



E-ISSN: 3108-4192

APSSHS

Academic Publications of Social Sciences and Humanities Studies

2022, Volume 2, Page No: 163-181

Available online at: <https://apsshs.com/>

Asian Journal of Individual and Organizational Behavior

The Impact of Social Media on Sustainable Consumer Practices: A Qualitative Perspective

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Abstract

This research explores how social media influences environmental awareness, perceptions of environmental responsibility, and aspirations toward sustainable consumption among consumers in Tunisia. Using a qualitative approach, the study involved semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 social media users—including students, professionals, and retirees—who regularly engaged with sustainability-related content. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling to ensure a variety of ages, genders, and professional backgrounds, capturing a broad spectrum of viewpoints. Findings show that social media plays a pivotal role in shaping sustainability-related knowledge and behaviors, with different platforms serving unique functions: Instagram fosters aspirational consumption, Facebook encourages interactive community engagement, and YouTube acts as a primary source of educational content. Despite these influences, challenges such as the high price of sustainable products and limited community backing continue to impede the translation of awareness into concrete behavioral changes. The study also identifies reliable information and community-focused initiatives as crucial drivers for adopting sustainable practices. By offering insights into platform-specific effects, this research advances the field of digital sustainability and provides actionable guidance for policymakers and marketers addressing socio-economic barriers. Future research should examine the enduring effects of social media on sustainable behaviors and investigate the potential of newer platforms like TikTok to promote sustainability advocacy.

Keywords: Sustainable behaviors, Sustainable consumption, Social media, Environmental responsibility, Environmental awareness

How to cite this article: Tanaka H, Sato Y, Nakamura K, Mori A. The Impact of Social Media on Sustainable Consumer Practices: A Qualitative Perspective. Asian J Indiv Organ Behav. 2022;2:163-81. <https://doi.org/10.51847/ntReu5tE1r>

Received: 29 January 2022; **Revised:** 27 April 2022; **Accepted:** 02 May 2022

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Introduction

In recent years, sustainability has gained significant global traction, with consumers increasingly seeking products that are both environmentally friendly and socially responsible [1]. This evolving consumer preference has compelled companies to integrate sustainable practices into their operations and to communicate these efforts transparently [2]. Social media has become a pivotal channel for organizations to disseminate sustainability-related messages and interact with audiences on ecological and societal concerns [3]. Nevertheless, there remains limited insight into how consumers interpret and react to such content [4], and the link between online sustainability awareness and real-world behavioral change is particularly underexplored. Consequently, two critical areas demand greater scholarly and practical focus.

First, the surge in sustainability interest has prompted marketing researchers to investigate novel ways of engaging consumers via social media [5]. Studies are examining, for instance, how credible sources can promote sustainable actions [6]. Evidence suggests that when consumers view information as trustworthy and reliable, they are more inclined to embrace sustainable



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behaviors [6, 7]. Thus, understanding the criteria consumers use to assess the credibility of sustainability content on social media is crucial.

Second, although sustainability-related posts are ubiquitous on social media, knowledge about how consumers cognitively and emotionally process this information—and what ultimately drives behavioral outcomes—remains scarce. A recurring observation is that heightened online awareness frequently fails to translate into tangible sustainable actions [8]. Existing studies tend to treat this awareness–behavior gap superficially, without delving into the deeper psychological, affective, or situational factors that may account for it. For example, while Masse and Ierlan [4] highlight the general lack of understanding of consumer responses to sustainability content on social media, they do not sufficiently pinpoint specific underexamined elements such as emotional responses, source trustworthiness, or motivational triggers for behavioral change.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to fill these gaps by focusing on dimensions that have received insufficient attention within the context of social media-driven sustainability communication [9]. Three key areas merit particular scrutiny: (1) the underlying motivations prompting consumers to interact with sustainability content on social media; (2) consumers' evaluations of the credibility and persuasive power of such content, especially when shared by influencers, organizations, or peers; and (3) the barriers—both structural (e.g., limited product availability or perceived inconvenience) and attitudinal (e.g., skepticism due to misinformation)—that prevent the conversion of online awareness into actual sustainable practices.

The primary goal of this research is to investigate the role of social media in fostering sustainable consumer behavior through a threefold lens: (1) the drivers of consumer engagement with sustainability-related content; (2) perceptions of content credibility and influence; and (3) obstacles to translating awareness into action. This integrated framework offers a holistic view of the consumer journey—from initial interest and trust formation to the practical hurdles of adopting sustainable habits—revealing how social media sustainability messages shape awareness, instill responsibility, and ultimately affect consumption intentions.

The study targets social media users and explores how exposure to sustainability content on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube impacts three core constructs: environmental awareness, perceived environmental responsibility, and intentions toward sustainable consumption. Data were gathered through interviews conducted in 2023 with 15 participants of diverse ages, genders, and occupations in Tunisia.

Employing an exploratory qualitative approach, the research examines users' views, attitudes, and motivations concerning sustainability and related behaviors [10]. The paper is structured as follows: it first reviews the theoretical underpinnings of sustainability, social media, and consumer behavior; it then describes the data collection and qualitative analysis methods; and finally, it reports the findings, acknowledges limitations, and proposes avenues for future research.

Literature Review

Social media has emerged as a key factor in influencing sustainable consumer behavior, shaping the ways in which people access, interpret, and act upon environmental information. Rather than merely raising general awareness, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter now serve as interactive environments that actively encourage concrete sustainable behaviors, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and making responsible consumption choices [11, 12]. Research indicates that the effectiveness of social media in promoting sustainability lies in its ability to deliver engaging content, leverage peer influence, and foster online communities centered on shared environmental values [9, 13]. For example, posts featuring visually appealing content or personal stories can make sustainable practices more tangible and relatable for consumers. The perceived trustworthiness of the content creator also plays a critical role, with reputable organizations and influencers significantly shaping user attitudes and behaviors [7]. As such, social media functions not only as a communication tool but also as a mechanism that can actively drive behavioral change toward sustainability.

Motivations for engaging with sustainability-related content

Multiple factors motivate consumers to interact with sustainability-related content on social media. A primary driver is the desire to acquire knowledge about environmental challenges and stay informed about emerging sustainability trends [9]. Social media provides a convenient and accessible way for users to follow news, research, and updates on sustainability topics [14].

Another significant motivator is the need for social connection and belonging. Individuals often use social media to align themselves with communities of people who share similar values or interests in sustainability. Schultz *et al.* [15] highlight that social platforms enable users to demonstrate affiliation with like-minded groups, fostering engagement in discussions, debates, and collective action around sustainable practices.

Influencers and celebrities represent another important source of motivation. Their role as opinion leaders and public figures allows them to advocate for sustainable behaviors effectively. Studies show that sustainability-related content endorsed by influencers or celebrities tends to attract greater consumer attention and interaction [16].

Additionally, personal responsibility and moral awareness drive engagement. Research suggests that individuals are more likely to adopt sustainable practices if they perceive their actions as having tangible environmental consequences or personal impact [17-19]. Social media helps consumers access actionable information that enables environmentally and socially responsible decisions [18]. Furthermore, social media engagement can be influenced by self-presentation goals, as interacting with sustainability-related content allows users to project a positive personal image and demonstrate commitment to ethical and eco-friendly values [20-22].

Overall, engagement with sustainability-related content on social media is shaped by a combination of knowledge-seeking, social affiliation, influencer endorsement, moral responsibility, and self-representation. This multidimensional nature underscores the importance of understanding these diverse motivations, enabling organizations and marketers to design strategies that more effectively promote sustainable behaviors and encourage active consumer participation [23].

Perceived credibility and influence of sustainability-related content

Sustainability-related content shared on social media has a notable impact on consumer behavior [24]. Consumers are more likely to trust information when it originates from credible sources, including recognized organizations, experts, and peer-reviewed research [25]. The credibility of such information is generally evaluated based on characteristics such as reliability, expertise, and impartiality [26].

Information from established organizations—such as government bodies and non-governmental organizations—is often considered highly trustworthy and objective because it is typically grounded in scientific evidence and data. Similarly, experts, including scientists and academic researchers, are regarded as credible due to their qualifications and specialized knowledge, which enhances consumer confidence in their recommendations [27]. Peer-reviewed studies also serve as a critical source of reliable sustainability information [28]. The peer-review process, which subjects research to scrutiny by other experts in the field, ensures quality and accuracy, making these studies more likely to be trusted by consumers [29]. Often, the findings of such research are simplified and disseminated across various media channels, including social media platforms, online news outlets, blogs, and discussion forums.

Despite these credible sources, the widespread presence of misinformation and “fake news” on social media creates substantial challenges. The ease with which false or misleading sustainability-related information spreads makes it difficult for consumers to distinguish trustworthy content from unreliable sources, fostering confusion, skepticism, and a general decline in trust toward sustainability information [30].

The growing influence of social media bloggers and influencers introduces additional complexities regarding credibility. While some influencers provide accurate and reliable guidance on sustainability issues, others may lack sufficient expertise or qualifications, potentially promoting unsustainable practices or biased information [31].

Addressing these credibility challenges requires deliberate strategies to evaluate sustainability-related content online. Fact-checking, source verification, and assessment of the author’s qualifications are essential measures. Encouraging critical thinking and media literacy among consumers, alongside promoting trustworthy sources, can enhance the effectiveness of sustainability content in shaping consumer behavior [32].

In summary, the spread of false or misleading information on social media often obscures evidence-based insights into sustainable development provided by qualified experts. The difficulty of identifying credible sources highlights the importance of critical evaluation. The subsequent section will examine how the environmental awareness generated through social media can be translated into tangible sustainable actions.

Barriers to translating online sustainability awareness into real-world actions

Increasing environmental awareness alone is insufficient to ensure the adoption of sustainable behaviors; converting knowledge into tangible action often involves navigating multiple obstacles. Beatson *et al.* [33] identify several factors that explain why individuals may fail to engage in sustainable practices. One major barrier is the lack of practical knowledge regarding how to implement sustainable behaviors in daily life. Even well-intentioned individuals may struggle to enact meaningful change without clear guidance or actionable advice.

Economic and practical constraints also play a significant role. Higher costs and perceived inconveniences associated with sustainable products or services can discourage consumers from transitioning away from conventional alternatives. Limited availability further complicates adoption, as sustainable options may not be accessible in certain geographic areas.

Social influences add an additional layer of complexity. When sustainability is not widely valued or practiced within a person’s social network, individuals may feel pressure to conform to prevailing norms rather than pursue environmentally friendly choices. Collectively, these interconnected barriers illustrate the challenge of moving from awareness to action, highlighting the gap between knowing what is sustainable and actually practicing it.

The role of credible sources in driving sustainable behavior change

Trustworthy information sources are fundamental in guiding consumers toward sustainable behaviors. Research indicates that when sustainability messages come from credible entities, people are more likely to internalize the information, enhance their understanding, and feel motivated to act [29]. Typically, information is perceived as reliable when it originates from respected organizations, such as government agencies or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which are considered objective and evidence-based [34]. For example, reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are widely cited and highly regarded for their authoritative insights on climate-related issues [27, 34].

Subject-matter experts, including scientists and academic researchers, are also viewed as highly credible. Their knowledge and professional credentials lend authority to the information they provide, fostering trust in their recommendations and opinions [35]. Evidence from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) supports this, showing that people tend to trust climate information from experts over politicians or media sources [36].

Peer-reviewed research further strengthens credibility. Because these studies undergo rigorous evaluation by other experts, they are recognized for methodological reliability and accuracy, making them a highly trusted source of sustainability information [37]. Research shows that consumers who rely on such verified sources are more likely to adopt sustainable behaviors, including reducing energy consumption and choosing environmentally friendly transportation [38].

Beyond offering accurate knowledge, credible sources are critical in countering misinformation. The rapid spread of false claims about sustainability can confuse consumers and erode trust, discouraging action. By providing fact-checked, scientifically grounded information, reputable organizations and expert groups help audiences differentiate between reliable content and misleading narratives. This empowers consumers to make informed decisions, bridging the gap between awareness and practical sustainable behavior [39].

Credibility also underpins social influence mechanisms such as social norms and social proof. When respected organizations, experts, or influencers promote sustainable practices, they signal that these behaviors are valued and socially endorsed. Highlighting examples of individuals or companies successfully adopting eco-friendly practices can create a “bandwagon effect,” encouraging others to emulate these behaviors. Stories, case studies, and testimonials from credible sources reinforce that sustainable actions are achievable, beneficial, and socially approved, motivating broader behavioral adoption [40].

In summary, reliable information from credible organizations, experts, and peer-reviewed studies serves multiple functions: it increases consumer knowledge, dispels misconceptions, and establishes behavioral norms. Together, these effects foster motivation and confidence, helping individuals move from passive awareness to active participation in sustainable practices.

Theoretical frameworks for understanding sustainable consumption behavior

Examining sustainable consumption behavior entails fostering environmental responsibility and motivating consumers to adopt sustainable practices. Various theoretical frameworks offer valuable perspectives on the factors that shape such behaviors. In this study, we draw upon a combination of three theoretical frameworks to guide our exploratory investigation, focusing on how consumers perceive credible and trustworthy sustainability-related information on social media and how this awareness is subsequently translated into pro-environmental actions.

Theory of Planned behavior

According to this framework, three primary factors influence behavior. First, attitude plays a critical role, as it reflects an individual’s overall evaluation of a particular action. For instance, people who hold favorable views toward sustainable practices are generally more inclined to engage in such behaviors compared to those with neutral or negative attitudes [41].

Second, subjective norms are highly influential. These norms encompass the perceived expectations of significant others, including friends, family, and colleagues, regarding what constitutes appropriate behavior. Individuals who believe that those around them—whether in their community or workplace—expect them to adopt sustainable practices are more likely to comply than those who perceive no such expectations [42].

Third, perceived behavioral control refers to a person’s assessment of their capability to perform a given behavior. This includes both confidence in their abilities and the perceived ease of overcoming potential obstacles. For example, individuals who feel equipped with the knowledge and resources to reduce plastic use and perceive minimal barriers are more likely to embrace environmentally friendly habits [43].

In summary, this theoretical perspective suggests that sustainable behavior is most likely when individuals maintain positive attitudes toward eco-friendly actions, perceive social expectations supporting these behaviors, and believe in their own capacity to successfully implement them.

Value-Belief-Norm Theory

The theory suggests that pro-environmental behavior is shaped by an interplay of personal beliefs, values, and guiding principles. Individuals motivated by altruism, concern for the biosphere, or even self-interest are more likely to engage in environmentally sustainable actions. Their awareness of the consequences of environmental issues fosters recognition of the negative impacts of ecological degradation. For example, someone who believes that pollution significantly harms the planet

may feel a strong moral obligation to avoid contributing to it. This sense of responsibility, rooted in personal ethics and value systems, can motivate behaviors such as using public transportation instead of private vehicles, reducing energy consumption, or purchasing eco-friendly products. In essence, effective pro-environmental action requires alignment among an individual's values, beliefs, and social norms [44]. The theory further posits that individuals who maintain positive attitudes toward sustainability are influenced by perceived social expectations and their own perceived ability to act, reinforcing their likelihood of engaging in eco-friendly behaviors.

Social-Cognitive theory

This hypothesis underscores how social learning, observational cues, and self-efficacy collectively shape sustainable behaviors. The premise is that people often adopt new behaviors by watching others, especially when those actions are rewarded or socially recognized. For instance, observing influencers, peers, or role models engaging in eco-friendly practices on social media can inspire individuals to replicate these behaviors. This type of observational learning allows consumers to see the practical benefits of sustainable actions, which in turn reinforces their own behavioral intentions [16].

Equally important is the concept of self-efficacy, which reflects an individual's belief in their capacity to successfully perform a behavior. When consumers feel that their actions can contribute meaningfully to sustainability, their sense of self-efficacy rises, increasing the likelihood of engagement. For example, witnessing friends or social media figures recycle and discuss the positive impact of their efforts can motivate others to take similar actions, particularly if they believe they can make a tangible difference [45].

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives highlight multiple factors that drive sustainable consumption. They illustrate the dynamic relationship between individual capabilities, social influences, and observed outcomes. **Figure 1** provides a visual summary of these interconnections, demonstrating how personal motivation and collective social structures interact to encourage environmentally responsible behavior. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for designing strategies that effectively promote sustainable consumption.

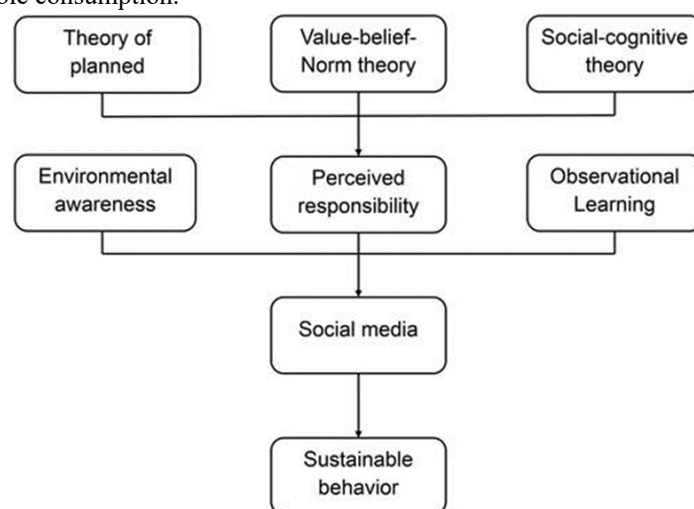


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Methodology

This research employs an abductive methodology within an interpretivist epistemological framework to investigate how social media shapes sustainable consumer behavior and the role of credible sources in promoting behavioral change. The abductive approach emphasizes an ongoing dialogue between existing theoretical knowledge regarding social media's influence on consumer behavior and the insights emerging from empirical data [46]. This iterative process combines both theoretical reasoning and practical observation, allowing for the continuous refinement of understanding [47].

Grounded theory serves as the guiding methodological framework, offering flexibility to incorporate new insights as data collection and analysis progress. This approach allows qualitative researchers to iteratively expand or redefine the research focus, supporting the development of a data-driven conceptual framework while retaining a coherent structure [48]. The ultimate goal of grounded theory is to generate substantive theoretical models grounded in empirical evidence.

An interpretive qualitative design underpins the study, enabling researchers to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and behaviors in depth. By examining participants' interpretations of social media content related to sustainability, the study seeks to uncover nuanced understandings of how such content influences behavior. Grounded theory is applied in analyzing participants' responses to sustainability-focused social media, ensuring alignment between the research objectives and the methodological approach [49].

Data

Study context

This research centers on Tunisian consumers, selected for several compelling reasons. First, Tunisia stands out as one of North Africa's digitally advanced nations, with exceptionally high rates of Internet and social media engagement [50]. Social platforms—including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and increasingly LinkedIn—are widely used not only for social interaction but also for e-commerce and civic engagement around environmental issues [51]. The country's literacy rate of 85.21%—above the global average of 80.97%—combined with strong higher education enrollment, has fostered a digitally literate middle class that actively participates in sustainability discussions [52]. Furthermore, national policies promoting renewable energy, waste reduction, and circular economy initiatives embed sustainability into public, corporate, and academic spheres.

Second, Tunisia offers a particularly rich context for exploring the interplay between social media and sustainability. The country has historically exhibited high social media activity, particularly following the 2011 revolution, when digital platforms became key instruments of social mobilization [53]. This makes Tunisian consumers especially relevant for examining how online communication can influence behavior. Tunisia's geographic and cultural position—bridging Mediterranean and European influences while also reflecting Islamic and Arab traditions—exposes its population to sustainability narratives from both developed and emerging economies, enhancing their awareness and responsiveness to environmental issues [54, 55].

Third, Tunisia is increasingly recognized as a leader in sustainability within the African context. It ranks as the continent's second-largest producer of organic goods, demonstrating its growing role in shaping sustainable consumption trends [55]. Socially, the country's highly educated female population participates across diverse sectors, further contributing to an engaged and informed consumer base that is suitable for examining sustainable behavioral patterns in the digital age.

Data collection

This study adopted a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the main tool for gathering in-depth insights [56]. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling method, with clear criteria to ensure relevance to the research focus. Only individuals who actively engaged with social media and demonstrated a genuine interest in sustainable consumption were considered. To assess eligibility, a preliminary screening questionnaire was administered, in which participants indicated how often they interacted with sustainability-related content—such as liking, sharing, or commenting on environmental posts—their membership in eco-focused online communities, and their personal interest in environmental topics. Respondents who consistently engaged with sustainability-oriented content, such as following relevant pages or participating in discussions, were invited to take part in the interviews.

The interviews were conducted at times that suited the participants' schedules to facilitate convenience and maximize participation. Written informed consent was obtained from all respondents, including permission to use anonymized information in publications. Participants were assured of strict confidentiality, and all identifying details were carefully removed to protect their privacy throughout the study.

Interview process

The interviews were conducted virtually through a video conferencing platform, enabling participants from various locations to take part. Each session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, providing sufficient time to explore participants' perspectives on sustainability-related content on social media and their attitudes toward engaging with it. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned during both data collection and analysis. Participants were reassured that their real identities would remain private and that no personal information would be disclosed in any publications, presentations, or related academic outputs.

Interview protocol

The interviews were structured around a semi-structured guide, organized into three overarching themes to align with the study's objectives. The first theme explored the reasons participants engaged with sustainability-related content on social media, including both emotional drivers and informational needs, as well as their motivations for following environmental accounts. The second theme focused on how participants evaluated the credibility and influence of online content, considering sources such as NGOs, influencers, peers, and organizations, and the strategies they employed to verify information. The third theme examined the factors that either support or hinder the application of online awareness to real-life sustainable behaviors, addressing issues such as cost, accessibility, social norms, and community encouragement. This thematic framework ensured that the interview questions were closely connected to the research goals.

To capture rich and detailed responses, the guide consisted of open-ended questions (see Online Appendix A) that invited participants to reflect on their social media behaviors, their trust in sustainability content, and the barriers they encounter in

translating online engagement into practical actions [57]. Interviews were conducted through Zoom, recorded with participants' consent, and then transcribed verbatim. The resulting transcripts totaled approximately forty pages, providing a thorough basis for identifying key patterns and themes across participants' responses.

Given that the study did not involve deceptive procedures, formal ethical approval was deemed unnecessary by the University of Sousse ethics committee. Participants were fully informed about the purpose and process of the research before the interviews commenced and received an information sheet outlining their rights, including the freedom to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained digitally or via email before participation. Participants were also made aware that interviews would be recorded for transcription purposes, and all data would be treated confidentially. While no monetary compensation was offered, participants were informed that their contributions could enhance understanding of sustainable behaviors on social media, potentially generating positive societal impacts.

Data saturation and preparation

Interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that no new themes or insights continued to emerge. The final dataset comprised 15 complete interview transcripts. To facilitate analysis, all transcripts were translated into English. NVivo qualitative data analysis software was then used to organize and code the data, supporting the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and meanings. Subsequently, a thorough qualitative content analysis was carried out to provide an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences. A more detailed description of the content analysis procedure is provided in the following section.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted as an iterative and reflexive process, with continuous engagement between the researchers and the data. The process was guided by qualitative content analysis principles, allowing the extraction of underlying themes and meanings embedded in participants' responses [58].

Open coding

The initial stage of analysis involved open coding, during which researchers examined transcripts line by line to identify key words, phrases, and concepts that reflected participants' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors concerning sustainability [59]. This step generated numerous preliminary codes, capturing dimensions such as social media's influence on environmental awareness, the credibility of information sources, and barriers to sustainable consumption. Examples of initial codes included "trust in information sources," "cost as a barrier," and "peer influence on sustainability attitudes." Open coding provided a foundation for deeper analysis and was revisited multiple times to ensure comprehensive coverage and accuracy [60].

Axial coding

Following open coding, axial coding was applied to explore relationships among the initial codes. Memo-writing was employed throughout this process to document analytical decisions, emerging patterns, and reflections, creating an audit trail that enhanced the reliability and transparency of the analysis. During axial coding, similar codes were grouped into coherent thematic categories, revealing connections such as the link between "information credibility" and "consumer responsibility," as well as between "social media engagement" and "sustainable behavior." This step was essential for constructing a structured understanding of how various factors interacted within the dataset.

Selective coding

In the final stage, selective coding was used to identify the central themes and their implications [59]. To ensure trustworthiness, preliminary findings were shared with a subset of participants for validation, allowing them to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. A key finding highlighted the pivotal role of social media in shaping perceptions of information credibility, which significantly influenced consumer attitudes and sustainable behaviors. Participants who regarded social media content as credible reported heightened environmental awareness and a stronger sense of responsibility toward the environment. This perceived obligation often guided them to adopt sustainable practices and make eco-friendly purchasing decisions, with consumers favoring products and companies aligned with their sustainability values.

Moreover, the analysis revealed a clear link between increased environmental knowledge and stronger intentions to purchase green products. As participants gained a better understanding of ecological issues, they were more likely to incorporate environmentally friendly options into their future buying decisions. In summary, perceived credibility of information enhances environmental awareness, fosters a sense of personal responsibility, and encourages sustainable consumption and purchase intentions.

Use of the NVivo software

The analysis of qualitative data was strengthened through the use of NVivo software, which enabled a structured and transparent organization of the interview material. NVivo facilitated the systematic collection, coding, and categorization of participants' responses, allowing researchers to efficiently manage large volumes of qualitative data. Its advanced functionalities ensured accurate coding and methodical organization of textual content. Additionally, NVivo provided visualization tools such as charts, graphs, and matrices, which helped illustrate complex patterns and relationships within the data. The software also supported transparency by generating detailed reports and visual representations, enhancing the rigor and reliability of the analytical process.

Emergent themes and categories

The analysis revealed several key themes and categories, derived both from the participants' responses and informed by prior research on sustainability and social media [61]. These themes were grounded in the empirical data while aligning with existing literature, ensuring that the findings reflected participants' perspectives and contributed to broader academic understanding.

Ensuring credibility and reliability

The study's sample, summarized in **Table 1**, was considered both credible and reliable due to the transparent and systematic approach applied throughout the data analysis. Participants were assigned pseudonyms in **Table 1** and throughout the manuscript to protect their identities. By carefully contextualizing the findings within ongoing discussions about sustainability and social media, the research ensured the validity and trustworthiness of the results, supporting their relevance and applicability in similar contexts.

Table 1. Information on the sample.

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Occupation	City of Residence
Mohamed	23	Male	University student	Sousse
Fares	31	Male	Banker	Tunis
Fatima	27	Female	Housewife	Sousse
Sami	46	Male	School teacher	Sfax
Sofia	62	Female	Retired	Tunis
Sonia	35	Female	Physician	Sousse
Malek	30	Male	Product Owner	Sousse
Feriel	29	Female	Engineer	Monastir
Adam	31	Male	Engineer	Tunis
Jamel	51	Male	University professor	Sousse
Khaled	63	Male	Retired	Sousse
Amira	27	Female	Sales manager	Tunis
Ahlem	38	Female	Dentist	Sfax
Nizar	35	Male	Software engineer	Sousse
Chourouk	26	Female	Housewife	Tunis

In conclusion, the data analysis was carried out systematically and transparently, ensuring credibility while thoroughly revealing and articulating the key themes and underlying insights in a clear and coherent manner.

Results

This qualitative study demonstrates the substantial role social media plays in shaping sustainable consumption behaviors. Analysis of participant responses revealed several prominent themes, highlighting the ways in which social media influences environmental awareness, perceived responsibility toward the environment, and intentions to engage in sustainable consumption.

Comparisons across participant demographics revealed notable differences in perceptions of sustainability. Younger participants (ages 23–31) were generally more receptive to social media trends and showed greater enthusiasm for adopting eco-friendly behaviors promoted online, often citing Instagram and YouTube as primary sources of inspiration. In contrast, older participants (46 years and above) tended to approach online sustainability content with skepticism, placing more trust in established organizations such as Greenpeace and National Geographic for reliable information. Gender differences also emerged: female participants frequently emphasized the influence of community-driven platforms and emotionally engaging narratives, while male participants tended to focus on factual and technical aspects of environmental issues. Occupational background further shaped perspectives. For example, individuals working in education and healthcare displayed a stronger focus on the social implications of sustainable behaviors, whereas those in engineering and sales were more concerned with practical constraints, including accessibility and cost of sustainable products.

The sections that follow provide a detailed exploration of the various components of sustainability-related content on social media and their impact on consumer attitudes and behaviors. **Table 2** presents a summary of the key findings, including

illustrative participant quotations. Additionally, **Figure 2** offers a conceptual framework that encapsulates the influence of different components of sustainability content on consumer responses.

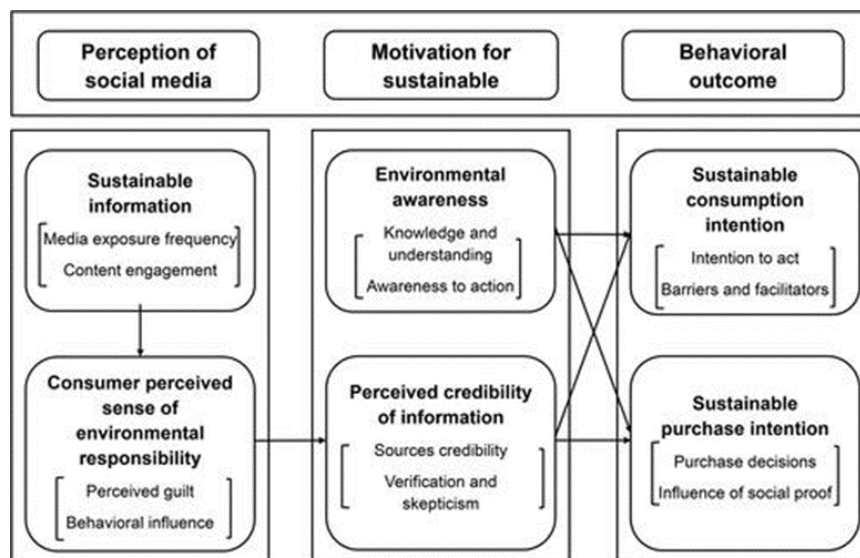


Figure 2. Effect of social media on sustainable behavior

Table 2. Summary of the findings

Theme	Specific Aspect	% of Participants	Main Insights	Illustrative Participant Voices
How often people see sustainability content	Frequency of seeing green posts/videos	52.2%	Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are the main platforms; most people come across this content daily or weekly.	"Almost every day I scroll past sustainability stuff on Instagram." – Fatima "I mainly watch eco-videos on YouTube once or twice a week." – Mohamed
Interaction with sustainability content	Liking, commenting, sharing	27.2%	Videos and infographics get the most interaction; stories and hashtag threads also popular.	"I often react to stories about green products." – Sofia "I jump into discussions under #ClimateCrisis." – Sami
Feeling personally responsible	Guilt or stronger duty toward the planet	34.2%	Content makes many feel they should do more; some have already cut plastic or chosen greener options.	"It shows me how companies affect the environment, so I feel I should act." – Malek "Now I take the bus more often." – Adam
Actual changes in daily habits	Real behavior shifts	62.1%	Increased recycling, lower electricity use, reusable items, some even organize community clean-ups.	"I started arranging neighborhood clean-up days." – Sofia
Growth in environmental knowledge	Better understanding of issues	57.8%	Learned more about climate crisis, ocean plastic, biodiversity and benefits of eating less meat.	"Social media really opened my eyes to the seriousness of climate change." – Sami "I now know why cutting meat helps." – Khaled
Turning knowledge into action	From learning to doing	46.8%	Many started supporting ethical brands or joining local environmental activities.	"Because of what I learned, I only buy from responsible fashion labels now." – Nizar
Trust in the information	Believing the source	72.3%	Trust given to well-known organizations (National Geographic, Greenpeace) and fact-based posts.	"I only believe it if it comes from serious experts or respected magazines." – Jamel
Checking if it's true	Fact-checking habits	52.4%	People double-check on official sites; fake or exaggerated posts make them distrust similar content later.	"I always go to the organization's own page or other trusted sites to confirm." – Khaled
Willingness to live more sustainably	Future intentions	63.1%	Strong desire to keep or increase green habits (buying eco products, reducing waste, etc.).	"I definitely plan to keep choosing the more sustainable options." – Fares
Things that help or block green choices	Enablers vs. obstacles	33.2%	Helpful: clear info & friends doing it. Obstacles: expensive prices and hard-to-find products.	"When the information is straightforward and I see others doing it, it's easier." – Adam
Buying eco-friendly products	Influence on actual purchases	69.6%	Regularly buy organic food, green cleaning products, or	"Several times I bought things influencers showed as planet-friendly."

			brands promoted as sustainable on social media.	– Nizar “Switched to reusable bottles and bags.” – Ahlem
Power of seeing others do it	Social influence & challenges	43.2%	Friends’ and influencers’ actions + viral challenges (zero-waste week, etc.) push people to buy greener items.	(no direct quote in original data for this row)

Key Relationships

Sustainable information on social media

Impact on environmental responsibility and awareness

Several participants highlighted the powerful influence of sustainability-focused content on social media platforms—such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, and TikTok—in strengthening their environmental awareness and sense of responsibility toward the planet. For instance, Nizar explained:

"I often come across posts on Instagram and Facebook about reducing plastic use and adopting eco-friendly habits. These posts usually offer practical tips, like reusing containers, avoiding single-use plastics, or choosing sustainable brands. They make me reconsider my daily routines and motivate me to take small actions I hadn't considered before, such as using my own water bottle or bringing a reusable shopping bag."

This example demonstrates how repeated exposure to practical guidance can encourage small but meaningful changes in daily behavior. Similarly, Fares emphasized the importance of community-driven online spaces:

"I frequently see posts in environmental Facebook groups where people share their personal efforts to live more sustainably, such as growing their own vegetables or switching to renewable energy. These stories create a sense of being part of a larger movement, which has inspired me to find ways to reduce my own carbon footprint, like using public transportation more often or buying second-hand items."

Together, these accounts illustrate how social media not only fosters individual behavioral changes but also cultivates a sense of collective responsibility and engagement within a community of environmentally conscious users.

Environmental responsibility and awareness as mediating factors

The heightened sense of responsibility and increased environmental awareness triggered by social media content have directly strengthened participants' intentions to adopt sustainable consumption practices. For example, Fatima remarked, "It has motivated me to lower my carbon footprint, especially through changes in my diet," showing how this awareness leads to concrete actions. Similarly, Fatima noted that Twitter conversations about the ecological consequences of certain foods encouraged her to join local environmental cleanup activities [62].

Perceived credibility of information sources

The extent to which sustainability-related content affects environmental awareness and responsibility largely depends on how credible participants perceive the sources to be. Sofia, for instance, explained, "I trust content the most when it comes from National Geographic or Greenpeace," illustrating that information from reputable organizations carries greater influence. Most participants reported habitually verifying claims by consulting official websites or peer-reviewed scientific papers, a practice highlighted by Fares and supported by research such as Severo *et al.* [63].

From environmental awareness and responsibility to sustainable consumption and purchasing intentions

The enhanced environmental awareness and personal responsibility cultivated through social media frequently translate into stronger commitments to sustainable consumption and purchasing decisions. Participants clearly connected their newfound knowledge to eco-friendly choices. Sami, for example, described how a series of Instagram stories about water scarcity prompted her to switch to water-saving appliances and begin favoring sustainable brands after reading detailed Twitter threads on industry impacts.

These shifts extend beyond single purchases to broader lifestyle changes. Sofia, for instance, explained that learning about the environmental damage caused by fast fashion led her to embrace minimalism and shop predominantly at second-hand stores. Such examples demonstrate that social media serves as an effective channel for converting awareness into action [64]. Furthermore, consistent with prior studies on positive spillover effects in pro-environmental behavior [65, 66], initial sustainable purchases often trigger wider sustainable habits, ultimately reshaping overall consumption patterns. In summary, the dynamic relationship among awareness, responsibility, and behavioral intention highlights the significant role social media can play in promoting sustainable consumption and purchasing behaviors.

Behavioral manifestation

Social media content frequently succeeds in converting intentions into real-world sustainable behaviors and purchasing choices. For example, Sonia began composting at home after being inspired by Instagram's content format:

"The quick, entertaining reels on Instagram made composting seem simple and enjoyable, so I decided to give it a try."

At the same time, Malek was motivated by posts from industry professionals on LinkedIn to promote sustainability at his workplace:

"Seeing experts talk about it made me realize that even small adjustments can have an impact, so I started advocating for proper waste separation policies at the office."

As Malek's experience illustrates, this transition from intention to concrete action highlights the tangible influence social media exerts on shaping and driving consumer behavior toward sustainability [10].

Detailed respondent insights

Exposure and sources

Participants encountered sustainability-related material on a daily basis across multiple social media channels. Ferial particularly emphasized Pinterest as a rich source of eco-friendly inspiration, filled with infographics and do-it-yourself tutorials:

"On Pinterest, I kept seeing creative ideas for repurposing old clothes and upcycling projects—it really sparked my interest."

"Zero-waste infographics on Pinterest offered simple, step-by-step tips that I could instantly use in my everyday routine."

Likewise, Jamel pointed out the practical value of Instagram videos:

"Those short, clever waste-reduction tricks I saw made me understand that even tiny habits can make a real difference."

The constant flow of environmental content across different platforms confirms that social media has become a primary channel for building environmental awareness [67] and for providing actionable ideas that help people move toward more sustainable lifestyles.

Content engagement

Engagement was driven by a wide range of formats, including videos, infographics, articles, and community discussions. The ninth participant, Adam, explained that user-generated content on Reddit played a major role in motivating him to tackle single-use plastics—an area widely examined in previous studies (e.g., Raab *et al.* [68]):

"Reading how so many ordinary people were successfully cutting down on plastic and sharing their tips really pushed me to join in."

"Watching real people on YouTube document their zero-waste journeys gave me the motivation to stay committed to my own targets."

The diversity of content types caters to different preferences and boosts overall involvement [69]. For instance, Eriksson *et al.* [70] showed that entertaining and visually appealing posts generate higher interaction, with Instagram outperforming Facebook because of its image-centric nature. Similarly, Phan *et al.* [71] demonstrated that the specific format of a post (photo, video, or text) is a key factor in determining engagement levels.

Personal impact and behavioral change

Exposure to social media content has significantly raised participants' awareness of their own environmental impact and prompted real behavioral shifts. Jamel described how reading online articles from blogs and magazines opened his eyes:

"I honestly had no idea how much damage fast fashion was causing until I started coming across those eye-opening articles."

As anticipated by recent research (e.g., Liu & Li [72]), this new awareness led Jamel to actively choose and support brands that prioritize sustainability.

Evaluating source reliability

The reliability of information sources was a critical factor in fostering trust and motivating participants to take action. Khaled, for example, tended to trust those whose activities were open and consistently documented:

"I follow advice from people who frequently share what they do and show tangible outcomes—it makes me feel confident in their guidance."

Several participants highlighted the importance of checking content creators' credibility by comparing their claims with other trustworthy sources:

"I always double-check the statements I see on social media to ensure they are scientifically supported." (Amira)

"I only act on information that has research backing or comes from reputable organizations like Greenpeace or WWF." (Khaled)

For many, this verification process was key to converting knowledge into concrete actions. Source credibility does not just influence behavior directly; it also affects behavioral intentions through parasocial interactions (PSI) [73]. In other words,

when followers perceive influencers as knowledgeable and dependable, their sense of connection grows, which then drives their behavioral intentions. If verification confirms an influencer's claims, it further strengthens their perceived expertise, enhancing PSI and increasing the likelihood of action.

Gaining knowledge and insight

Social media played a significant role in deepening participants' understanding of environmental issues. For instance, Ahlem realized the environmental impact of meat consumption:

"Learning how much water goes into producing meat made me explore plant-based recipes."

This observation is consistent with prior research. Pohjolainen and Jokinen [74] showed that social media campaigns, such as Finland's first 'Meatless October' in 2013, can effectively encourage sustainable behaviors. By publicly sharing experiences, these campaigns allow individuals to experiment with new habits, normalize sustainable practices, and cultivate both personal learning and a sense of collective environmental responsibility.

From awareness to behavior

Increased awareness of social media content often translated into concrete actions. Nizar, for example, shifted his purchasing habits after learning about fast fashion's environmental impact:

"After realizing how harmful fast fashion is, I began supporting local ethical designers."

This demonstrates a clear link between raising awareness and behavioral change and aligns with findings from Cayaban *et al.* [75], which suggest that sustainability awareness can reduce fast fashion consumption.

Obstacles and enablers

Participants reported various factors that either hindered or facilitated their sustainable behaviors. One common challenge was the higher price of sustainable products. Nizar expressed this frustration:

"I want to buy eco-friendly products, but they are often much pricier than regular ones, which makes it hard to stay consistent."

Limited access to sustainable options was another barrier. Sonia explained:

"Living in a small town makes it difficult to find ethical brands or organic products, so I often have to compromise."

On the other hand, support from communities, practical guidance, and influencers' tips helped overcome these obstacles. Chourouk emphasized:

"Being part of an online community kept me motivated; their encouragement and advice were really helpful."

Other participants highlighted the usefulness of social media platforms. Khaled noted:

"I joined a Facebook group where people share their sustainable farming tips—it's been incredibly practical."

Similarly, Feriel appreciated Pinterest:

"I've learned numerous ways to reuse items through Pinterest boards."

These observations align with Muñoz-Martínez *et al.* [76], who identified a wide range of internal and external factors affecting sustainable behaviors and emphasized how these factors interact.

Role of social influence

Social proof strongly influenced participants' actions. Observing others undertake sustainable practices or challenges made their own choices feel more credible. Adam described:

"Watching people document their zero-waste journeys on YouTube inspired me to continue with my own efforts."

Malek also noted the effect of professional networks:

"Seeing corporate leaders discuss sustainability on LinkedIn motivated me to support green initiatives at my workplace."

Even outside digital settings, similar patterns were observed. Nguyen *et al.* [77] highlighted the role of informal waste collectors, or 've chai', who encouraged sustainable behaviors in their communities, acting similarly to influencers. Several NGOs and government initiatives, such as the EU's #SustainableTogether and the UN Environment Programme's Act Now campaign, collaborate with social media influencers to expand their reach.

Drawing from these insights, a conceptual model (**Figure 3**) was developed to illustrate how sustainability-focused content on social media shapes consumer behavior, emphasizing the interactions between credibility, social proof, community engagement, and behavioral intentions.

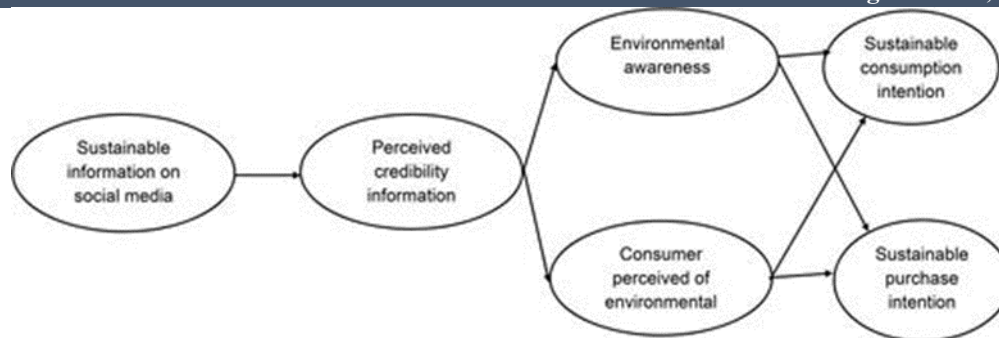


Figure 3. The conceptual model

Discussion

Overview

This research explores how exposure to sustainability-related content on social media influences consumer behavior, particularly in terms of perceived environmental responsibility, heightened environmental awareness, and stronger intentions to engage in sustainable consumption. Drawing on qualitative data from a diverse group of participants in Tunisia, the study highlights key drivers, perceived trustworthiness of information sources, obstacles, and concrete actions toward sustainability. The analysis further uncovers how various social media platforms and types of content contribute differently to promoting sustainable practices, linking participants' experiences with existing scholarship to answer the research questions [10].

Main drivers for engaging with sustainability content

Participants frequently described social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Pinterest as sources of both inspiration and learning when it came to sustainability. Visually engaging content, including videos, infographics, and interactive discussions, was highlighted as particularly effective in conveying environmental knowledge and raising concern [70, 71, 78]. The availability of multiple content formats caters to different ways of learning, which seems to amplify the impact of these messages. These findings reinforce earlier research suggesting that exposure to sustainability-related content not only increases knowledge but also nurtures a sense of environmental responsibility [63].

Credibility as a key factor

The trustworthiness of content emerged as a crucial factor influencing whether participants acted on sustainability information. Many expressed hesitation toward user-generated content unless it included clear evidence or verification. Respondents emphasized the importance of checking claims against authoritative sources, such as environmental NGOs, peer-reviewed studies, or verified social media accounts. This aligns with Lep *et al.* [79], who note that perceived credibility strongly affects the effectiveness of sustainability communications. Verification processes, therefore, serve as an important bridge between exposure to content and the likelihood of behavioral change.

Previous studies, including Knight *et al.* [7], have shown that the perceived reliability of sustainability messages can determine whether audiences accept the information and incorporate it into their behaviors. Similarly, Mladenovic *et al.* [26] stress that trust in the source is a major determinant of engagement with green initiatives. Our results expand on these insights by showing that credibility judgments are shaped not only by the reputation of organizations but also by visible signs of transparency and peer validation on social media—factors that have not been widely explored in prior work.

Challenges to sustainable behavior

Despite social media's ability to raise awareness and influence intentions, participants reported several obstacles to turning intentions into real actions. The higher cost of sustainable products was frequently cited as a barrier, along with the perceived difficulty of accessing certain eco-friendly options. These observations are consistent with prior literature that identifies price and availability as key constraints to sustainable consumption [80].

Although mentioned less often, some participants were wary of social media content due to concerns about greenwashing, suggesting that skepticism can also limit behavior change. Nevertheless, certain enabling factors, particularly community support, were noted as helpful in overcoming these barriers. Being part of an online community offered encouragement and practical guidance, helping participants maintain their sustainable practices.

From awareness to action

The study highlights a notable discrepancy between understanding sustainability issues and consistently practicing eco-friendly behaviors. Although many participants expressed a willingness to adopt sustainable habits, maintaining these behaviors over time proved difficult. Nonetheless, factors such as social proof and active community engagement emerged as

important facilitators. Participants' experiences reflect principles of social influence theory, which suggest that people are more inclined to mirror behaviors exhibited by their social networks [81]. Additionally, these findings corroborate previous research indicating that observing others' environmentally responsible behaviors increases trust and motivates individuals to engage in similar pro-environmental actions [77].

Platform-Specific roles in sustainability engagement

Participants noted that different social media platforms serve unique purposes in promoting sustainable behaviors. Instagram and YouTube were particularly effective in delivering visually striking content that creates an emotional connection with users. Respondents frequently cited the persuasive power of imagery and videos on these platforms, which aligns with findings from Eriksson *et al.* [70] and Phan *et al.* [71].

In contrast, platforms such as Facebook and Reddit were valued for facilitating in-depth conversations and providing peer support, while LinkedIn was recognized as a venue for professional advocacy and sharing workplace sustainability initiatives. These observations support Shahbaznezhad *et al.* [82], who emphasize that various platforms offer distinct advantages in shaping consumer behavior. By addressing different user needs—including emotional engagement, community interaction, and professional influence—social media collectively plays a multifaceted role in encouraging sustainable practices.

Theoretical Implications

The outcomes of this study offer meaningful contributions to the understanding of behavioral change and communication theories, particularly regarding how social media content on sustainability shapes consumer decisions.

One key insight concerns the role of source credibility, which resonates with both the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Social-Cognitive Theory (SCT). These frameworks suggest that messages delivered by trusted communicators are more persuasive and more likely to influence intentions. Participants in this study reported placing greater trust in information from NGOs or verified accounts, indicating that credibility plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between intention and action [16]. This finding points to the potential for TPB models to be refined by explicitly incorporating trust as a moderating factor in decision-making processes related to environmental behavior.

Additionally, the study highlights structural constraints—such as product cost and limited availability—that can hinder sustainable action. These observations extend the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory, which traditionally focuses on individual values and moral obligations as motivators for pro-environmental behavior. The findings suggest that integrating practical barriers into the VBN framework would make it more applicable to real-world contexts, where even highly motivated and aware individuals may be prevented from acting sustainably due to systemic limitations.

Social proof and community engagement also emerged as powerful influences, aligning with Social-Cognitive Theory's emphasis on observational learning and peer effects. Seeing peers successfully implement sustainable practices not only encourages similar behaviors but also demonstrates that these actions are achievable. Participants' involvement in online communities and discussion groups illustrates how collective engagement and peer networks reinforce sustainability behaviors [83].

Finally, the research offers insights relevant to Media Richness Theory and Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory, emphasizing the platform-specific effects of sustainability content. Instagram and YouTube were perceived as highly effective for conveying emotionally resonant, visually rich messages, supporting the notion that richer media are better suited for complex information. In contrast, Facebook and Reddit were valued for fostering dialogue and peer support, while LinkedIn served as a platform for professional advocacy. These patterns underscore the need for communication theories to account for the distinct affordances of digital platforms in promoting sustainability [84].

In summary, the study not only reinforces the relevance of existing theoretical frameworks but also highlights areas for refinement, particularly the incorporation of trust, systemic barriers, and platform-specific dynamics. By doing so, it provides a more comprehensive theoretical basis for understanding how sustainability-related content can drive meaningful behavioral change.

Practical Implications

These findings offer concrete guidance for stakeholders aiming to promote sustainable practices, including marketers, policymakers, influencers, and environmental organizations. A central insight is that the credibility of the information source heavily shapes the effectiveness of sustainability messaging. Collaborations with established entities—such as verified experts or reputable NGOs—can significantly boost campaign trustworthiness. Transparency is equally important: presenting scientific evidence, case studies, or measurable outcomes helps reinforce credibility and encourages audiences to act on sustainability messages [16].

Beyond credibility, structural obstacles such as high costs and limited availability of sustainable products pose significant challenges. To address these, policymakers and businesses could implement financial incentives, such as subsidies or tax benefits, and adopt pricing strategies that make eco-friendly options more accessible. Public awareness efforts that communicate the long-term economic and environmental benefits of sustainable products can also help shift consumer perceptions, making green choices seem more attainable and valuable.

The role of online communities and social proof emerged as another powerful mechanism for promoting sustainable behavior. Platforms like Facebook and Reddit can provide interactive spaces where individuals exchange experiences, share practical tips, and celebrate progress. When influencers or community leaders visibly practice sustainable behaviors, they help establish behavioral norms that others are more likely to follow [83]. Although tailoring campaigns to the unique features of each platform is recommended, the overarching goal should be to match content with the specific strengths of each channel to engage diverse audiences effectively. Importantly, building credibility alone is not enough; initiatives must also ensure that sustainable options are tangible and accessible to facilitate real behavioral change.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite offering valuable insights into the influence of social media on sustainable behavior, this study has several limitations. First, the relatively small sample size and the qualitative nature of the research constrain the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Second, potential biases—particularly social desirability bias—must be considered. Given the sensitive nature of environmental behavior, participants may have exaggerated their levels of awareness or presented themselves in a more environmentally responsible light than was accurate, either consciously or unconsciously. Third, reliance on self-reported interview data introduces the possibility that participants' actual behaviors may differ from their stated intentions or attitudes.

To address these limitations, future research could incorporate anonymous surveys and longitudinal designs that track sustainable behavior over time. Combining self-reported data with objective behavioral measures, such as digital trace data or direct observations, could provide a more accurate assessment of social media's impact on sustainable consumption. Such approaches would enable researchers to capture both immediate intentions and actual behavior, offering a fuller picture of how social media influences consumer actions.

Future studies should also examine the long-term effects of social media-driven sustainability initiatives. While this study primarily assessed short-term perceptions and intentions, understanding whether exposure to sustainability content results in lasting behavioral changes is crucial. Additionally, emerging platforms, such as TikTok, merit investigation. The platform's short-video format and predominantly younger user base present distinct opportunities and challenges for sustainability messaging, and research could explore how these campaigns affect different demographic groups.

Exploring the framing of various sustainability topics—such as climate change, biodiversity, and waste reduction—could yield further insights into which approaches most effectively drive behavior. The evolving social media landscape continues to offer potential for promoting environmental action, highlighting the need for ongoing research.

Finally, incorporating contextual variables such as gender, cultural background, and socio-economic status would provide a more nuanced understanding of how different groups engage with sustainability content. An intersectional perspective could illuminate variations in motivations, trust in sources, and perceived barriers, ultimately supporting the design of more targeted and effective communication strategies.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of social media on sustainable consumer behavior, focusing on three interlinked areas: the drivers that motivate users to engage with sustainability content, the perceived trustworthiness and influence of sources, and the obstacles that prevent intentions from translating into sustainable practices. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 15 participants from Tunisia, the analysis revealed that each platform plays a distinct role: Instagram inspires aspirational engagement, Facebook facilitates peer interaction and community support, and YouTube provides informational and educational content. Across these channels, credibility of sources, the presence of social proof, and supportive online networks emerged as key factors encouraging sustainable behavior, while persistent challenges such as high costs and limited availability of eco-friendly products continued to impede action.

The contribution of this research is twofold. Conceptually, it advances current theories of sustainable consumption by combining motivations, credibility, and barriers into a unified framework, offering a more nuanced understanding of how social media shapes behavior. Practically, the findings provide guidance for marketers, policymakers, and sustainability advocates seeking to use digital platforms more effectively to promote eco-conscious practices. While the study is limited in scale and scope, it highlights opportunities for future research to examine how demographic and contextual factors—such as age, gender, cultural background, and socio-economic status—affect engagement with sustainability messages. By addressing

these dimensions, scholars and practitioners can better harness the potential of social media to encourage long-term, sustainable consumer behavior.

Acknowledgments: None

Conflict of interest: None

Financial support: This work was supported by the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education under Grant Bourse d'Alternance.

Ethics statement: None

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