

# Economic and Business Horizon

ISSN: 2963-2765

Economic and Business  
Horizon

Volume: 04  
Issue: 02  
Year: 2025  
Page: 385-392

## Citation:

Ramandini, N.,  
Oktawandari, H. H., &  
Batu, K. L. (2025).  
Influence of Social Media  
on Sustainable Purchasing  
Behavior: A Systematic  
Literature Review.  
*Economic and Business  
Horizon*, 4(2), 385-392.

## Influence of Social Media on Sustainable Purchasing Behavior: A Systematic Literature Review

Nabila Ramandini<sup>1\*</sup>, Hargianti Henni Oktawandari<sup>1</sup>, Kardison Lumban Batu<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang, Indonesia

\* Corresponding author: Nabila Ramandini ([nabilarmdn25@gmail.com](mailto:nabilarmdn25@gmail.com))

## Abstract

The increasing urgency of environmental sustainability, combined with the rapid growth of social media usage, has significantly influenced consumer behavior in the digital era. Social media has evolved beyond a mere communication tool into a powerful space where consumer values, perceptions, and attitudes are shaped. Through mechanisms such as parasocial interactions with influencers, peer influence in online communities, and exposure to trust-based and user-generated content, consumers are increasingly encouraged to adopt sustainable purchasing behaviors. This study aims to examine these dynamics by conducting a systematic literature review focused on the role of social media in shaping consumer attitudes and behavior toward sustainable products. A total of 205 scholarly articles published between 2020 and 2025 were retrieved from the Watase Uake database, and 50 of them were selected for in-depth review based on relevance, quality, and methodological rigor. The selected literature was analyzed to explore patterns and trends related to consumer motivation, behavioral intention, and the effectiveness of social media in promoting sustainable consumption. The findings provide valuable insights into how digital platforms support sustainability goals and influence consumer decision-making. This review also identifies key research gaps and calls for future empirical studies to better understand and optimize the role of social media in encouraging ethical and environmentally conscious consumer practices.

## Keywords

Consumer Behavior, Purchasing Attitude, Purchase Behavior, Social Media.

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of sustainability and the widespread adoption of social media have significantly influenced how organizations develop their management strategies in the modern era. These two forces have played a key role in enhancing how businesses engage with their customers (Lee et al., 2021). Social media, now used by over 4.59 billion people globally, has become an essential tool for increasing public awareness and promoting sustainability initiatives (Shin et al., 2024). It contributes not only by spreading information but also by encouraging stakeholder involvement and supporting the integration of sustainable practices across various business functions. To measure the effectiveness of these efforts, big data analytics has become increasingly important. Through data-driven insights, organizations are able to uncover patterns of interaction and explore how different aspects of message delivery influence audience behavior. These insights are often beyond the reach of traditional research methods. As a result, businesses are better equipped to understand how sustainability communications are interpreted by diverse groups within different settings.

Social media has also shown relevance in supporting SME development, providing access to products and services while facilitating decision-making through peer engagement (Patma et al., 2021). Growing environmental concerns have significantly impacted consumer behavior toward buying sustainable products, as people are now more responsive to environmental policies and aware of the ecological impact of product disposal. Nevertheless, this awareness does not always translate into a strong motivation for consumers to adopt sustainable purchasing habits for the sake of environmental preservation (Elgammal & Al-Modaf, 2023).

The rise of digital technologies has transformed how consumers behave. It marks a new era in sustainable consumption. Social media, in particular, plays a pivotal role in encouraging environmentally responsible purchasing habits. Numerous studies have highlighted how these platforms now serve as essential instruments for advancing sustainability-focused consumer choices, influencing purchasing decisions through a range of interconnected pathways (Lee et al., 2021; Nazish et al., 2024). They provide users with convenient access to information related to sustainable practices and foster online communities where individuals with shared eco-friendly values can connect and engage in meaningful dialogue (Vaitone, 2024). The unique architecture of social media - characterized by its interactivity, visual dominance, and network effects - enables the rapid dissemination of environmental awareness and fosters new forms of green consumer engagement (Băcilă et al., 2022; Eastman et al., 2024).

Current literature identifies three primary pathways through which social media influences sustainable purchasing behavior: cognitive, affective, and social. Cognitively, platforms serve as vital educational channels that enhance consumer understanding of sustainability issues and product impacts (Bósquez et al., 2024). Effectively, emotionally resonant content creates personal connections to environmental causes, transforming abstract concerns into motivational drivers for green consumption (Eastman et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024). Socially, the participatory nature of these platforms facilitates observational learning and normative influence, as users witness peers and influencers adopting sustainable practices (Ilieva et al., 2024). However, significant challenges persist in translating digital engagement into actual sustainable purchases. Research highlights several persistent barriers including: the attitude-behavior gap (Chang et al., 2021), green skepticism (Radi & Shokouhyar, 2021), cultural variations in sustainability perceptions (Hoppe & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2023), and platform-specific limitations in message penetration (Garner & Mady, 2023). Additionally, the commercial nature of many

social media platforms creates inherent tensions between sustainability messaging and consumption-driven algorithms (Lee et al., 2021; Mujahid & Mubarik, 2021).

However, the research also identifies significant barriers. The "attitude-behavior gap" persists across cultures, with Chang et al. (2024), and Amosko et al. (2024) revealing that only 31% of positive sustainability attitudes actually translate to purchases. This gap widens in collectivist cultures Zafer et al. (2024) where social norms outweigh personal convictions, and in contexts with information asymmetry where consumers distrust corporate sustainability claims. Although scholarly attention toward the influence of social media on user behavior continues to expand, a key question remains insufficiently explored: To what extent does social media shape consumers' attitudes toward sustainable purchasing?

## **2. Literature Review**

A positive attitude toward sustainable purchasing plays a crucial role in encouraging environmentally and ethically conscious consumer behavior. Since behavior is strongly influenced by individual attitudes, fostering favorable perceptions of ethical and eco-friendly shopping can significantly increase the likelihood of consumers making sustainable choices (Khasanah & Sasana, 2022). Thus, shaping positive attitudes is essential for promoting consistent sustainable purchasing actions (Zafar et al., 2021; Elgammal & Al-Modaf, 2023; Marpaung et al., 2024; Suparjo & Dana, 2024).

Social media for sustainability refers to digital platforms that facilitate the dissemination of environmental awareness and promote sustainable practices through interactive content and community engagement. It involves "dialogic communication that enhances consumer engagement with sustainability messages," enabling two-way interactions between brands and audiences. Nazish et al. (2024) further define it as a tool that "amplifies environmental narratives in the digital age," leveraging algorithms to reach target demographics. Vaitone (2024) emphasizes its role in behavior change, noting how influencers transform "likes into sustainable consumption patterns." Lee et al. (2021) characterizes it as a dynamic ecosystem where "trends in sustainability discourse are shaped by user-generated content and platform-specific features."

According to Adwan and Altrjman (2024), people's sustainable living-related information, abilities, and behaviors can all be improved by a social media campaign. Purchasing attitude represents consumers' psychological predisposition to evaluate sustainable products favorably or unfavorably. Baltacı et al. (2025) define it as "a mediator between environmental values and green cosmetic purchases," emphasizing its role in converting beliefs into actions. Eastman et al. (2024) identify affective components, showing "luxury brands' sustainability posts generate positive effects that shape attitudes." Radi and Shokouhyar (2021), note skepticism as a counterforce, where "consumer distrust in corporate claims weakens positive attitudes." Garner and Mady (2023), contrast B2B and B2C contexts, finding "attitudes are more responsive to emotional appeals in B2C markets."

## **3. Methods**

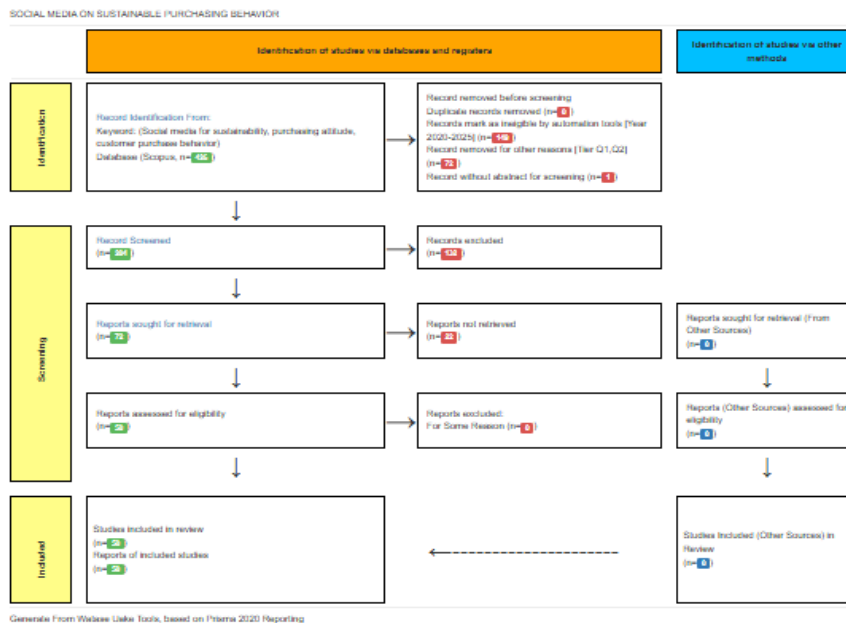
This research applies the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, a widely recognized guideline for conducting structured reviews of scholarly publications relevant to the topic. The PRISMA approach typically consists of three essential phases: identification, screening, and selection. A systematic literature review is defined as a structured, transparent, and replicable process used to locate, assess, and synthesize the body of existing research contributed by academics and professionals (Mengist et al., 2020). For this study, the researcher accessed the Scopus database via the Watase Uake platform. The initial

phase included keyword-based searches using terms such as “social media for sustainability,” “customer purchasing behavior,” and “purchasing attitude,” resulting in a total of 426 retrieved articles. These records were then refined using predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and quality.

**Table 1.** Articles Criteria

Criteria Inclusion	Criteria Exclusion
Research articles published 2020-2025	Research articles published before 2020
Scopus Q1 and Q2 indexed articles	Articles that are not indexed by Scopus Q1 and Q2
Research articles that focus on discussing purchasing behavior on sustainable environment	Research articles that do not discuss about purchasing behavior on sustainable environment

Following the screening stage, a total of 50 scholarly articles were found to meet the established criteria for inclusion in the subsequent analysis. The detailed steps involved in the screening and selection of these articles are presented in the chart below.



#### 4. Results

The primary objective of this systematic literature review is to explore and clarify the influence of social media on shaping consumer attitudes toward purchasing sustainable products and services. This section provides a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the selected studies to address the core research questions. The review reveals key findings that highlight the significant role social media plays in influencing consumer purchasing attitudes. It demonstrates that social media can shape individuals’ intentions to choose environmentally conscious and low-impact products (Nazish et al., 2024).

Social media has emerged as a powerful platform for shaping sustainable purchasing attitudes and influencing customer behavior. This is supported by multiple studies in the provided literature. Several articles highlight how social media has become a primary channel for promoting sustainability awareness and influencing consumer attitudes. Research highlights that dialogic and engaging

sustainability content on social media enhances consumer awareness and fosters positive attitudes toward green products (Nazish et al., 2024). For instance, luxury brands' sustainability-focused posts have been found to generate effective responses that translate into favorable purchase intentions (Eastman et al., 2024). Additionally, attitudes toward sustainability often act as a critical mediator between environmental values and actual purchasing behavior, underscoring the psychological dimensions of green consumption (Bósquez et al., 2024; Baltacı et al., 2025).

The mechanisms through which social media impacts behavior are multifaceted, involving emotional, cognitive, and social pathways. Emotional appeals, such as guilt-inducing messages about food waste, and cognitive triggers, like factual sustainability information, both play pivotal roles (Liu et al., 2024). Social influences, particularly from influencers and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), further amplify these effects by normalizing sustainable consumption and strengthening brand loyalty (Wei et al., 2021; Ilieva et al., 2024). However, challenges such as cultural differences in message reception and information asymmetry between brands and consumers can hinder the effectiveness of these campaigns (Chang et al., 2021; Hoppe & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2023).

**Table 2.** Key Themes

Theme	Description	References
Educational Role	Social media increases consumer knowledge on sustainability	Bósquez et al., 2024
Emotional Persuasion	Emotional appeals in posts enhance attitudes	Eastman et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024
Influencer Impact	Parasocial relationships influence sustainable choices	Ilieva et al., 2024
e-WOM	Peer-shared experiences drive behavior	Wei et al., 2021
Cultural Platform Limitations	& Gaps in message reception due to norms and platform design	Hoppe & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2023

Several theories are often utilized in research on purchasing attitude of customer behavior towards sustainable, including:

1. Planned Behavior Theory
2. Value-Belief-Norm Theory
3. Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is commonly referenced as a framework for understanding the connection between consumer attitudes and sustainable purchasing, particularly among younger demographics. As noted by Amoako et al. (2020), TPB has been extensively applied across various disciplines to predict individual intentions and behaviors. Its effectiveness has been especially evident in studies related to environmentally responsible behavior. Applications of TPB include contexts such as sustainable tourism, energy-efficient products, and green consumer goods, where the theory has consistently demonstrated its predictive power and empirical validity. First proposed by Ajzen in 1985, TPB suggests that behavioral intentions are shaped by three core components: attitudes toward the behavior, perceived social pressure (subjective norms), and perceived control over the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). An individual's attitude reflects their overall evaluation of a specific behavior as beneficial or harmful. According to the theory, a favorable attitude increases the likelihood of behavioral adoption. When individuals associate a behavior with positive outcomes, they are more inclined to form supportive attitudes that, in turn, lead to engagement in the desired action.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this systematic literature review highlight the significant role of social media in shaping sustainable purchasing behavior through cognitive, affective, and social pathways. Social media enhances consumer awareness by serving as an educational platform, disseminating sustainability-related information that fosters knowledge and understanding (Bósquez et al., 2024). The emotional engagement offered by social media, particularly through visual storytelling and value-driven narratives, significantly enhances message recall and personal relevance. Liu et al. (2024) observed that emotionally charged sustainability campaigns, such as those related to food waste, can activate moral emotions that motivate consumer behavior. Similarly, Eastman et al. (2024) emphasized the potential of emotionally appealing content in generating positive attitudes toward eco-conscious luxury brands.

Although social media platforms have been effective in raising awareness and encouraging favorable perceptions toward sustainability, there is still a notable challenge in converting these attitudes into consistent actions. As highlighted by Chang et al. (2021) and Zafer et al. (2021), a persistent attitude-behavior gap reveals that positive environmental attitudes do not always translate into sustainable purchasing decisions. Meanwhile, the structure of social media itself requires further examination. According to Lee et al. (2021), the interaction between algorithmic filtering and user-generated content forms a complex ecosystem that can both amplify and diminish the visibility of sustainability messages. However, Hoppe and Kleinen-von Königsłow (2023) pointed out that sustainability messages do not resonate uniformly across different cultures and digital environments.

The findings also have important theoretical implications, particularly for the Theory of Planned Behavior, which helps explain how social media influences the attitude-intention-behavior chain (Amoako et al., 2020). Future research directions include exploring emerging markets, employing mixed-method approaches, and investigating the role of new platform features and algorithms in sustainability communication. The findings underscore the need for integrated approaches that leverage social media's unique capabilities while addressing its inherent challenges to drive meaningful behavioral change toward sustainability.

## 6. Conclusion

The collective findings from these studies reveal that social media serves as a powerful driver of sustainable consumption by shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors through multiple psychological and social mechanisms. Interactive and engaging content on digital platforms plays a key role in raising environmental awareness. In addition, emotionally compelling messages reinforce the alignment between sustainability values and consumer decision-making. Influencers and peer networks play a crucial role in making eco-friendly choices appear desirable and socially normative. Although awareness of sustainability continues to rise, several important challenges remain in encouraging sustainable purchasing behavior. These challenges include cultural differences in how messages are received, consumer skepticism regarding the authenticity of corporate sustainability efforts, and the persistent gap between expressed positive attitudes and actual purchasing actions. To address these barriers, effective strategies often incorporate educational messaging, relatable storytelling, and specific behavioral prompts. Additionally, periods of societal disruption, such as pandemics, can create timely opportunities to promote sustainable behavior, particularly when communication efforts align with consumers' immediate priorities and concerns.

For maximum impact, businesses and policymakers must tailor their approaches to different platforms, generational preferences, and regional contexts while embracing technological innovations that enhance transparency. These insights

collectively demonstrate that sustainable consumption in the digital age is not just an individual choice but a socially influenced practice shaped by algorithmic platforms, influencer ecosystems, and participatory engagement dynamics. The future of green marketing lies in leveraging these digital social systems to make sustainable living not just responsible but irresistibly mainstream.

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