

## From Like to Lifestyle: The Digital Path from Green Influencers to Sustainable Action

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### ABSTRACT

This theoretical paper discusses the concept of green influencer marketing (GIM) and how it can be used to encourage sustainable consumerism (SC). With the increasing rate of environmental degradation, there is a need to move towards sustainable consumption. Social media influencers, whose persuasive influence they have, are major agents of this change. The conceptual framework suggested in this paper examines the effect of GIM on SC. Environmental concern (EC) is assumed to mediate this relationship; GIM increases ecological awareness, promoting sustainable consumption. Moreover, we use pre-existing environmental values (PEV) as a moderator in our model. The hypothesis is that GIM directly and indirectly affects SC through EC, which are more potent in persons with high pro-environmental values. This research is based on marketing, environmental psychology, and communication literature, which forms a strong theoretical basis. It adds a refined view on the efficacy of influencers in pro-social campaigns and presents practical advice to brands, policymakers, and influencers. The paper ends with the description of the limitations of the model and the ways to continue the empirical validation in the future.

**Keywords:** Green Influencer Marketing (GIM), Sustainable Consumerism, Environmental Concern, Environmental Values, Social Media Influence

### INTRODUCTION:

Two parallel developments define the 21st century: exponentially increasing digital connectivity and an alarmingly growing environmental crisis (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021). In this context, many researchers identify consumer behaviour as a key factor that defines environmental outcomes, with household consumption contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions (Hertwich & Peters, 2009). This has led to a worldwide appeal to shift towards sustainable consumerism- a type of consumption conscious of the environmental and social effects (Geiger et al., 2019). Nevertheless, moving the mass consumer behaviour towards sustainability is a daunting task, usually complicated by the established habits, the perceived high prices, and the unavailable information (Gifford, 2011). At the same time, the emergence of social media and influencers (content creators who have achieved a loyal following and communities around their brands and expertise) has transformed the nature of the marketing environment (De Veirman et al., 2017). These influencers have proven to be capable of influencing opinions and trends and profoundly making buying choices (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Another niche in this field- green influencers- has appeared, and its core concept is to promote environmentally friendly products, services, and lifestyles. These people use their platforms to inform, motivate, and encourage their followers to make more

sustainable decisions, which is called Green Influencer Marketing (GIM) (Kushwah et al., 2023). Although GIM is becoming increasingly widespread, there is a lack of research in the academic literature on the psychological processes by which it affects consumer behaviour. Although intuitively, influencers who advocate sustainability would also promote sustainability, it is probably not a simple stimulus-response mechanism. The author tries to fill this gap by suggesting a conceptual model defining the influence channels. In particular, this research explores the effect of GIM in promoting sustainable consumerism. Its main impact is not direct but mediated by the fact that it increases the environmental concern of the audience.

In addition, the author proposes that GIM's effect is inconsistent among all audiences. An individual's existing environmental values moderate their message, and those who already tend toward environmentalism are more open to it. The proposed conceptual research paper will attempt to develop a theoretical framework where these four constructs (Green Influencer Marketing (Independent Variable), Sustainable Consumerism (Dependent Variable), Environmental Concern (Mediator), and Pre-existing Environmental Values (Moderator) are integrated. In such a way, the article helps to create a more subtle picture of pro-social marketing in the digital era and offers a solid basis for future empirical studies. The results have important implications for brands interested in establishing credible green credentials, influencers wanting

maximum positive influence, and policymakers wanting to use digital platforms to do good.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This review synthesises the available literature in several fields to develop the conceptual model's theoretical background. It is organised by theme to examine all the core constructs and their hypothesised relationships.

### Green Influencer Marketing (GIM)

Influencer marketing has transformed the concept of celebrity endorsements into an advanced approach in which individuals who have developed authenticity, trust, and a close connection with a particular audience on social media platforms are used (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Many consumers find influencers more trustworthy than traditional advertisers. It makes their recommendations incredibly persuasive (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). A specific type of this practice is Green Influencer Marketing, in which influencers are interested in promoting environmental sustainability (Thomas et al., 2021). These green-influencers or eco-influencers use Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok platforms to post information about zero-waste lifestyle, conscious consumption, ethical fashion, plant-based diets, and sustainable travel (Leung et al., 2022). Their content strategy usually incorporates personal narratives with informative pieces, tips and product advice, which makes sustainability seem reachable, attractive and attainable (Yeo et al., 2020). GIM's success depends on several aspects based on social influence and communication theories.

The Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) describes that people learn through observing and copying others, especially those whom they like or consider a role model. Green influencers are these models who exhibit sustainable behaviours that their followers can follow. Moreover, the perceived credibility of these influencers increases their source credibility, which is one of the most important factors in determining a message's persuasiveness (Ohanian, 1990; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The message becomes more likely to be internalised when the followers see that an influencer is interested in environmental issues and not just driven by commercial interests (Boerman et al., 2017). A study by De Veirman et al. (2017) validates that influencers perceived as more trustworthy and expert create a better brand attitude and purchase intentions. GIM uses this principle in the promotion of not only products but also a whole sustainable lifestyle.

### 2.2 Sustainable Consumerism (SC)

Sustainable consumerism or green consumerism or responsible consumerism is described as the consumption of goods and services that are responsive to the basic needs and provide a better quality of life and reduces the consumption of natural resources, toxic materials, and waste and pollutant emissions throughout the life cycle, and in the process, does not impair the needs of future generations (Peattie, 2010). It is a complex behaviour that involves various behaviours, such as buying environmentally friendly products,

general lessening of consumption, recycling, resource conservativeness, such as water and energy, and creating business partnerships with well-established ethical and environmental history (Geiger et al., 2019). Sustainable consumerism drivers are complicated and have been explored in environmental psychology and consumer behaviour. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), attitudes, perceived social pressure to act (subjective norms), and perceived ability to change the situation (perceived behavioural control) determine intentions, and intentions determine behaviour. In the case of SC, a consumer will be more likely to act sustainably when he/she has a positive attitude towards it, when he/she feels under social pressure to act (subjective norms), and when he/she believes that he/she can make a difference (perceived behavioural control).

Nevertheless, there is a substantial amount of literature that identifies the so-called attitude-behaviour gap or value-action gap and the fact that consumers can hold pro-environmental attitudes yet do not convert them into their behaviour (Carrington et al., 2010; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Some of the barriers credited to this gap include increased cost of sustainable products, inaccessibility, inconvenience, and insufficient information (Tanner & Wolfiging Kast, 2003). GIM has a unique opportunity to overcome a few of these barriers by offering convenient information, normalising sustainable practices (affecting subjective norms), and presenting convenient and affordable sustainable options (increasing perceived behavioural control).

### 2.3 The Relationship between the Green Influencer Marketing and Sustainable Consumerism

The central assumption of the new discipline is the direct connection between GIM and SC. Influencers also play an important role in mediating information, making it easier to understand complex environmental issues and convert them into consumer behaviours (Hudders et al., 2021). By demonstrating the use of sustainable products in real-life situations, they can raise awareness and positive attitudes toward these products (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). As an illustration, when an influencer shows that a cleaning product without plastic is effective, he or she can directly affect the intention of a follower to buy the product. Research has indicated that one of the key factors in this process is the parasocial relationships, i.e. the one-sided and intimate relationship that a follower develops with the media personality, which predicts the level of trust that a follower has in the advertisement (Labrecque, 2014). As followers grow fond and trusting of a green influencer, the latter promotes the acquisition of sustainable practices (Belanche et al., 2021).

**H1:** Green Influencer Marketing positively correlates with Sustainable Consumerism.

### 2.4 The Intermediary Position of Environmental Concern

As there is a direct relationship, the effect of GIM on SC can be better described by an indirect process: the development of Environmental Concern (EC).

Environmental concern is the perception of a person about environmental issues and the desire to help find a solution (Dunlap & Jones, 2002). It is one of the main psychological preconditions of pro-environmental behaviour (Bamberg & Möser, 2007). Green influencers go beyond product suggestions and may frequently be part of the educational content that contextualises consumption decisions in the context of environmental problems like climate change, plastic pollution and loss of biodiversity (Stubb et al., 2019). Such narrative-based content can evoke the feelings of followers and make them feel personally relevant and accountable (Al-Ghafri et al., 2021). This aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which assumes that personally relevant messages can lead to deeper and long-lasting attitudinal changes.

Once the environmental issue becomes more acute, it becomes an influential intrinsic force. High EC individuals are more likely to seek information on sustainable options, pay a high price for green products and are more likely to conserve (Stern, 2000). So, we posit that GIM does not exert its primary influence through merely instructing followers to purchase something but creates a more profound environmental awareness, which then, in its turn, leads to making sustainable decisions. The influencer plants the seed of concern into various sustainable behaviours.

H2: Environmental Concern mediates between Green Influencer Marketing and Sustainable Consumerism.

## 2.5 The Moderating Role of Pre-existing Environmental Values

The effect of any persuasive message is hardly homogeneous across the whole audience. Personal inclinations are also vital in how a message is perceived and digested. Within the framework of GIM, researcher suggest that an individual's Pre-existing Environmental Values (PEV) are an important moderator. Environmental values are included in an individual's larger system of values. They can be seen as the fundamental beliefs of the individual concerning the significance of the environment and the connection between human beings and nature (Schultz, 2001). The value-belief-norm theory (Stern, 2000) suggests that consumers with strong biospheric values (concern with the well-being of the environment) have a higher likelihood of being aware of environmental issues, which in turn results in a feeling of responsibility to act and consequently, they engage in pro-environmental behaviour when they are subjected to GIM.

The message delivered by the influencer will resonate with the influencer's values and reinforce them; hence, they are highly responsive to the proposed actions (Verplanken & Holland, 2002). GIM content is a stimulus to this group, as they provide practical advice and social sanction of behaviours the group is already internally motivated to perform. The message of the influencer is successful in reducing the obstacles to action according to their values. On the other hand, people who have weak or no environmental values might

not be influenced by GIM. Their perceptions of the content may be that it does not relate to their lives, or they may be more suspicious of the intentions of the influencer (Whitmarsh, 2009). Although GIM may continue to work to some extent via peripheral cues (e.g. the attractiveness or popularity of the influencer), it will not be able to effect profound, meaningful change in consumption patterns. Thus, the correlation between GIM and SC and the mediated way via the environmental concern is much stronger among people who already appreciate the environment.

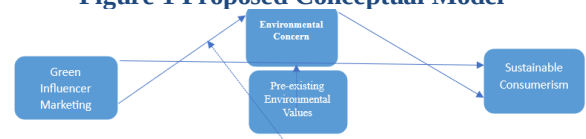
H3: Pre-existing Environmental Values moderate the positive relationship between Green Influencer Marketing and Sustainable Consumerism, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with high pre-existing environmental values.

H4: Pre-existing Environmental Values moderate the indirect effect of Green Influencer Marketing on Sustainable Consumerism via Environmental Concern, such that the mediated effect is stronger for individuals with high pre-existing environmental values.

## CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Based on the literature review and the hypotheses developed, the following conceptual model is proposed. This model illustrates the hypothesized relationships between the four key constructs of the study.

Figure 1 Proposed Conceptual Model



### The model depicts:

1. A direct path from the independent variable, Green Influencer Marketing (GIM), to the dependent variable, Sustainable Consumerism (SC) (H1).
2. An indirect path from GIM to SC, which is mediated by Environmental Concern (EC) (H2).
3. A moderating effect of Pre-existing Environmental Values (PEV) on the direct relationship between GIM and SC (H3).
4. A moderating effect of PEV on the relationship between GIM and EC, thereby influencing the entire mediation pathway (moderated mediation) (H4).

The model suggests a nuanced process where GIM's effectiveness is contingent on the psychological state it induces (environmental concern) and the inherent dispositions of the audience (environmental values).

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The offered conceptual model provides a systematic system of perception of the intricate interplay of variables that predetermine the success of green influencer marketing. It does not just focus on a

simplistic perception of influence but considers psychological mediators and individual differences. This framework is critical to theory, practice and society in general.

#### 4.1 Theoretical Implications

This article contributes to the academic theory in several ways. First, it combines independent literature, including influencer marketing, consumer behaviour, and environmental psychology, to offer a comprehensive model of pro-social persuasion on a digital platform. Although such areas have been studied separately (e.g., Lou and Yuan, 2019, on influencer marketing; Bamberg and Möser, 2007, on environmental behaviour), this model describes the causal pathway between them. Second, the model offers a theoretical explanation of the workings of GIM by suggesting that environmental concerns are major mediators. It implies that the influence of GIM can be the most significant, not necessarily in direct product promotion but in its ability to influence attitudes and develop a more profound environmental awareness. This changes the emphasis on transactional outcomes (e.g., sales) to transformational outcomes (e.g., increased awareness and concern), which is more likely to reflect a change in behaviour in the long term. Third, the preexisting environmental values as a moderator are introduced, introducing an essential layer of sophistication. It is consistent with the selective exposure and confirmation bias theories (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014), which assume that consumers do not receive information passively but instead seek to consume information that reinforces their preconceived notions of the world. It emphasises the role of audience segmentation and targeting in pro-social marketing and warns against the one-size-fits-all approach. It adds to the literature on consumer behaviour in general because it highlights how marketing stimuli and individual value systems interact to influence sustainable decisions.

#### 4.2 Practical Implications

The model provides several practical points to stakeholders:

- To Brands and Marketers: Collaborating with an influencer and demonstrating a green product is insufficient. In order to create true sustainable consumerism, the campaigns must be structured in such a way that environmental concern is also raised. This implies giving influencers the power to produce content that informs and narrates powerful stories regarding environmental concerns, instead of simply concentrating on product details. Moreover, brands must ensure that influencers are carefully chosen, with their followers having the right psychographics, to ensure the campaign ROI is maximised.
- In the case of Green Influencers: To be the most effective, the influencers must pay attention to authenticity and education. What they produce should be geared towards creating a true feeling of environmental concern amongst their

followers. Rather than just advertising products, influencers may use their personal experiences to share with their followers, whether it is an entry-level introduction to sustainable practices or more advanced advice to those already engaged. Influencers could consider the needs of each segment of their followers, which would include introductory content to new followers and more advanced tips to those who are already committed.

- To Policymakers and NGOs: This model emphasises the possibilities of influencers as strong partners during the public information campaigns. Governments and environmental bodies can engage the green influencers to share information on environmental policies, enhance national conservation, and motivate sustainable living at a large scale. Such collaborations can facilitate the communication divide between institutions and the population, particularly the younger generations who are very active on social media.

#### 4.3 Social Implications

In a larger social context, this study highlights how social media can be used as a tool of positive transformation. Although they are often viewed as a source of promoting overconsumption and unrealistic lifestyles, such platforms as Instagram and YouTube can also serve as potent tools of environmental education and mobilisation. It focuses on green influencers, who will democratise sustainability and make it more inclusive and accessible. The GIM phenomenon will be able to promote a collective change into a more sustainable culture by effectively promoting environmental concern and converting it into actual consumer behaviour. This peer-to-peer movement, which is bottom-up, can be used to supplement top-down policy interventions to form a more holistic and stronger response to environmental issues. It also gives people a sense of power by demonstrating that their daily decisions count and that when combined with others, they create a bigger solution, thus creating the feeling of agency and shared effectiveness against overwhelming world issues.

#### 5. Limitations and Future Research

This study has a significant limitation since it is a conceptual paper and thus has not been empirically validated. Although the proposed relationships are based on the existing theory, they must be confirmed with the help of an intensive empirical study. Future research is expected to operationalise the four constructs and test the model using a quantitative approach. The data on the followers of green influencers, including their exposure to GIM content, the extent to which they are environmentally concerned, their values before the survey, and their self-reported sustainable consumption habits, could be collected through a survey-based method. Moreover, the structural equation modelling (SEM) would be a suitable statistical approach to examine the suggested mediation and moderation effects in one direction.

Causality could also be determined more conclusively by using experimental designs. An example is to have different groups exposed to different kinds of GIM content (e.g. educational vs. product-focused) and see how this affects subsequent changes in environmental concern and behavioural intentions. The other weakness is that it is concentrated on GIM as a monolithic concept. Green influencers differ in terms of their style, authenticity, and the niche they belong to. Future research could explore how different types of influencers (e.g., macro vs. micro-influencers) or content formats (e.g., video vs. image) affect the proposed relationships. Lastly, this model is culturally neutral, but the cultural factors can significantly affect the environment's values and consumer behaviour. The model requires cross-cultural studies to determine its applicability in various settings within society.

## CONCLUSION:

The emergence of green influencer marketing is an important and encouraging trend in advocating sustainable consumerism. The paper has presented an extensive conceptual model beyond a shallow discussion of this trend. Theorising the mediating effect of the environmental concern and moderating effect of the preexisting environmental values, the model explains how and when GIM is most effective. It assumes that the real strength of GIM is not only in its capacity to sell the products, but also in its capacity to instil a greater sense of environmental ethos that leads to sustained behavioural transformation.

The proposed model highlights that influencing sustainable behaviour is a complicated psychological process. It is a combination of the message (by the influencer), the affective and cognitive states (concern) induced, and the predisposition of the receiver (values). It is important for brands, influencers, and policymakers to understand these dynamics to develop communication strategies that can truly shift the needle on one of the most urgent issues of our time. With digital media continuing to dominate our lives, it is not only an opportunity but a necessity for the power of digital media to be used to benefit the planet. This paper is a theoretical guide on how to make that journey.

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