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Green Social Media Influencers' Characteristics Affect Sustainable Clothing Purchase Intentions Among Millennials: An Extended Source Credibility Framework

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Abstract

The fashion and apparel industry has been growing tremendously due to fast fashion and it has caused detrimental effects on the environment, which make it the second dirty industry. Thus, to shape the favorable perception of the fashion apparel industry, businesses have tried to align the sustainability practices in their products and supply chains, including the use of green social media influencers (SMIs) to gauge the favorable image in the consumers' eyes. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate Millennials' intentions to purchase sustainable clothing which are impacted by the green SMI characteristics, namely attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise which derived from the source credibility framework and extended the two characteristics, interactivity and credibility to further expand the framework. Purposive sampling was applied to gather data from a self-administered questionnaire. The data was provided by valid 384 respondents who have followed green SMI and were currently residing in Malaysia. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was then used to analyze the data via the Regression analysis. The results indicated that the attractiveness, credibility, and expertise of green SMIs were the predictors of purchase intentions. However, the trustworthiness and interactivity of the green SMIs were not significant predictors. This study urged the sustainable fashion industry/ business to carefully select green SMIs who are credible and experts in environmental knowledge to avoid the greenwashing and skepticism effects. Conclusion, implication, and future research pathways were discussed.

Keywords: green social media influencers, purchase intention, sustainable apparel, sustainable consumption and production, millennials

1. Introduction

The global fashion industry has grown to be the largest sector and because of the intense market competition, economic uncertainty, and consumer shift (McKinsey & Company, 2024), it has made the industry very competitive. In addition, the manufacturing process has made the fashion business the second-most polluted industry in the world (Maiti, 2025), where consumers still buy inferior materials that seem to be difficult to recycle, resulting in the production of additional pollutants (Debnath et al., 2023; Jacobsen et al., 2022). This harms the environment because of the fast-paced manufacturing and excessive consumption in the fashion business, which is also the second-least clean industry after the oil industry (Chen et al., 2021).

Maiti (2025) acknowledges that it is estimated that the fashion sector accounts for 10% of worldwide carbon emissions. Thus, the concept of sustainable fashion has emerged to balance out the detrimental effects of fast fashion production and its supply chain (Olivar Aponte et al., 2024; Wren, 2022). Considering consumers nowadays are aware of environmental issues, the consumers' decision-making regarding their purchases is primarily focused on sustainable

consumption (Chen, 2024; Lopes et al., 2024).

However, consumers' perceptions of sustainability in fashion are still comparatively low (de Oliveira et al., 2022), and their awareness about sustainable apparel still lacking (Ramany et al., 2022). Since they are unfamiliar with the idea, consumers might not even be aware that they have purchased sustainable clothing. As a result, there is an increasing perception that sustainable clothing is expensive and poor-quality product (de Oliveira, 2022; Rausch et al., 2021). For instance, Yue and Mond Nor (2024) found that Malaysians lack awareness when it comes to environmentally friendly/ sustainable products, which warrants Malaysia as a strong research context to be studied in developing Asian countries.

Thus, the market needs to encourage and place demand for sustainable fashion, for the transition to be successful. As social media now plays a bigger role in consumers' daily lives, everything shared on social media can influence them. Thus, the new concept of eco or green social media influencers (SMIs) play a crucial role in this matter (Abate et al., 2025; Munaro et al., 2024).

According to Rodrigo and Mendis (2023), social influencers can have an impact on customers' consumer preferences and sustainable purchase intentions given that they are considered experts in this area. This can be seen from the lenses of Millennials, who are thought to be more frequent users of social media platforms as they are impacted by the rise of the Internet era (Velasco, 2020). Prior studies have demonstrated that youngsters, specifically the Millennials, are a target demographic that might be recognized by their buying behavior since they are expected to be keen on sustainable friendly items as a result of the Internet's expansion (Ghouse et al., 2024; Mabkhot, 2024). Thus, to protect the environment and in response to the environmentally conscious consumerism that is expanding in the fashion industry, businesses and organizations have begun to adapt their production process to be more sustainable (Haleem et al., 2023).

Previous studies related to influencers and celebrities often applied the source credibility model by Ohanian (1990), which applied the three main attributes, namely attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Sitorus et al., 2024). Past studies have utilized the enhanced model such as TEARS, which expanded the similarity and respect attributes (Chan et al., 2021; Sharipuddin et al., 2023). However, other characteristics like credibility and interactivity need further examined particularly in the context of sustainable and green products (Chetioui et al., 2020; Rodrigo & Mendis, 2023; Vilkaite-Vaitone, 2024).

Thus, this study intends to test the impact of green SMI characteristics (attractiveness, trustworthiness, interactivity, credibility, expertise) and purchase intention of sustainable clothing which extends the source credibility framework.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

This study uses Roobina Ohanian's (Ohanian, 1990) Source Credibility Model as the theoretical guide. The Source Credibility Model states that if a message communicated from a source is perceived as credible by the consumers, they are more likely to accept the message and be influenced by it (Dominic et al., 2023). In the case of SMI, the application of Ohanian's Source Credibility Model pinpoints three dimensions as influential, namely trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise (Dominic et al., 2023; Koay et al., 2022). El Hedhli et al. (2021) stated that the Source Credibility Model is used in the analysis of celebrity endorsements and advertising in situations that involve the usage of celebrity endorsers to enhance endorsements' credibility. Numerous scholars (e.g. Belanche et al., 2021; Ilieva et al., 2024) stated that sources of communication (green SMIs in this case) that have higher credibility result in positive changes in purchase behavior. Thus, this study extended the source credibility model by including the perceived SMI credibility (Nafees et al., 2021) and interactivity (Yu et al., 2023).

The next section discussed the hypotheses development and led to the formulation of the research framework.

2.2 Hypothesis Development

Given the booming state of the fashion business, marketers are using influencer attractiveness as a creative way to draw in buyers (Gurung et al., 2023; Mir, 2024). Vilkaite-Vaitone (2024) and Zhao et al. (2024) discovered that the attractiveness of SMIs is more successful in promoting brand trust with the customers, which in turn strengthens their intention to make a sustainable purchase and consumption. When it comes to sustainable clothing advertisements, attractive green SMIs can thus help make sustainable fashion more appealing and lead to purchase intention (Ge, 2024; Jacobson & Harrison, 2022). For instance, Abate et al. (2025) found that physical attractiveness of SMI was a significant predictor of environmental concern for Generation Z. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Attractiveness of green SMIs has a positive impact on the purchase intention of sustainable clothing.

A person's intention to purchase fashion clothing is positively impacted by the trustworthiness of influencers (Chetioui et al., 2020). Green influencers in particular have a significant impact on improving consumer thinking by fostering awareness and environmentally conscious choices (Islam et al., 2024). Based on the assertion, the study finds that SMI's

trustworthiness affects consumer perspective, which elevates the best possible purchase intention (Al-Mu'ani et al., 2023; Mohamed & Gadiman, 2024; Weismueller et al., 2020). Abbas and Salim (2023), found that the trustworthiness of the influencer positively impacts the purchase intention, which aligned with the study of Gurung et al. (2023). It appears that there are differing opinions about whose discourse is trustworthy when it comes to sustainable fashion (Jacobson & Harrison, 2022). Thereof, this study postulated that:

H2: Trustworthiness of the green SMIs has a positive impact on the purchase intention of sustainable clothing.

Interactivity refers to the degree to which two or more parties are responsive, actively involved, and exchange communication messages reciprocally (Yuan et al., 2024). In this study, the degree of interaction/ responsiveness between the green SMIs and their followers on sustainable fashion is a reflection of their engagement and enthusiasm to form an affinity (Abbas & Salim, 2023; Jacobson & Harrison, 2022) and leads to the purchase intention. For instance, Wismiarsi et al. (2024) found that content interactivity did affect the consumers' purchase intention. Besides, Li and Peng (2021), also found that interactivity of the SMI positively affects the advertising trust. Thus, this study formulated that:

H3: Interactivity of green SMIs has a positive impact on the purchase intention of sustainable apparel.

According to Belanche et al. (2021), influencers are viewed as credible brand ambassadors who have the power to influence the views and opinions of their followers about the products. However, Chetioui et al. (2020) found that among the biggest elements influencing sentiments about the influencer are the influencer's credibility and truthfulness. Vilkaite-Vaitone (2024) found that credibility is a significant determinant that impacts followers' sustainable consumption behavior, where this also aligned with the notion of Rodrigo and Mendis (2023). Besides, Lam et al. (2023) and Rizomyliotis et al. (2024) also evidence that the credibility of SMIs and Internet celebrities positively impacts brand consideration and purchase intention. Thus, this study assumed that:

H4: Credibility of the green SMIs has a positive impact on the purchase intention of sustainable apparel.

Consumers are more likely to purchase products recommended by influencers on social media if they have a certain level of expertise in them (Ilieva et al., 2024; Weismueller et al., 2020). In a similar vein, customers prefer to consider online reviews as valuable when they believe the SMIs are credible and experienced, which may have a positive impact on customers' decisions to purchase the recommended items (Weismueller et al., 2020). For instance, Mohamed and Gadiman (2024) found that the expertise of the YouTube influencer positively influences the purchase intention of cosmetic products. This also aligned with the findings of Al-Mu'ani et al. (2023), where the expertise of the SMI impacts purchase intention and brand attitude. Therefore, this study postulated that:

H5: Expertise of the green SMIs has a positive impact on the purchase intention of sustainable clothing.

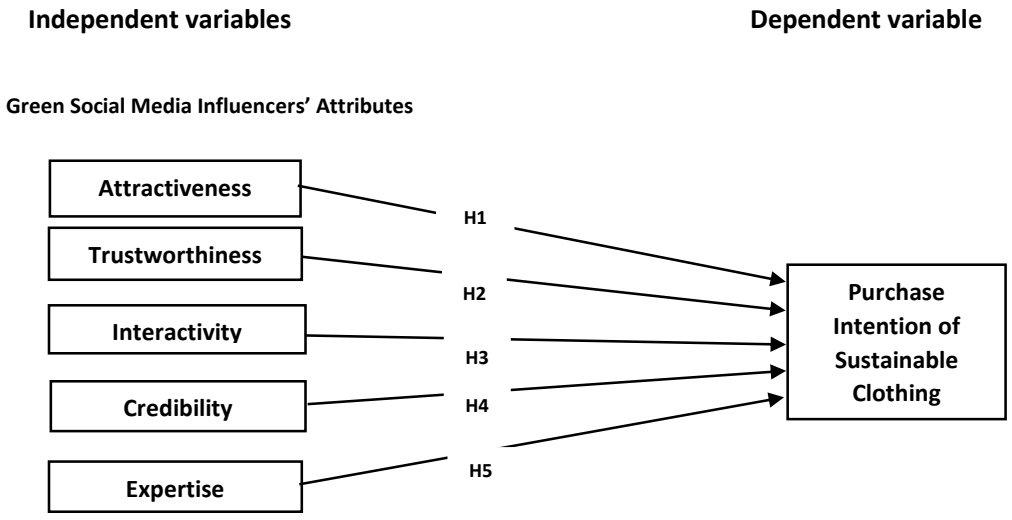

Figure 1. Research framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research was conducted based on a quantitative method to acquire the data needed. According to Lim (2024), a quantitative method is used to process the numerical data collected and can be measured mathematically to be further analyzed. As suggested by Barroga and Matanguihan (2022), research should all be in line with the research topic,

where the hypothesis is developed by the researchers and then examined to confirm or reject the hypothesis. Since it is quantitative research, hence a structured questionnaire is utilized to collect the data.

3.2 Sampling Procedure

This study used purposive sampling (non-probability) as it lacked an adequate sampling frame. This purposive sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who have experience with a certain issue of interest (Campbell et al., 2020). For this study, purposive sampling is the right choice to be implemented considering the respondents selected for the sample are based on the researcher's judgment that the respondents should be Millennials who follow green SMIs and promote sustainable clothing on social media. The choice of purposive sampling has been used in numerous sustainable studies which warrant the use of this sampling (Chan et al., 2025, Ramany et al., 2022).

To determine the appropriate sample size, the researchers utilized G-power software. Based on the analysis, the minimum sample size required is 138 (Predictor: 5, effect size: 0.15, power: 0.95), and the current study has a valid 384 sample which is appropriate and sufficient for data analysis.

3.3 Measurement

The instrument for this research consisted of three sections with a total of 47 questions. The first section consists of the demographic questions of the respondents such as gender, age, income, and screening questions that ask whether the respondents have followed any green SMIs that promote sustainable apparel and have seen sustainable content in social media. These questions are crucial to ensure that the respondent is valid and can fulfill the requirement.

The second section contained the dimensions of green SMIs characteristics (attractiveness, trustworthiness, interactivity, credibility, and perceived expertise). 8 items for attractiveness were adapted from (Ki & Kyung, 2019; Khan et al., 2019). In addition, the 7 items for trustworthiness were modified from (Lou & Kim, 2019), and 6 items for interactivity were derived from (Ki & Kyung, 2019; Yadav & Rahman, 2017).

Besides, 7 items for credibility were adapted from (Martins et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2019) and 7 items for expertise were modified from (Lou & Kim, 2019; Ki & Kyung, 2019; Bergkvist et al., 2016). The last section was the 6 items for purchase intention which were adapted from (Casaló et al., 2017; Ki & Kyung, 2019; Khan et al., 2019). The independent and dependent variables were measured using a 5-point Likert's type scale which denoted 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The researchers guarantee that the respondents' information will be kept private and confidential. The data were collected from 18th March 2023 until 29th May 2023. The data was collected via Google form (online questionnaires) and valid 384 data results were obtained.

3.5 Pilot Testing

A pilot test was conducted based on at least 30 respondents. Srinivasan and Lohith (2017) state that the purpose of a pilot test is to ensure that the questionnaire is understandable and it should be carried out on individuals who are comparable to the sample's final population. An alpha value between .60 and .75 is accepted as a reasonably reliable scale (Taber, 2018). As shown in Table 1, the construct and items on green SMI's characteristics and purchase intention were found to be reliable (alpha > 0.6). This means that the scales used in this investigation are consistently reliable and acceptable.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha of the variables

Variable(s)	Cronbach's alpha (n=30)	No. of Items
Attractiveness	0.874	8
Trustworthiness	0.914	6
Interactivity	0.925	6
Credibility	0.885	7
Expertise	0.814	7
Purchase intention	0.665	7

The results of the normality test suggest that the data is normally distributed, with skewness values between -0.338 and -1.034 and the kurtosis values range from -0.537 to 0.946. Since both skewness and kurtosis are within the acceptable limits of ±2 (George & Mallery, 2019). Thus, the normality of the data is fulfilled and parametric analysis can be further tested.

Table 2. Normality analysis using Skewness and kurtosis

	Attractiveness	Trustworthiness	Interactivity	Credibility	Expertise	Purchase intention
Skewness	-1.034	-0.338	-0.595	-0.776	-0.945	-0.627
Kurtosis	0.946	-0.874	-0.537	0.536	1.502	0.075
Minimum	13.00	11.00	6.00	10.00	10.00	8.00
Maximum	40.00	34.00	28.00	30.00	35.00	24.00

4. Findings

Table 3 shows the profile of 384 respondents that were collected from the Millennials in Malaysia. The percentages of gender show that female respondents have slightly higher percentages than male respondents, which is 75.8 percent. For the age category, it is shown that the respondents are the majority ranging from 36 to 40 years old, which has a percentage of 34.6 percent. Next, for the income, the findings illustrate that the income which is above RM 3000 category accounts for the majority of the respondents whereas RM 1501 to RM 2000 income category accounts for the minority of the respondents.

Table 3. Profile of the Respondents (n=384)

Variable(s)	**Category**	**Frequency**	**%**
Gender	Male	93	24.2
	Female	291	75.8
Age	<30	124	32.3
	31- 35	123	32.0
	36 -40	133	34.6
	> 40	4	1
Income	< RM1500	4	1
	RM1501 - RM2000	2	0.5
	RM2001 - RM2500	12	3.1
	RM2501 - RM3000	30	7.8
	> RM 3000	336	87.5

Two or more variables that are highly correlated will cause the multicollinearity issue. Thus Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to evaluate the multicollinearity (Kim, 2019). Kim (2019) further highlighted that if the VIF value is more than 5 there is a high tendency with the multicollinearity. Based on Table 4, the VIF values range between 1.331 and 1.543 which indicates that the values did not exceed 5. Thus, there were no severe multicollinearity issues.

The value of R is 0.598 indicating that there is a moderate effect between the independent variables which are the attributes of green SMIs to the purchase intention of sustainable clothing. The value of R^2 is 0.358 which indicates that the independent variables are impacting the purchase intention of sustainable clothing by 35.8%. Thus, the remaining 64.2% are based on other variables that currently not yet been investigated in this research.

Based on the regression analysis, it indicated that Attractiveness ($\beta = 0.095$, $t = 3.316$, $p < 0.05$), Credibility ($\beta = 0.215$, $t = 5.294$, $p < 0.05$), and Expertise ($\beta = 0.256$, $t = 6.194$, $p < 0.05$) have a positive and significant impact on the purchase intention of sustainable apparel. Hence, H1, H4, and H5 were supported. However, H2 and H3 were rejected, where trustworthiness and interactivity did not significantly impact the purchase intention.

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis of purchase intention of sustainable clothing with predictors

	Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**P**	**Collinearity Statistics**	
Path	**B**	**Std. Error**	**Beta**			**Tolerance**	**VIF**
(Constant)	4.062	1.004		4.044	0.000		
H1: Attractiveness	0.095	0.029	0.157	3.316	0.001	0.751	1.331
H2: Trustworthiness	-0.024	0.029	-0.042	-0.833	0.406	0.664	1.506
H3: Interactivity	0.035	0.031	0.056	1.131	0.259	0.696	1.437
H4: Credibility	0.215	0.041	0.263	5.294	0.000	0.686	1.458
H5: Expertise	0.256	0.041	0.316	6.194	0.000	0.648	1.543

$F = 42.303$ $df_1=5, df_2=380$ $p = 0.000$

$R = 0.598$ $R^2 = 0.358$ Adj $R^2 = 0.349$

5. Discussion

The current results affirmed that the attractiveness of green SMIs impacted the purchase intention of sustainable clothing which supported the past studies (Vilkaite-Vaitone, 2024; Zhao et al., 2024). This is because the attractiveness of the green influencer will make sustainable clothing promotional materials more appealing (Ge, 2024; Jacobson & Harrison, 2022) and drive the intent to purchase.

In addition, the study also found that the credibility of the green SMIs positively impacts the purchase intention of sustainable apparel, which corroborated with the results of (Chetioui et al., 2020; Rodrigo & Mendis, 2023; Vilkaite-Vaitone, 2024). This is because when the SMI is credible, it will create word-of-mouth and a good impression, and this will further influence the consumers' intentions and make them purchase sustainable products.

In a similar vein, the expertise of social media influencers positively impacts purchase intention, which aligns with the past studies of (Al-Mu'ani et al., 2023; Mohamed & Gadiman, 2024). This can be further explained that when the SMI is an expert in sustainable products and green knowledge, he/she can provide more valuable expert reviews on those products which will further influence the consumers' decision to recommend sustainable products (Weismueller et al., 2020).

However, the current study discovered that the trustworthiness of green SMIs does not affect the purchase intention of sustainable clothing, which differs from the studies of (Abbas & Salim, 2023; Islam et al., 2024; Gurung et al., 2023). Besides, the interactivity of the green SMI was also found not significantly related to the purchase intention which contrasted with the study of (Abbas & Salim, 2023; Jacobson & Harrison, 2022). The insignificant findings can be best explained by the current demographic where most of the respondents are young adults whose age range of around 30-40 years old, where this group of consumers could be technology savvy and well versed with eco-products. Thus, they might not fully trust the words/ comments from the green SMIs, due to the greenwashing effects.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that the green SMIs attributes (attractiveness, credibility, and expertise) were the predictors for sustainable clothing purchase intents. However, the trustworthiness and interactivity of the green SMIs did not significantly impact the purchase intentions.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The study contributed to the source credibility framework developed by Ohanian (1990), where expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness have been deduced from the model and become the conceptual framework. In addition, the study expanded the source credibility model by incorporating the credibility and interactivity elements which are crucial in examining the green SMIs (source) characteristics. This study contributed to the green and eco-marketing, by looking into the green SMI's attributes, which make it interesting as compared to the studies of celebrity and SMI in the commercial promotional products/ services.

6.2 Practical Implications

These findings indicated that the three dimensions of green SMI's characteristics, such as attractiveness, credibility, and expertise were able to impact the purchase intention. Customers may depend on influencers' recommendations and viewpoints when making decisions on purchasing. This enables businesses/ retailers in the fashion business to concentrate more on identifying the aspect that should be prioritized when using green SMIs to promote their brands or items.

For instance, fashion retailers/businesses should carefully choose the green SMI that has eco-expertise and is credible regards the sustainable messages. This is to avoid the negative public perceptions who think that the green SMIs were paid by the company and just do the green promotions for the sales and benefits of the company, but the real actions which improve the environment might be questionable to eliminate the effects of greenwashing and green skepticism, as the current study found that trustworthiness of the green SMIs did not significantly impact the purchase intention.

Besides, the green SMIs that collaborate with fashion brands should be more transparent in their communication with the stakeholders, including consumers, as the current study found interactivity of the green SMIs does not have a significant impact on purchase intents. Thus, green SMIs should communicate more actively and engage the viewers on credible environmental/ sustainable information on social media to shape the good image and credibility of the green SMIs. This will elevate the image of the green SMIs and in turn, give visibility to the fashion retailers/businesses on the green actions.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Pathways

This study prompts several limitations. Firstly, the majority of the respondents were between the ages of 30 and 40. Future studies can expand on this by employing a bigger sample size and concentrating on people who are >40 because of their potential for having another perspective on green SMI characteristics.

Additionally, considering the data solely focuses on Millennials, it cannot be applied to other contexts or demographics. To make the results more generalizable, future studies might involve different segments of consumers (generation cohorts) and cross-cultural segments so that comparative studies and multi-group analyses can be performed. Besides, a comparison of the green SMIs of different countries and the utilization of augmented reality and virtual reality SMIs (Madhavedi et al., 2025) would also be interesting to be carried out.

The current study only focused on the five characteristics of green SMIs, future researchers can further examine the other characteristics such as similarity, respect, and familiarity (Leong et al., 2024; Sharipuddin et al., 2023; Sitorus et al., 2024). This study only tested the direct effects, other potential variables such as wishful identification (Koay & Lim, 2025) and willingness to pay for a premium price (Al Mamun et al., 2023) can further expand the framework and perform the intervening and moderating effects to further enhanced this study in the future.

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Authors contributions

Conceptualization, T. J. C., A. M. J., & N. S. K; methodology, T. J. C., A. S., & M. L. N; software, T. J. C & A. M. J.; Validation, A. S., & H. T. H; formal analysis; T. J. C., & N. S. K.; resources, M. L. N.; data curation, N. S. K; writing – original draft preparation, T. J. C., A. M. J., & N. S. K.; writing-review and editing, T. J. C., A. S., M. L. N., & H. T. H.; Supervision, A. M. J.; project administration, N. S. K.; funding acquisition, T. J. C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Obtained.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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