Drivers of Sustainable Purchase Intention in Malaysia: Integrating Social Media Engagement, Influencer Credibility, and Green Attitudes

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Abstract

Social media sites have grown so quickly that they have completely changed how people make decisions, especially when it comes to buying things that are good for the environment. People in Malaysia are becoming more aware of the environment, but they don't always make purchases that are good for the environment. This conceptual paper clarifies the determinants influencing Malaysian consumers' intentions to make sustainable purchases by incorporating gender as a moderator, attitude towards green products as a mediator, social media engagement, influencer credibility, environmental awareness, and perceived trust. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Stimulus–Organism– Response (S–O–R) model, the study gives a detailed conceptual framework that explains how digital stimuli affect internal mental processes that affect people's desire to buy green products. In the Malaysian context, characterized by a scarcity of integrative conceptual work, this paper synthesizes existing literature and delineates research gaps. The proposed framework provides valuable insights for marketers, legislators, and sustainability advocates while also making a theoretical contribution by connecting the literature on social media marketing and sustainable consumption. It is recommended that subsequent empirical validation be performed to evaluate the model across Malaysia's diverse demographic segments.

Keywords: Sustainable purchase intention, social media engagement, influencer credibility, green attitude, Malaysia, TPB, S–O–R, economic empowerment

1. Introduction

Sustainable consumption has become a very important global goal as climate change, environmental degradation, and resource depletion get worse. More and more, people are being told to do things that are good for the environment and help keep the ecosystem in balance over time. In this context, sustainable purchase intention—defined as consumers' willingness to buy eco-friendly products—has received considerable attention in marketing and consumer behavior research (Yadav & Pathak, 2017; Gazi et al., 2025). It is still important to study what makes people who care about the environment actually want to buy something, especially in countries like Malaysia that are still developing. Malaysia has made a lot of progress in promoting sustainability through national policies that support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) (Suki, 2022; Ng et al., 2025). People have learned more about environmental issues thanks to government campaigns, school programs, and corporate social responsibility programs. Malaysian consumers, on the other hand, often have an intention-behavior gap, which means that even though they care about the environment, they don't always buy things that are good for it (Nekmahmud, 2022; Joshi & Rahman, 2022). Peer influence is when people can talk to each other on social media in real time. This gap implies the existence of additional psychological and contextual factors influencing individuals' inclination to purchase green products in Malaysia. But social media has grown so quickly that it has completely changed how people make decisions. Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube used to be just places to talk to each other, but now they are powerful marketing ecosystems that change how people think, feel, and act (Islam et al., 2022). A lot of Malaysian consumers, especially younger ones, use and interact with social media. This makes digital platforms great places to promote sustainable consumption. Social media lets people talk to each other, share information in real time, and influence each other, all of which can have a big impact on how people think about green products. Among the various digital influences, social media engagement has become a key behavioral indicator of how actively consumers engage with online content (Ahmed et al., 2025). Users who are very engaged are more likely to think about sustainability messages in depth and develop positive attitudes toward the environment (Islam et al., 2022). Influencer marketing has also become very popular in Malaysia's digital economy. Social media influencers are often seen as leaders of opinion, and their credibility can help people feel more confident in claims about green products. Previous studies demonstrate that perceived influencer credibility enhances consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, especially in scenarios where product attributes are challenging to validate, such as eco-friendly products (Han, 2020; Wang et al., 2023). Awareness of the environment is another important factor that leads to sustainable consumption. Individuals with heightened awareness and concern regarding environmental matters typically exhibit more robust pro-environmental intentions (Yadav & Pathak, 2017). However, mere awareness may be inadequate to incite purchasing behavior in digital contexts marked by information saturation and concerns regarding greenwashing. In these situations, how much people trust online green information becomes very important. Trust diminishes perceived risk and enhances the efficacy of sustainability messages, thus promoting the transformation of positive attitudes into purchase intentions (Nekmahmud, 2022). While previous research has investigated individual factors influencing green purchase intention, the current literature indicates significant deficiencies. First, a lot of research looks at social media factors on their own instead of as part of a bigger picture. Second, limited conceptual work specifically focuses on the Malaysian context, despite the country's high digital adoption and growing sustainability agenda. Third, we still don't know enough about the psychological process by which social media affects people's intention to buy eco-friendly products, especially how attitude toward green products plays a role. Lastly, demographic factors like gender have not been given enough attention, even though research shows that men and women may react differently to environmental and social media cues.

This conceptual paper develops a comprehensive framework that incorporates key social media drivers—namely social media engagement, influencer credibility, environmental awareness, and perceived trust—while utilizing attitudes toward green products as a mediating variable and gender as a moderating variable. The framework is built on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2020). These two models together show how both logical and emotional factors affect people's desire to buy things online that are good for the environment. This study makes several contributions. In theory, it links the fields of social media marketing and sustainable consumption by proposing a single idea that works for Malaysia. Methodologically, it emphasizes the importance of simultaneously examining mediating and moderating mechanisms. In practice, it provides Malaysian marketers, policymakers, and sustainability advocates aiming to promote responsible consumption via digital channels with valuable information for their initiatives. This paper establishes a foundation for subsequent empirical validation of sustainable consumer behavior within Malaysia's evolving digital ecosystem by synthesizing prior research and identifying significant research deficiencies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Purchase Intention

People who have sustainable purchase intentions know about and plan to buy things that are good for the environment and don't hurt it. The literature on consumer behavior widely recognizes it as a reliable measure of authentic green purchasing behavior. The Theory of Planned

Behavior (TPB) asserts that behavioral intention is the primary antecedent to behavior, establishing it as a crucial framework in sustainability research (Ajzen, 2020). Prior studies indicate that consumers possessing elevated environmental consciousness and positive attitudes towards eco-friendly products are more likely to demonstrate enhanced sustainable purchasing intentions (Yadav & Pathak, 2017). Researchers have always found a gap between what people say they want to do and what they actually do, especially in developing countries where people don't always buy things they want (Nekmahmud, 2022). This gap in Malaysia is caused by things like how much people trust companies, how sensitive they are to price, and how little they believe green claims. More and more research has been done lately on how social media affects people's willingness to buy things that are good for the environment. This is because the places where people shop are becoming more and more digital. People can read messages about sustainability, hear what their friends think, and get suggestions from influencers on social media sites. All of these things can have a big effect on how people choose (Islam et al., 2022). Thus, examining sustainable purchase intention through the lens of digital and social media is both relevant and imperative.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinning

2.2.1 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior is still one of the most common ways to explain how to be a good consumer for the environment. TPB says that a person's intention to act is mostly based on three things: their attitude toward the behavior, their subjective norms, and their perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2020). Of these, the attitude toward green products has consistently demonstrated its efficacy as a strong predictor of sustainable purchase intention. Research in green marketing indicates that individuals with favorable perceptions of eco-friendly products are more inclined to purchase them (Yadav & Pathak, 2017). The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is particularly beneficial in sustainability research as it examines the rational aspects of decision-making. Critics assert that the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) may prove insufficient in highly digitalized environments where emotional engagement, online trust, and social influence play increasingly pivotal roles (Islam et al., 2022). To fully understand how sustainable consumption works on social media, we need to look at it from different theoretical angles.

2.2.2 Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Model

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model enhances the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by elucidating the impact of external environmental stimuli on internal psychological states, which subsequently govern behavioral responses. In digital marketing settings, social media content, influencer communications, and online interactions serve as external stimuli that influence consumers' cognitive and emotional responses (Shang, 2022).

Within the S–O–R framework:

• **Stimulus (S):** Engaging with social media, the credibility of influencers, and information about the environment

• **Organism (O):** Trust, attitudes, and mental tests

• **Response (R):** Intention to make a sustainable purchase

Recent research indicates that social media marketing initiatives substantially influence consumer engagement and environmentally conscious purchasing behavior through this mechanism (Islam et al., 2022). By merging TPB and S–O–R, researchers can encompass both rational evaluation and affective response mechanisms that inform sustainable consumption choices.

2.3 Social Media Engagement and Green Attitude

Social media engagement is how much people interact with online content by liking, sharing, commenting, and joining conversations. Engagement is different from passive exposure because it requires more mental and emotional work to process information. Islam et al. (2022) found that people who use social media more often are more aware of environmental issues and like green products more. People who are involved with environmental messages are more likely to remember them because they are more relevant and easier to understand when they are involved. It's especially important to get young people in Malaysia to care about the environment because they use smartphones and social media a lot. Studies show that interactive digital environments can change how people think about the environment a lot, especially when they believe the content is real and backed up by other people. As a result, using social media is expected to be a big factor that affects how consumers think about eco-friendly products.

2.4 Influencer Credibility and Green Attitude

People are now more likely to trust influencers when they make decisions online. It usually has three parts: how trustworthy, how knowledgeable, and how real it is. People are more likely to listen to what influencers say if they think they are honest. Studies have shown that when an influencer is credible, it makes people trust them more and makes them think more positively about the products they promote, even eco-friendly ones (Han, 2020). This effect is especially important in sustainability marketing because customers can't always check the green features of a product themselves. Influencer marketing is now a big part of digital marketing plans in Malaysia. Malaysians, especially younger ones, often turn to influencers for help finding and judging products. People are more likely to buy green products when they trust the information they hear from credible influencers. So, the credibility of an influencer is probably a big social media factor that affects how people feel about environmental issues.

2.5 Environmental Awareness and Green Attitude

People who are environmentally aware know about problems with the environment and want to protect it. It is a key mental foundation for actions that promote sustainable consumption. Many studies have found that people who care about the environment are more likely to like eco-friendly products and buy them (Yadav & Pathak, 2017; Zhuang et al., 2021; Kautish & Sharma, 2023). Being aware of things helps people think about how their choices affect the world around them. The environmental education programs and campaigns for sustainability in Malaysia have made people more aware of the problems, but their behavior is still not always the same. This means that just knowing about something might not be enough; it needs to work with other psychological and social media factors. According to the TPB framework, environmental awareness is still a big reason why people are more likely to buy green products.

2.6 Perceived Trust in Online Green Information

Most people agree that trust is a big part of how people shop online. In terms of sustainable consumption, perceived trust is how much people believe that environmental claims made on social media are true and can be trusted. Many green products have credence attributes that are hard for customers to check, so trust is very important (Nekmahmud, 2022). People are even more skeptical of environmental marketing claims because greenwashing is so common. Studies show that people who trust green products more are much more likely to want to buy them and feel good about them (Shang, 2022; Chen & Chang, 2012; Wang et al., 2023). When there is too much information online, trust helps people make decisions by lowering their risk. So, perceived trust is probably an important part of the S–O–R framework because it changes how people think and feel about social media.

2.7 Mediating Role of Attitude Toward Green Products

Attitude toward green products signifies consumers' comprehensive evaluative assessment of eco-friendly items. In the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), attitude is consistently recognized as one of the most significant predictors of behavioral intention (Ajzen, 2020). Previous research shows that external marketing stimuli don't usually directly affect purchase intention. Instead, they first change people's attitudes, which

then leads to intention (Yadav & Pathak, 2017; Zhuang et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2022). In social media, engagement, influencer credibility, awareness, and trust are thought to affect people's intentions to make eco-friendly purchases mostly by changing their attitudes toward green issues. So, how people feel about green products is an important way to explain how digital and psychological factors lead to behavioral intention.

2.8 Moderating Role of Gender

There is a lot of research on sustainability that shows how men and women treat the environment differently. Research shows that women care more about the environment, have stronger values about ethical consumption, and are more likely to respond to messages about sustainability (Han, 2020). In Malaysia, where people come from many different cultures, gender may affect how people respond to social media and information about sustainability. Some research shows that women are more likely to respond emotionally to environmental appeals, while men may be more interested in how well a product works. So, gender is thought to be a moderating variable that could make the link between social media drivers and the desire to make sustainable purchases stronger or weaker (Kumar et al., 2024).

2.9 Research Gap

There is more and more research on sustainable consumption and social media marketing, but there are still some important gaps that need to be filled. First, most of the previous research has looked at the factors that affect people's intention to make a sustainable purchase in isolation. There haven't been enough attempts to combine important social media factors like engagement, influencer credibility, environmental knowledge, and perceived trust into a single, all-encompassing framework. Second, even though Malaysia has quickly adopted digital technology and become more aware of environmental issues, there isn't a lot of research that looks at Malaysian customers in a specific way. This makes it hard to use what we already know about this new market. Third, Malaysia hasn't done a good job of theorizing the psychological process that turns social media stimuli into long-term purchase intentions, especially how important attitude toward green products is. Lastly, demographic factors, such as gender differences, have not been consistently examined, despite evidence indicating that men and women may respond differently to social and environmental media cues. This study proposes an integrated TPB–S–O–R-based conceptual framework to elucidate the factors that motivate Malaysian consumers to purchase environmentally beneficial products. The authors are unaware of any prior research that has integrated these four social media drivers into a singular TPB–S–O–R framework in Malaysia.

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

3.1 Conceptual Framework

This study fills in the gaps in previous research by suggesting an integrated conceptual framework to explain Malaysian consumers' intention to make sustainable purchases in the digital world. The framework employs the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 2020) and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model to clarify the mechanisms by which social media influences affect green purchasing intentions. The S–O–R perspective regards significant social media influencers such as engagement, credibility, environmental awareness, and perceived trust as external factors influencing individuals' thoughts and emotions. The evaluations that make up the organism stage are shown by how people feel about green products. This attitude then leads to the response, which is the plan to buy something that will last. The TPB backs up the idea that attitude is a strong predictor of behavioral intention. People are much more likely to buy eco-friendly products when they feel good about them, according to earlier studies (Yadav & Pathak, 2017). As a result, social media drivers can have an effect on how people feel about green products. Gender is also included as a variable that can change things. Studies show that men and women respond to environmental cues in different ways and are more or less sensitive to them (Han, 2020). Adding gender to the proposed framework makes it easier to explain things in Malaysia. The model generally gives a simple but complete answer to the question of why people in Malaysia's social media environment want to buy things that are good for the environment.

3.2 Conceptual Model

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework grounded in the TPB–S–O–R integration. Social media drivers are expected to influence sustainable purchase intention indirectly through attitude toward green products, while gender moderates the strength of the relationship.
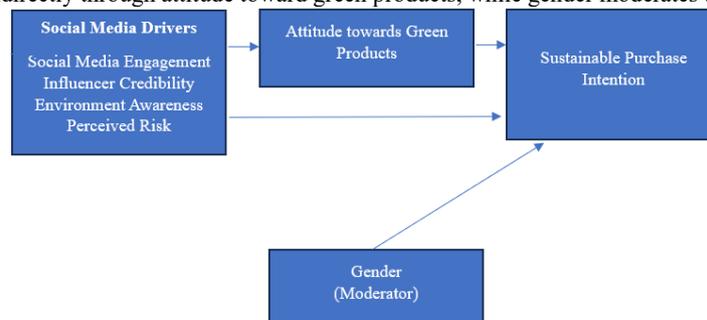

Figure 1

3.3 Hypotheses Development

Social Media Drivers and Green Attitude

People's opinions about eco-friendly products are affected by social media drivers like engagement, influencer credibility, environmental awareness, and perceived trust. When people are aware of something, they care more about the environment. When they trust something, they feel less risky. When they interact with something, it makes the message more detailed. There have been studies that show that these things all work together to make people feel better about green products (Islam et al., 2022; Shang et al., 2022; Yadav & Pathak, 2017).

H1: Social media drivers have a positive effect on how people feel about green products.

Green Attitude and Sustainable Purchase Intention

Within the TPB framework, attitude toward behaviour is one of the strongest predictors of behavioural intention. Consumers who evaluate green products positively are more likely to form purchase intentions. Empirical studies consistently support the significant relationship between green attitude and sustainable purchase intention (Ajzen, 2020).

H2: Attitude toward green products positively influences sustainable purchase intention.

Mediating Role of Green Attitude

Based on the TPB–S–O–R integration, external social media stimuli are anticipated to affect purchase intention mainly via consumers' internal psychological assessments. Consequently, the attitude toward green products serves as the primary mechanism for converting digital influence into behavioral intention.

H3: The attitude toward green products acts as a mediator in the relationship between social media drivers and the intention to make sustainable purchases.

Direct Effect of Social Media Drivers

While attitude is anticipated to mediate the relationship, previous research indicates that social media factors may also directly affect purchase intention via informational and normative channels (Islam et al., 2022).

H4: Social media drivers have a positive effect on the intention to make sustainable purchases.

Moderating Role of Gender

There is a lot of evidence that men and women care about the environment and are responsive to technology in different ways. Women shoppers often care more about the environment and may respond more strongly to messages about sustainability (Han, 2020). So, gender is likely to change how social media drivers affect the desire to make sustainable purchases.

H5: Gender affects the link between social media drivers and the desire to buy things that are good for the environment.

4. Theoretical Contributions

This conceptual paper offers several important contributions to the existing body of knowledge on sustainable consumption and digital marketing. First, the study advances the literature by integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model into a unified framework. While prior studies have predominantly applied these theories independently, the present framework demonstrates how rational cognitive evaluations (TPB) and affective responses to digital stimuli (S–O–R) jointly explain sustainable purchase intention. This theoretical integration provides a more comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making in contemporary social media environments. Second, the study enriches the sustainable consumption literature by positioning social media drivers—specifically social media engagement, influencer credibility, environmental awareness, and perceived trust—as key external stimuli influencing green attitudes. Earlier research has often examined these variables in isolation; however, this paper conceptualizes them collectively within a parsimonious model, thereby offering a more holistic perspective on digital sustainability influences. Third, the proposed framework highlights the mediating role of attitude toward green products as the central psychological mechanism translating social media exposure into behavioural intention. By explicitly modelling this mediation, the study responds to calls in prior literature for deeper examination of the internal cognitive processes underlying green purchasing behaviour. Fourth, the inclusion of gender as a moderating variable contributes to the growing but still fragmented literature on demographic contingencies in sustainable consumption. The model acknowledges that consumers are not homogeneous in their responses to sustainability messaging, thereby improving the explanatory richness of green behaviour models. Finally, the study contributes contextually by focusing on Malaysia, an emerging digital economy with high social media penetration but relatively limited integrative conceptual work in sustainable consumption. This contextual emphasis enhances the geographical relevance of the literature and provides a foundation for future empirical research in Southeast Asian markets.

5. Managerial Implications

The suggested conceptual framework gives marketers, policymakers, and businesses in Malaysia's changing sustainability landscape a lot of good ideas. The findings indicate that marketers must engage in more than merely promoting eco-friendly products. Instead, businesses should use social media in a smart way to get people more involved. When people interact with user-created campaigns, stories about sustainability, and community discussions, they can better understand messages and feel better about green products. Marketers should also make working with honest, knowledgeable influencers who care about the environment a top priority. People need to trust what an influencer says about green issues, and that's why this is important. People need to believe what brand managers say about sustainability online. People are getting more and more worried about greenwashing, so companies should be honest about their claims about the environment, give proof of those claims, and explain how their actions will have a real effect on the environment. If people feel more trust, digital sustainability campaigns can do a lot better. This framework shows Malaysian lawmakers and environmentalists how important it is to use digital education programs to get people to care about the environment. According to SDG 12, both government agencies and non-governmental organizations can use social media to spread correct information about the environment and promote responsible consumption. Policies that stop people from making false green claims could make people even more sure about the sustainability market. Because gender affects moderation, companies that want to reach a lot of people need to find more personal ways to talk about sustainability. Women might be more likely to respond to messages that make them feel something or that make them think about what is right and wrong. On the other hand, men might be more likely to respond to messages that talk about how well something works and how it affects the environment. Campaigns can work better if they use different strategies for each group. The study shows that to get people in Malaysia to buy things that are good for the environment, you need a digital plan that includes ways to build trust, get people involved, and spread the word.

6. Future Research Directions

While this conceptual paper provides a comprehensive framework, several avenues remain open for future research. First, empirical validation of the proposed model using Malaysian consumer data is necessary to test the strength and significance of the hypothesized relationships. Structural equation modelling (SEM) or SmartPLS techniques may be particularly suitable for this purpose. Second, future studies could examine generational differences, particularly comparing Generation Z, Millennials, and older consumer groups, as digital behaviour and environmental sensitivity may vary substantially across age cohorts in Malaysia. Third, platform-specific analyses (e.g., TikTok versus Instagram) could provide more nuanced insights into how different social media environments shape sustainable purchase intention. Fourth, researchers may extend the model by incorporating additional moderators such as income level, education, cultural orientation, or price sensitivity to improve predictive accuracy. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in examining whether favourable green attitudes translate into sustained purchasing behaviour over time. Finally, cross-country comparative research within ASEAN economies could help determine whether the proposed relationships are culturally contingent or broadly generalizable across emerging markets. Such comparative work would significantly enrich the global sustainable consumption literature.

7. Conclusion

This conceptual paper develops an integrated framework to explain the drivers of sustainable purchase intention among Malaysian consumers in the social media era. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Stimulus–Organism–Response model, the study proposes that key social media drivers—social media engagement, influencer credibility, environmental awareness, and perceived trust—function as external stimuli that shape consumers' attitudes toward green products, which in turn influence sustainable purchase intention. The framework further recognizes gender as an important moderating factor affecting the strength of these relationships. By synthesizing prior literature and addressing identified research gaps, the study provides a more holistic understanding of how digital influences translate into environmentally responsible consumption behaviour in Malaysia. The proposed model contributes theoretically by bridging fragmented research streams and contributes practically by offering guidance for marketers, businesses, and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable consumption through social media channels. As Malaysia continues progressing toward its sustainability goals, understanding the psychological and digital mechanisms underlying green purchasing behaviour becomes increasingly important. The framework presented in this study offers a strong foundation for future empirical testing and strategic implementation in the Malaysian context and beyond.

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