

# The Influence of Instagram Influencers' Activity on Green Consumption Behavior

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## **Abstract**

Nowadays, environmental problems are rising due to the individuals' consumption behaviour, which necessitates serious attention. Consumers gradually become aware of the effect of their consumption behaviour on the environment and make a difference. Social media, particularly Instagram, play a major role in increasing awareness and promoting environmentally friendly behaviour. Hence, it is crucial to investigate the impact of Instagram on green consumption intention, which is the best predictor of behaviour. By reviewing the existing literature, the current study develops a conceptual model regarding the effect of Instagram influencers' green activity on followers' intention. As the model proposes, green attitude and green consumption intention are shaped among followers by the Instagram influencers' green concern, green photo content, and green word of mouth (WOM). Additionally, it is proposed that the perceived credibility of followers moderated the link between green WOM and green consumption intention. The study contributes to the body of knowledge by developing a new model that helps identify green consumption intention determinants.

**Keywords:** Green Attitude, Green Concern, Photo Content, Perceived Credibility, Green Consumption Intention

## 1. Introduction

Environmental degradation, which is manifested in air and water pollution, ozone depletion, global warming, and hazardous waste disposal (Dagher & Itani, 2014), is rising due to increasing consumption, which necessitates the adoption of alternatives that promote sustainability (Uddin & Khan, 2016). Hence, green consumption behaviour allows people to participate in environmental protection (Sun et al., 2019). According to Joshi & Rahman (2016), green consumption behaviour represents a complex ethical decision-making behaviour, which is considered a socially responsible behaviour type. Purchasing products made of recycled materials, buying, recycling organic food, and considering environmental factors in marketing practices such as package and product design, marketing strategies, and green advertising are all related to the green consumption activities (Lu et al., 2015).

Through social media platforms, consumers' communication has become reliable, shaping consumers' buying intentions (Jain et al., 2020). For example, consumers modify the accessibility of information about services and products, and traditional shopping ways evolve rapidly (Devereux et al., 2020). A study by Carmela & Fiorillo (2017) argues that media exposure considerably increases the extensive dissemination of major environmental concerns and environmental awareness among the targeted audiences. Media exposure means that a viewer, reader, or listener has any opportunity to hear or see an advertising message in a specific media vehicle. Specifically, media exposure in the green product context means the appealing and persuasive messages disseminated through particular media vehicles about consuming green products (Jan et al., 2019). According to Joshi & Rahman (2016), the green behaviour of young educated consumers will be positively predicted by exposure to environmental messages through India's media. The author concludes that consumers' buying attitude towards green products can generally be influenced by a vibrant media campaign supporting the green product (Jan et al., 2019).

As the most recent trend, people get used to and look for information from people with a higher rate of visualization, usually referred to as influencers (Wang et al., 2016). Influencers are individuals who have a huge number of followers and have their own network. Followers of these influencers tend to trust their influencers largely. Each influencer's role varies where some promote brands, and some others do marketing, whereas some others share experiences in their daily lives. This phenomenon of influencers affecting their approaches represents a new form of independent third party that endorses and nurtures or reshapes the individuals' attitude through blogs, tweets, and using multiple social media channels (Glucksman, 2017). For instance, Zata Shah is one of the Instagram influencers with environmental concerns and intentions to encourage her followers' green consumption behaviour. Currently, she has more than 72000 followers and shared more than 13000 posts mainly to promote "sayno2plastic" and "zero food wastage."

It is suggested that influencers' role is a worthwhile topic for further studies (Bedard and Tolmie, 2018). This topic is particularly critical to train and raise awareness about environmental issues and green consumption behaviour (Tan, 2018). Additionally, the nature

of influencers' behaviour on Instagram may impact the attitude, mindset, opinion, intention, and behaviour of followers, and this impact mainly can be attributed to the content of photos or videos shared on Instagram. Nonetheless, the role of visual imagery content is undeveloped (Manikonda and De Choudhury, 2017).

Concerning the critical role of Instagram influencers in shaping followers' attitude and intention, this study proposed a framework consisting of green photo content, green WOM, perceived credibility, green concern, and green attitude as antecedents of green consumption intention, as the best predictor of behaviour. The remainder of the paper discusses the hypotheses and conceptual model, followed by the conclusion.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Developments**

### *2.1 Photo Content and Green Attitude*

In online interactions, images are more effective at conveying feelings than text and naturally striking, and are increasingly included (Souza et al., 2015). Some scholars believe that a picture is worth a thousand words (Hu et al., 2014). People tend to trust audio-visual modality due to the resemblance of its content to the real world. It means that we trust the things we can see on those merely read. People generally trust in pictures on the textual descriptions because pictures cannot lie (Sundar, 2008, p 80,81).

Instagram, a mobile video and photo capturing and sharing application, allows users instantaneously to capture and share their moments of life with others by sharing videos and pictures (Hu et al., 2014). This visual communication is not only for entertainment but also for social media users' opinions, thoughts, attitudes, and generally lifestyle (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Followers seek ambitiously for the certain Instagram influencers' lifestyles, imitating their makeup and fashion styles, restaurant choices, types of posts, and holiday destinations (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In their study, Turner and Lefevre (2017) show that orthorexia symptoms are highly prevalent among the healthy eating community on Instagram, and they use Instagram more due to the increased symptoms. These findings show the effect of social media on psychological wellbeing and the effect of social media influencers on hundreds of thousands of people.

Although there has been recently widespread use of Instagram, the effect of visual communication or visual imagery is less known (Manikonda & De Choudhury, 2017) due to Instagram being a relatively new phenomenon. Its size has grown only in recent years. More research should explore Instagram based on visual communication (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Hence, the present study aims to study the role of influencers' photo content in shaping Instagram followers' attitude to bridge the gap. For instance, when an influencer shares photos or videos with environmental protection content, followers will find a positive attitude toward protecting environment and consuming green products. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is put forward:

Hypothesis 1: Instagram influencers' photo content positively impacts the green attitude of Instagram users.

## *2.2 Green Concern and Green Attitude*

Green concern means how much an individual is interested in environmental issues (Kwong, 2016). There has been slowly increased consumer concern about environmental issues in the past decades (Hassan, 2014). Concern about the environment drives individuals to take more pro-environmental actions (Zhou et al., 2019). This is in line with the findings of Kautish and Sharma's (2020) study. The authors conclude that environmental concern is significantly related to the willingness to be environmentally friendly. Results of the Ohler and Billger's (2014) study also indicate that there is increasing concern about energy costs. Individuals tend more to report disconnecting rechargeable batteries, and reduce their electricity usage and water heat. Respondents concerning about energy costs use less electricity. Consumers who are environmentally concerned first tend to use environment-friendly consumption and green consumption to satisfy their higher needs (Kautish & Dash, 2017).

From an empirical perspective, Fu et al. (2020) and Shen & Chen (2020) find out that environmental concern significantly affects purchase intention. Likewise, according to Tan et al. (2019), increasing environmental concerns significantly affected the consumers' intention to buy green products. Several studies have confirmed a positive relationship between the individual's concern for the environment and their preferring green consumption (Sun et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, prior studies suggest that customers' green purchase behaviour through green attitude can be determined by the concern for environmental issues (Ghazali *et al.*, 2018; Trivedi *et al.*, 2018). Findings of an empirical study by Hassan (2014) revealed that there would be a more positive attitude towards green products among the consumers concerning about a positive environmental concern. Similarly, Vazifehdoust et al. (2013) find out that environmental concern is a personal factor that influences attitude towards green products (Vazifehdoust et al., 2013). In a Causality analysis of media influence on 308 Indian consumers' environmental attitude, Trivedi et al. (2018) find the positive effect of the environmental concern on both inward and outward environmental attitudes. Several other studies results also found that environmental concern had a significant positive influence on the attitude (Paul *et al.*, 2016; Ghazali *et al.*, 2018).

Besides empirical evidence of prior studies, the influence of green concern on attitude is justifiable through TPB. As mentioned earlier, the general attitude and personality (background factors) impact attitude. The green concern of influencers, which is a personal factor, has the potential to shape the green attitude of followers, meaning that when influencers express their feeling and concerns about environmental issues, the followers will have a positive evaluation and point of view about green consumption behaviour.

However, despite a few empirical evidence that proves the importance of green concern in shaping a green attitude, this area is still undeveloped and should be studied more (Sreen et

al., 2018). Hence, to address this gap, the following hypothesis is developed:

Hypothesis 2: Instagram influencers' green concern positively impacts followers' green attitude.

### *2.3 Green Word of Mouth and Green Consumption Intention*

Word of Mouth, which is known as a traditional way of communication is non-commercial and interpersonal dialog about a specific topic such as a product, brand, or service between consumers provided by relatives, friends, or third parties through two-way communication (Rahim et al., 2016). The traditional communication model has changed by introducing the Internet, known as Electronic WOM (Luo et al., 2013). Electronic WOM means any positive or negative statement of actual, potential, or former customers about a company or product available to several institutions or people on the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Besides empirical evidence, TPB agreed that exposure to information, particularly social media, impacted decision making and intention to behave certainly. Applying it to the green consumption behaviour context, this study suggests that Instagram influencers' green WOM has a positive impact on followers' green consumption intention. For instance, when an influencer talks about the lovely experience of staying in a green hotel or spending a day cleaning plastic bags and gives advice about more environmentally friendly products, followers may have the desire to develop the same approach and intent to be a green consumer. Although several studies investigated the influence of WOM on green intention or behaviour, there is adequate research on the studies that examine the effect of influencers' green WOM on green consumption intention of followers on the Instagram platform. Additionally, there is inadequate research in the Asian context (Chua et al., 2019). Accordingly, to address the gap in the literature, the following hypothesis is developed:

Hypothesis 3: Instagram influencers' green word of mouth positively impacts followers' green consumption intention.

### *2.4 Green Attitude and Green Consumption Intention*

Attitude is person's tendency and state of emotions towards a specific object or concept favorable or unfavourable (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). In fact, individuals express that they prefer a particular entity through attitude (Ojo et al., 2019).

In several studies, the influence of attitudes on green consumption and purchase intention was investigated. The findings of Hassan (2014) verified that consumers whose attitude towards green products is positive strongly intend to buy green products. Finding of an interesting study by López-Mosquera et al. (2015) show that citizens with firm environmental attitudes purchase based on the environmental issues and reduce car use for environmental purpose. More recently, several studies confirmed that attitude toward green product has a positive impact on green purchase intention (Ariswibowo and Ghazali, 2017; Sreen et al., 2018).

TPB also consider attitude as one of the major factors that contribute to shaping intention and,

in turn, behaviour. a sustainable society can be developed by leading the citizens' daily behaviours and attitudes in environmentally friendly directions (Kurisu et al., 2019). Individuals with a positive attitude toward the environment can show pro-environmental behaviours and regard environmentally friendly products as desirable (Arı & Yılmaz, 2017).

Although theory and literature support critical role of green attitude in shaping green consumption intention, there is still a dearth of research on attitude towards green products to predict intention to purchase general green products (Jaiswal & Kant, 2018), not a specific category of product. Additionally, as suggested by Wright and Klü (1998) , the previous findings on attitude are not generalizable to all countries. The correlations varied considerably between countries, and in some countries, they were not significant at all. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 4: Instagram followers' green attitude positively impacts their green consumption intention.

### *2.5 The Moderating Role of Perceived Credibility*

Credibility means how a person perceives the credibility of a source of message. This concept is multi-dimensional as a means of rating the source or transmitter of the communication based on the information for the information receiver (Eisend, 2006). One of the perceived barriers to engagement with climate change is distrust in information sources (Amato et al., 2019) and media (Spence & Pidgeon, 2013). The eco-information source is important while information may be regarded as a positive driving factor of pro-environmental behaviours (D'Amato et al., 2019).

Audiences get information from several media outlets by perceiving various levels of credibility in each medium. Despite the identical message, people may react to or evaluate the same information differently depending on the perceived credibility of different media (Lee & Cho, 2020). In this regard, the trustworthiness and reliability of the information provider are effective in determining the value of information and how it is used by the public (Amato et al., 2019).

The root of this concept is embedded in credibility theory, that if an expert considers a messenger as trustworthy, the message which the messenger conveyed is credible (Kyung et al., 2011). Supporting this concept, this study posits that credibility of an influencer plays important role in the acceptability of the WOM among members of a specific Instagram account. In this regard, Cheung et al. (2008) state that if the consumer thinks that the comments are posted with high-credibility, then they will have a higher perception of the usefulness of the comments (Cheung et al., 2008). Similarly, Fan and Miao (2012) find out that credibility has a significant effect on electronic WOM acceptance.

Based on the above argument and prior studies, we conclude that the positive influence of green WOM on green consumption intention can be potentially moderated by the perceived credibility of followers. It means that if followers believe that comments and textual

information shared by an influencer are reliable and trustworthy, the link between green WOM and green consumption intention will be strengthened. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formed:

Hypothesis 5: Followers' perceived credibility moderates the relationship between influencers' green WOM and followers' green consumption intention.

### **3. Conceptual Model**

Considering TPB's potential for extension and empirical test of the influence of media exposure on intention and its antecedents, the current study aims to examine the impact of Instagram influencers' photo content, green concern, and GWOM on followers' green attitude and green consumption intention. Additionally, we proposed credibility as a moderator between GWOM and green consumption intention.

Social media influencers represent a new type of leaders who shape an audience's attitudes by creating content and sharing it on social media channels (Glucksman, 2017). Nowadays, interactions increasingly involve images (Souza et al., 2015). Social media platform users share several high-volume images of their personal life events, daily lives, or opinions, often as selfies, memes, personal photographs, gifs, etc. (Manikonda & De Choudhury, 2017). Shared photos and videos, with environmental content, may impact influencers' attitude and point of view about environmental problems and lead to a green attitude toward consuming environmentally friendly products. The previous literature revealed that photos can more effectively convey the feeling than the text and are naturally attractive (Souza et al., 2015).

Additionally, we suggest that influencers' green concerns shape followers' green attitude. In other words, the degree to which an influencer is actively involved in environmental issues and planet protection positively impacts the desirability of involvement in green behaviour. The next important variable, which shows influence of influencer, is called GWOM. This concept refers to the textual content of an Instagram influencer's account. The more encouraging circumstance and interaction between influencer and follower concerning environmental protection, the more likely to increase followers' green consumption intention. However, this relationship can be even stronger if a follower perceives the respective follower as a credible source of information and trust him/her. Hence, followers' perceived credibility moderates the link between GWOM and green consumption intention. Figure 1 shows the research framework.

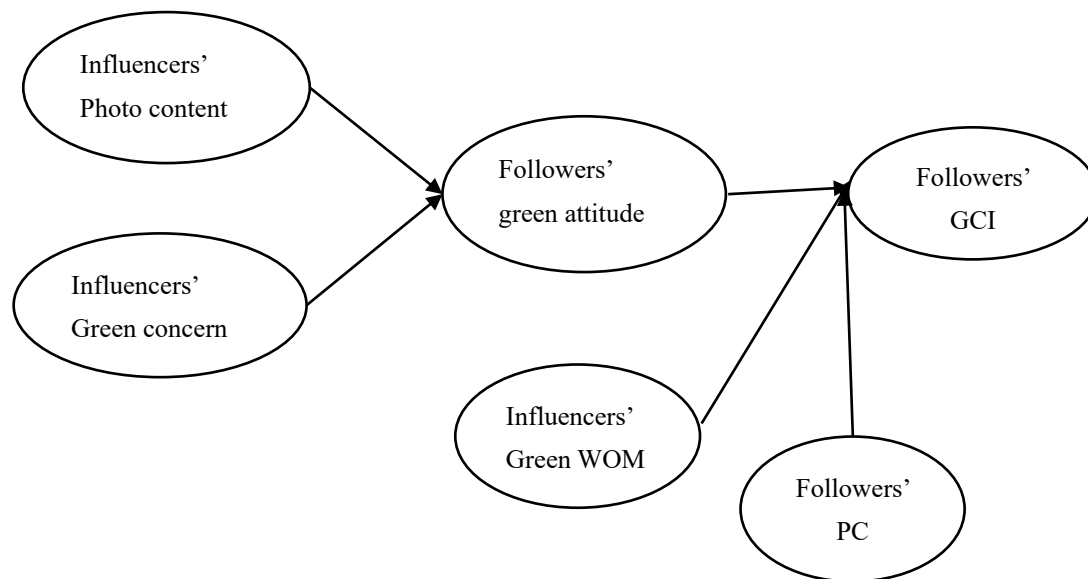


Figure 1. Proposed Framework

Note: PC: perceived credibility; WOM: word of mouth; GCI: green consumption intention.

#### 4. Research Method

A self-administrated questionnaire will be distributed among Instagram followers. Indicators for the measurement of variables are all adopted from the previous studies. Scale to measure photo content will be taken from the study by Mcandrew and Jeong (2012) and Loureiro et al. (2018) with 6 items. To measure green concerns, 4 items will be borrowed from Lee (2008). Green WOM will be measured with 4 items developed by Zhang et al. (2018). For green attitude, 6 items will be adopted from Hansmann et al. (2020) and green consumption intention will be measured with scale developed by Paul et al. (2016), including 5 items.

The research hypotheses will be tested using structural equation modelling, SmartPLS. This method is particularly useful for predicting a particular variable, which is a green consumption intention in this study. In the first step, measurement model will be assessed to monitor reliability and validity. In the second step, the structural model will be evaluated for testing hypotheses.

#### 5. Conclusion

Instagram plays a major role in increasing awareness and promoting environmentally friendly behaviour, and influencers represent a new type of leaders who shape an audience's attitudes by creating content and sharing it on social media channels (Glucksman, 2017). The current study proposed Instagram influencers' photo content, green concern and GWOM as factors affecting followers' green attitude and green consumption intention. Moreover, perceived credibility plays a moderator role between GWOM and green consumption intention.

Further studies are suggested to empirically test the proposed framework in this study. It is



recommendable to include the role of government in promoting green consumption behaviour. The main reason is that government has facilities and power to impact public culture and awareness. Furthermore, there should be more complete understanding to investigate green behaviour from a social, cultural, and physical perspective.

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