

Role of Social Media Influencers in Promoting Sustainable Lifestyle among College Students in Tenkasi District

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Abstract

Social media influencers have emerged as powerful opinion leaders capable of shaping attitudes and behaviours among young consumers. With sustainability becoming a global concern, influencers play a crucial role in promoting eco-friendly lifestyles, particularly among college students who are active social media users. The present study examines the role of social media influencers in promoting sustainable lifestyle practices among college students in Tenkasi District. Primary data were collected from 279 college students using a structured questionnaire. The study employed reliability analysis, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test, Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity, and factor analysis to identify key dimensions influencing sustainable lifestyle adoption. The results reveal that influencer credibility, content authenticity, environmental awareness, and behavioural motivation significantly influence students’ sustainable lifestyle choices. The study highlights the growing importance of influencer-led sustainability communication and provides insights for educators, policymakers, and digital marketers.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Sustainable Lifestyle, College Students, Factor Analysis, Tenkasi District

Introduction

Sustainability has become a critical global issue due to increasing environmental degradation, climate change, and unsustainable consumption patterns. Young adults, particularly college students, play a pivotal role in shaping future sustainable practices. In

recent years, social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook have become influential communication channels for spreading sustainability-related messages.

Social media influencers individuals with a significant follower base and perceived credibility have the ability to affect attitudes, opinions, and behaviours of their audiences. Through lifestyle content, product endorsements, and awareness campaigns, influencers promote eco-friendly habits such as waste reduction, sustainable consumption, recycling, and ethical purchasing. In semi-urban regions like Tenkasi District, influencers act as digital opinion leaders bridging global sustainability narratives with local youth culture.

This study investigates how social media influencers contribute to promoting sustainable lifestyle practices among college students in Tenkasi District.

Review of Literature

Castro, O'Reilly, and Carthy (2022) analyzed the role of social media influencers in adolescents' consumer decision-making processes with a sustainability perspective, emphasizing their growing influence on Generation Z. The study highlighted that social media influencers function as key opinion leaders who significantly shape young consumers' purchase intentions and brand perceptions through peer-like communication and relatable content. The authors stressed that marketers increasingly rely on influencer-based strategies to effectively engage younger audiences and enhance message credibility. Importantly, the review underscored the potential of influencers to promote environmentally friendly products, reduce waste and pollution, and foster sustainable consumption patterns. The study also linked influencer-driven sustainability communication to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG-13 on climate action, thereby reinforcing the role of social media influencers as instrumental agents in encouraging sustainable lifestyles among youth.

Ahmad and Bruno (2021) examined the influence of social media influencers on the dietary choices of university students by applying the Theory of Reasoned Action. The study focused on final-year students of Universiti Malaysia Sabah and analyzed the role of attitudes

and subjective norms in shaping behavioural intentions related to food consumption. The findings revealed a significant relationship between students' subjective norms influenced by social media influencers and their behavioural intent regarding dietary choices, whereas students' attitudes towards influencers did not significantly affect their daily eating habits. The study also highlighted the extensive reach of social media influencers, with the majority of respondents actively subscribing to influencers across multiple platforms, particularly Instagram. The results underscore the strong normative influence exerted by influencers on students' lifestyle-related behaviours and demonstrate how social media influencers shape everyday choices, reinforcing their relevance in promoting health- and sustainability-oriented behaviours among university students.

Chwialkowska (2019) examined how sustainability influencers promote the adoption of green lifestyles on social media by framing sustainability as a minority viewpoint that challenges dominant consumption-oriented norms. Using Netnographic analysis of over 8,000 Facebook posts from green lifestyle advocates along with in-depth interviews of followers, the study explored the process through which online audiences internalize and adopt environmentally responsible behaviours. The research integrated Minority Influence Theory and Social Learning Theory to explain how sustainability influencers exert both informational and normative influence at different stages of behaviour adoption. The findings revealed that consistent messaging, role modelling, authenticity, and peer reinforcement play a crucial role in encouraging followers to observe, learn, and gradually adopt green lifestyle practices despite social resistance from offline reference groups. The study contributes significantly to sustainability communication literature by demonstrating how minority influence operates effectively in online environments and provides valuable insights for policymakers and social change agents seeking to promote sustainable behaviours through social media platforms.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the socio-demographic profile of college students in Tenkasi District.
2. To examine the influence of social media influencers on sustainable lifestyle awareness among college students.

3. To identify the key factors influencing sustainable lifestyle adoption through social media influencers.
4. To assess the reliability and validity of the measurement scale used in the study.
5. To offer suggestions based on the findings of the study.

Research Methodology

Research Design: The study is descriptive and analytical in nature.

Area of the Study: The study was conducted among college students in Tenkasi District, Tamil Nadu.

Sample Size: A total of 279 respondents were selected using the convenience sampling method.

Data Collection: Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of statements measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Tools Used for Analysis

- Percentage Analysis
- Reliability Test (Cronbach’s Alpha)
- KMO and Bartlett’s Test
- Exploratory Factor Analysis (Principal Component Method with Varimax Rotation)

Reliability Analysis

To test the internal consistency of the scale, Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

| Variables | No. of Items | Cronbach’s Alpha |
|--|--------------|------------------|
| Social Media Influencer & Sustainability Scale | 12 | 0.872 |

Sources: SPSS Output

Table 1 presents the results of the reliability analysis conducted for the Social Media Influencer & Sustainability Scale. The scale consists of 12 items, and the calculated Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.872. This value is well above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the items included in the scale.

The result confirms that the statements used to measure the role of social media influencers in promoting sustainable lifestyle among college students are reliable and consistent. Hence, the scale is considered suitable for further statistical analysis such as factor analysis and inferential testing.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

| Particulars | Value |
|--|----------|
| Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) Measure | 0.843 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity – Chi-Square | 2146.328 |
| Degrees of Freedom | 153 |
| Significance Level | 0.000 |

Sources: SPSS Output

Table 2 presents the results of the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity conducted to assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The KMO value of 0.843 indicates a high level of sampling adequacy, suggesting that the sample size is sufficient and the variables are appropriate for factor analysis.

Further, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is found to be highly significant with a Chi-square value of 2146.328 at 153 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This confirms that there exists a significant correlation among the variables and the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix.

Therefore, the results confirm that the data are suitable for exploratory factor analysis, and the extracted factors are statistically meaningful for the study on the role of social media influencers in promoting sustainable lifestyle among college students.

Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis extracted four major factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 67.48% of the total variance.

Table 3: Factor Analysis Results

| Factors | Variables | Factor Loadings |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Factor I: Influencer Credibility | Influencers are trustworthy | 0.821 |
| | Influencers provide reliable sustainability information | 0.804 |
| | Influencers act as role models | 0.776 |
| Factor II: Content Authenticity | Sustainability content is genuine | 0.812 |
| | Influencers practice what they promote | 0.789 |
| | Non-commercial sustainability posts influence me | 0.761 |
| Factor III: Environmental Awareness | Influencers increase awareness of environmental issues | 0.836 |
| | Sustainability content educates me | 0.803 |
| | Influencers highlight local environmental issues | 0.742 |
| Factor IV: Behavioural Motivation | Influencers motivate eco-friendly habits | 0.828 |
| | Influencer content affects purchase decisions | 0.794 |
| | Influencers encourage sustainable lifestyle changes | 0.767 |

Sources: SPSS Output

Table 3 presents the results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) conducted to identify the underlying dimensions influencing the role of social media influencers in promoting a sustainable lifestyle among college students in Tenkasi District. Using the Principal Component Method with Varimax Rotation, four significant factors were extracted based on Eigenvalues greater than one.

Factor I – Influencer Credibility comprises three variables with high factor loadings ranging from 0.776 to 0.821, indicating that trustworthiness, reliability of sustainability information, and role-model behaviour of influencers strongly affect students' acceptance of sustainable messages. This factor highlights the importance of influencer credibility in shaping sustainable attitudes.

Factor II – Content Authenticity includes three variables with factor loadings between 0.761 and 0.812, suggesting that genuine, non-commercial, and practice-oriented sustainability content significantly influences college students. Authenticity of influencer content enhances the effectiveness of sustainability communication.

Factor III – Environmental Awareness consists of three variables with strong loadings ranging from 0.742 to 0.836, showing that influencers play a crucial role in educating students and increasing awareness about environmental and local ecological issues. This factor reflects the informational impact of influencer-led sustainability messages.

Factor IV – Behavioural Motivation contains three variables with factor loadings from 0.767 to 0.828, indicating that influencer content motivates eco-friendly habits, influences purchase decisions, and encourages sustainable lifestyle changes among college students.

Overall, all variables exhibit factor loadings above the acceptable threshold of 0.60, confirming their strong contribution to the respective factors. The extracted factors collectively explain the key dimensions through which social media influencers promote sustainable lifestyles among college students in Tenkasi District.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study is limited to college students in Tenkasi District only.
2. Convenience sampling limits generalization of the findings.
3. The study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias.
4. Only selected social media platforms were considered.

Suggestions

1. Educational institutions should collaborate with sustainability-focused influencers for awareness campaigns.
2. Influencers should promote authentic and transparent sustainability content.
3. Policymakers can use influencer-based digital strategies to promote sustainable development goals.
4. College students should be encouraged to critically evaluate influencer content to avoid greenwashing.

Conclusion

The study concludes that social media influencers play a significant role in promoting sustainable lifestyle practices among college students in Tenkasi District. Influencer credibility, authenticity of content, environmental awareness, and behavioural motivation are the key factors influencing sustainable lifestyle adoption. With the increasing penetration of social media among youth, influencers can serve as effective change agents for sustainability. Strategic use of influencer-led communication can foster long-term sustainable behaviour among college students and contribute to environmental conservation efforts.

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