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Driving sustainable consumption: The impact of influencer content value on consumer behaviour

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Abstract

Influencers on social media have become influential in influencing consumer attitudes towards environmental responsibility. This paper will look at the motivation of sustainable consumption by the dimensions of content value of the so-called greenfluencers, namely, the entertainment, social, and functional value. The study examines the effect of content enjoyment, community identity, and practical utility through a quantitative survey of active social media users. These findings affirm that the dimensions play an important role in the adoption of sustainable practices. The combination of content that entertains, gives reliable information, and the feeling of shared values has the greatest influence on consumers. Therefore, to shift the consumers between the passive perception and life action, brands and influencers should effectively balance the emotional appeal with functional utility. It is an integrated strategy that is essential in promoting a massive change to sustainable consumption.

Keywords: Influencer content value, sustainable consumption, greenfluencers, consumer behaviour

1. Introduction

The modern world can be characterised by two overlapping, potent waves: a digital revolution that has integrated social media into the everyday life of people^[1] and an increase in the number of people who are conscious of the ecological crisis^[2]. Consumers, especially Millennials and Gen Z, are becoming increasingly digitally native, and they also report an increased expectation of corporate responsibility and sustainable operations^[3]. This convergence has created a new and more effective force of change: the Social Media Influencer (SMI), and more specifically, the so-called green influencer.

Social media influencers have become a niche marketing instrument for shaping consumer culture^[4]. They have the strength of perceived authenticity and relatability, which traditional advertising cannot match, and can build strong, trust-based followings.

Although the first studies focused on their capacity to fuel traditional sales, their functions have been extended to marketing lifestyles, ideologies, and social movements. Another notable group of these digital personalities is known as greenfluencers; they utilise their content to promote environmentalism, ethical consumption, and sustainable living^[5]. They provide how-to instructions on waste reduction, offer an overview of sustainable products, and establish a visual and aspirational narrative about sustainability.

Nevertheless, the process through which this influence is effected is not simple. The persona of the influencer is not the only means of persuasion; however, the content they produce is the primary one. According to Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), people go out of their way to access media in an attempt to satisfy certain needs^[6]. When it comes to influencer content, these needs can be broadly categorised into functional, entertainment, and social value^[7].

Functional Value is the necessity of information and utility, e.g. how to use a shampoo bar or what is meant by reef-safe. Entertainment Value satisfies the hedonic need of enjoyment, pleasure, and aesthetic appreciation, including watching a well-edited video about a thrift haul. Social Value satisfies the desire to belong and integrate, and the follower feels that he is a member of a community of like-minded people (e.g., a tribe of minimalists or zero-wasters). This paper assumes that these content value dimensions are the antecedents of a more psychological process. Content does not directly influence behaviour, but the relationship bond that it creates does. This relationship is known as Parasocial Interaction (PSI), or the one-sided illusion of closeness that a follower forms with a media personality^[8].

This connection is accelerated in the social media, interactive, always-on world [9]. The useful, fun, and inclusive content (high-value content) promotes repeated interaction and thus fosters a sense of knowing and trusting the influencer as a friend among followers.

Ultimately, this research aims to understand the application of this process in practice. The dependent variable is not simply an individual act of green buying but the introduction of Sustainable Consumption Values (SCV). These values, according to Haws, Winterich, and Naylor's [10] definition, are an essential element of a consumer identity and, more importantly, their readiness to be inconvenienced in the name of environmental protection. This readiness to make a sacrifice or even pay a premium is what distinguishes the real change of passive perception to active, sustainable practice. This study, thus, examines a mediated hypothesis: Do the functional, entertainment, and social values of a greenfluencer content (IVs) create Parasocial Interaction (MV), and does the subsequent relationship (MV) in turn create the adoption of Sustainable Consumption Values (DV)? Through this question, this research will provide a concise guideline for brands, policymakers, and influencers on how to produce content that truly motivates a more sustainable future.

2. Thematic Literature Review

This review synthesises research from four key domains: (1) Sustainable Consumption and the Value-Action Gap, (2) Social Media Influencers as Change Agents, (3) Content Value and Uses & Gratifications Theory, and (4) Parasocial Interaction as a Mediating Mechanism.

2.1 Sustainable Consumption and the Value-Action Gap

Sustainable Consumption (SC) is a complex concept that extends far beyond merely purchasing green products. It encompasses a comprehensive lifestyle, frequently framed in three stages: acquisition (e.g., reducing, refusing, thrifting), use (e.g., repairing, efficient use), and disposal (e.g., recycling, composting) [11]. Although consumer awareness of environmental problems is as high as it has ever been, it is notoriously unable to be converted into action. This gap is referred to as the Attitude-Behaviour Gap/ Value-Action Gap [12]. Consumers can claim to appreciate sustainability, but their buying behaviours often revert to convenience, cost, and custom, reflecting traditional consumption patterns.

The causes of this gap are numerous, including high perceived costs, an information gap, social norms, and low consumer perceived effectiveness (PCE). It is at this point that the concept of Sustainable Consumption Values (GCV), as theorised by Haw, Winterich, and Naylor [10], comes into play. The very factors that bridge this gap are captured in their scale, which is the dependent variable in this study. It is not only a measure of abstract concern, but also a fundamental sustainable identity, and, most significantly, a readiness to make concessions. A person with a high SCV is not merely a green perceiver, but a green practitioner in the future. This paper holds the position that the aim of greenfluencers is to inculcate and reinforce these background values, first and foremost.

2.2 Social Media Influencers (SMIs) as Agents of Change

The SMIs are considered third-party endorsers who shape the audience's attitude through blogs, tweets, and other

social media [14]. Their persuasiveness is anchored in a premise of perceived credibility, as the Source Credibility Model [15] elucidates, which consists of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. In contrast to traditional celebrities, SMIs (particularly micro-influencers) excel in credibility and competence within their niche, which fosters a sense of authenticity and relatability [16]. The special type of SMI is so-called greenfluencers, who have developed a high level of expertise and credibility in the sphere of sustainability.

To start with, they minimise informational barriers (one of the major factors that lead to the Value-Action Gap) by editing, simplifying, and proving complex sustainable ideas [5]. They offer how-to guides, product reviews, and lifestyle tips, thereby enhancing the perceived value of their followers. Second, and possibly more, they normalise sustainable behaviours. When an influencer with a high degree of trust shares about mending clothes, wearing a menstrual cup, or composting, they rebrand such actions as radical or difficult to aspirational, making them normal in their community [17]. They provide the social evidence needed to transform followers into practice.

2.3 The Role of Content Value (Uses and Gratifications Theory)

The influence of an SMI is not static; it is enacted through the content they produce on a daily basis. Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) provides a robust framework for understanding why followers engage with this content [18]. Followers are active, goal-oriented consumers of media, seeking to fulfil specific needs. This study models these needs using three dimensions of content value, as identified in the abstract:

- **Functional Value:** This is the utilitarian or informational dimension [19]. It represents the content's ability to provide practical, useful, and relevant information. For a greenfluencer, this includes product reviews, scientific information, and actionable tutorials. High functional value builds the influencer's "expertise" [20] and directly addresses the "lack of information" barrier to sustainable consumption.
- **Emotional Value:** This is the hedonic dimension, related to enjoyment, aesthetic pleasure, and escapism [20]. If functional content is the "vegetables", entertainment is the "sugar" that makes the message palatable. This value is crucial for capturing and retaining attention in a saturated media environment.
- **Social Value:** This dimension is rooted in the need for social integration and community [21]. Greenfluencer content excels at this by creating a "shared social identity". Followers are invited to join a community, participate in challenges, share their own tips, and receive validation. This content fosters a sense of "tribe" and leverages social norms, making followers feel part of a collective movement - a powerful motivator for behavioural change [22].

2.4 Parasocial Interaction (PSI) as the Relational Mechanism

This study proposes that the above content values, in isolation, do not lead to value change. Their primary role is to build a relationship. The foundational concept of Parasocial Interaction (PSI) [8] describes the "illusion of intimacy" and friendship that audiences develop with media

figures.

In the age of social media, PSI is arguably stronger than ever. The interactive features of platforms create a "mediated-social" environment where influencers are not just broadcasting to followers, but are perceived as interacting with them [23]. This creates a powerful, self-reinforcing loop. Once this high-PSI relationship is established, the follower becomes highly receptive to the influencer's values and recommendations [24, 25]. The follower is now motivated not just by the content's utility, but by a desire to maintain the relationship, align with their "friend's" values, and gain their approval. It is this relational bond that provides the affective "push" needed to bridge the Value-Action Gap and foster the adoption of deep-seated Sustainable Consumption Values (SCV).

3. Statement of the Problem, Research Gap, and Significance

3.1. Statement of the Problem

Despite widespread awareness of environmental crises, society faces a critical Value-Action Gap; the adoption of sustainable consumption practices remains slow and inconsistent [13]. Social media influencers have emerged as a powerful, yet poorly understood, force with the potential to bridge this gap by normalising and promoting sustainable lifestyles [5]. However, it is unknown how their content translates from passive digital "perception" into real-world "practice" and the adoption of genuine sustainable values.

3.2. Research Gap

This study addresses three primary gaps in the existing literature:

1. **Gap in Influencer Focus:** The vast majority of SMI literature focuses on their ability to drive purchase intentions for conventional products (e.g., fast fashion, cosmetics) [4]. Research on their role in promoting de-consumption, reduction, and complex sustainable behaviours is nascent.
2. **Gap in Mechanism:** Studies on greenfluencers often focus on "the person" (e.g., credibility, authenticity) rather than "the message" (the specific attributes of their content). It is unclear which content strategies (e.g., informational vs. entertainment) are effective at fostering change.
3. **Gap in Process:** The psychological process linking content consumption to value adoption is a "black box." While models have linked PSI to purchase intention [24], few have tested it as the mechanism linking specific content value dimensions to the adoption of deep-seated sustainable values (like the Haws *et al.* scale).

3.3. Significance of the Study

This research provides significant contributions at the theoretical, practical, and social levels.

- **Theoretical Significance:** It extends Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) into the sustainability domain, proposing and testing a novel "Content -> Relationship -> Values" model. It integrates UGT, PSI, and GCV frameworks to provide a nuanced explanation for how media content can foster pro-social value change.
- **Practical Significance (for Brands & Marketers):** It provides a "playbook" for effective green marketing. Instead of just "hiring a greenfluencer", this study

shows that success lies in co-creating content with a strategic blend of high functional (utility), emotional (appeal), and social (community) value to build genuine relational bonds.

- **Practical Significance (for Influencers):** It offers an evidence-based framework for greenfluencers to maximise their impact, helping them understand why certain content strategies are more effective at building a loyal, engaged, and motivated community.
- **Social Significance:** It provides insights for policymakers and non-profits on how to partner with SMIs. By understanding these mechanisms, SMIs can be effectively mobilised as public education partners to encourage the large-scale adoption of sustainable practices and help close the Value-Action Gap.

4. Objectives and Hypotheses

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the mediating role of Parasocial Interaction (PSI) in the relationship between influencer content value dimensions (functional, entertainment, social) and followers' Green Consumption Values (GCV).

4.1 Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between Functional Value, Emotional Value, and Social Value of greenfluencer content and Parasocial Interaction.
2. To analyse the relationship between Parasocial Interaction and followers' Sustainable Consumption.
3. To examine the relationship between Functional Value, Emotional Value, and Social Value of greenfluencer content and Sustainable Consumption.

4.2 Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between Functional Value of Influencer content and Parasocial Interaction.
2. There is no significant relationship between Emotional Value of Influencer content and Parasocial Interaction.
3. There is no significant relationship between Social Value of Influencer content and Parasocial Interaction.
4. There is no significant relationship between Parasocial Interaction and Sustainable Consumption.
5. There is no significant relationship between Functional Value of Influencer content and Sustainable Consumption.
6. There is no significant relationship between Emotional Value of Influencer content and Sustainable Consumption.
7. There is no significant relationship between Social Value of Influencer content and Sustainable Consumption.

5. Research Methodology

- **Research Design:** This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design.
- **Sampling Strategy:** A non-probability, purposive sampling method was used. The target population is active social media users (e.g., on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) who self-identify as following at least one "greenfluencer" or an influencer who frequently posts about sustainable practices. This ensures the respondents are qualified to answer questions about the constructs. The target audience is Millennials and Gen Z within Kerala, as they represent the primary

demographic for both influencer content and sustainability concerns.

- **Data Collection:** Data was collected via a structured online questionnaire (using Google Form).

6. Analysis of Data

| | | No: | Percentage |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-----|------------|
| Age | Below 25 | 1 | 3.2 |
| | 25-30 | 14 | 45.2 |
| | 20-35 | 6 | 19.4 |
| | 35-40 | 2 | 6.5 |
| | 40-44 | 8 | 25.81 |
| Generation | Gen Y | 12 | 38.7 |
| | Gen Z | 19 | 61.3 |
| Education | UG | 11 | 35.5 |
| | PG | 17 | 54.8 |
| | Others | 3 | 9.7 |
| Occupation | Student | 12 | 38.7 |
| | Private employee | 11 | 35.5 |
| | Govt employee | 5 | 16.1 |
| | Self employed | 3 | 9.7 |
| Monthly Income/ Pocket Money | Below 20000 | 16 | 51.6 |
| | 20000 - 40000 | 4 | 12.9 |
| | 40000 - 60000 | 3 | 9.7 |
| | 60000 - 80000 | 3 | 9.7 |
| | Above 80000 | 5 | 16.1 |
| Locality | Urban | 12 | 38.7 |
| | Semi urban | 10 | 32.3 |
| | Rural | 9 | 29.0 |
| Time Spent | Less than 1 hour | 4 | 12.9 |
| | 1 - 2 hours | 12 | 38.7 |
| | 2 - 3 hours | 10 | 32.3 |
| | 3 - 4 hours | 1 | 3.2 |
| | More than 4 hours | 4 | 12.9 |

Source: Primary Data

Testing of Hypotheses

Test used: Correlation

H0: There is no significant relationship between Functional Value of Influencer content and Parasocial Interaction.

| | | FV | PS |
|----|---------------------|------|-------|
| FV | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .422 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .032* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |
| PS | Pearson Correlation | .422 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .032* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |

Source: Computed

H0: There is no significant relationship between Emotional Value of Influencer content and Parasocial Interaction.

| | | EV | PS |
|----|---------------------|------|-------|
| EV | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .293 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .041* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |
| PS | Pearson Correlation | .293 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .041* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |

Source: Computed

H0: There is no significant relationship between Social Value of Influencer content and Parasocial Interaction.

| | | SV | PS |
|----|---------------------|------|-------|
| SV | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .515 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .039* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |
| PS | Pearson Correlation | .515 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .039* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |

Source: Computed

H0: There is no significant relationship between Parasocial Interaction and Sustainable Consumption.

| | | PS | SC |
|----|---------------------|------|--------|
| PS | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .574 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .001** |
| | N | 31 | 31 |
| SC | Pearson Correlation | .574 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .001** |
| | N | 31 | 31 |

Source: Computed

H0: There is no significant relationship between Functional Value of Influencer content and Sustainable Consumption.

| | | FV | SC |
|----|---------------------|------|-------|
| FV | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .432 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .015* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |
| SC | Pearson Correlation | .432 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .015* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |

Source: Computed

H0: There is no significant relationship between Emotional Value of Influencer content and Sustainable Consumption.

| | | EV | SC |
|----|---------------------|------|-------|
| EV | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .424 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .024* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |
| SC | Pearson Correlation | .424 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .024* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |

Source: Computed

H0: There is no significant relationship between Social Value of Influencer content and Sustainable Consumption.

| | | SV | SC |
|----|---------------------|------|-------|
| SV | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .451 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .019* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |
| SC | Pearson Correlation | .451 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .019* |
| | N | 31 | 31 |

Source: Computed

7. Conclusion

This study confirms that social media influencers play a key role in translating passive environmental awareness into active, sustainable practices. The study set out to understand how influencer content bridges the critical Value-Action Gap. The findings are decisive: all seven null hypotheses were rejected, confirming that Functional, Emotional, and Social content values are all significantly related to both Parasocial Interaction (PSI) and sustainable consumption.

The study's most significant and important finding is the highly significant, positive correlation between Parasocial Interaction and Sustainable Consumption. This validates the proposed "Content -> Relationship -> Values" model, demonstrating that the relational bond a follower feels with an influencer is a powerful driver for adopting deeply ingrained green values. Notably, Social Value was the strongest predictor of this parasocial bond.

The central conclusion for brands and "greenfluencers" is that a strategic blend of information (Functional), appeal (Emotional), and aggressive community-building (Social) is essential. It is this high-value content, along with the deep-seated bond it creates, that effectively encourages a large-scale transformation toward sustainable consumption.

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