

Impact of Social Media on Consumer Attitude towards Sustainable Beauty/Personal Care Brands in Mumbai

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Abstract

Consumer is the king of marketplace. Consumer centricity is the key agenda for business policy and strategic management. This study examines the impact of social media communication on consumer attitudes toward sustainable beauty and personal care brands in Mumbai, with reference to brands such as Mamaearth, Plum, Forest Essentials, and The Body Shop. Against the backdrop of intensifying environmental concerns, urban consumers are increasingly attentive to sustainability narratives in beauty and personal care consumption. However, heightened ecological awareness is accompanied by growing skepticism toward brand-led green claims. The research investigates whether sustainability-oriented messages disseminated through social media platforms particularly Instagram and YouTube influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, with specific emphasis on brand transparency and influencer credibility. A descriptive research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 52 respondents in Mumbai using a structured questionnaire circulated via email, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The findings indicate that while consumers actively engage with sustainability-related content on social media, purchase decisions are not driven by promotional claims alone. Instead, consumers rely heavily on third-party validations such as authentic reviews, certification labels, and verifiable evidence of sustainable practices. The study underscores the presence of informed and discerning consumers who critically evaluate digital sustainability communication. The insights offer practical implications for marketers, policymakers, and academicians in designing credible, transparent, and responsible social media strategies that foster sustainable consumption behaviour.

Keywords: *Social Media, Sustainability, consumption, beauty/personal care brands, influencer's credibility, purchase intentions*

1. Introduction

Social media is the powerful tool in today's digital and hypercompetitive world. The growing dominance of social media has redefined how consumers form attitudes toward brands, particularly in sectors where sustainability, ethics, and environmental responsibility are integral to brand value propositions. In the beauty and personal care industry, heightened awareness of climate change, ecological degradation, and responsible consumption has led consumers to critically evaluate sustainability claims communicated through digital platforms (Appel et al., 2020). Urban consumers in cities like Mumbai, characterized by high digital engagement and exposure to influencer-driven content, increasingly rely on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube to gather information about sustainable beauty brands (Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla, & Paladino, 2014). However, recent studies indicate that this exposure also intensifies consumer skepticism, as audiences question the authenticity of green claims and influencer endorsements, demanding transparency, third-party certifications, and evidence-based communication before forming favourable attitudes (Lou & Kim, 2022). Consequently, social media functions not only as a persuasive marketing channel but also as a critical evaluation space where informed consumers negotiate trust, credibility, and sustainability narratives, making it essential to understand its role in shaping consumer attitudes toward sustainable beauty and personal care brands in contemporary urban markets. Social media has both pros and cons depending on how the users consider its usage. It should be used with the sense of responsibility, digital literacy, privacy and ethics. Otherwise, it leads to the digital stress for self and others to the great extent (Gaikwad, 2024).

In today's evolving business scenario, modern companies cannot survive with old-school "profit only" mind-set. This is 21st century where investors, employees and customers are expecting organisations to show responsibility towards society and environment. Among these beauty/ personal care products like skincare, hair care, cosmetics, perfumes, bath and body care, even tools and accessories are judged from the lens of sustainability going beyond the brands advertising, promotions, trending hashtags and heart reactions. The social media plays a very important role to how consumers access information and how would they react and interact with sustainable beauty/ personal care brands. Platforms such as YouTube and

Instagram have become an informal educating space where consumers learn about sustainable brands, sustainable lifestyle (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). They follow influencers promoting sustainability also give there inputs to through making communities and sharing tips reshaping not only what consumers buy but also what consumers believe. Despite of increasing global interest in sustainability, the Indian beauty and personal care industry remained under explored. This study aims to see how these trends unfolds young generations especially from metropolitan cities like Mumbai.

2. Scope and significance

The deep study of literature review from the period of 2019 to 2025 shows that even though social media is helping brands creating deeper value-based connections, there is a gap in understanding how social media communication actually shapes consumer attitudes and influences purchase intentions for sustainable beauty and personal care brands. The beauty/personal care industry shows growing consumer demand for sustainability globally. According to PwC's 2024 "*Voice of the Consumer Survey*" consumers are willing to pay 9.7% more on an average for a for sustainable goods. Additionally, "study by first insight" 62% of Gen Z consumers are inclined towards sustainable products. Taken together these insights suggests that sectors like beauty/personal care can directly impact purchase decisions by not just selling dreams but selling responsibility. These business can drive a positive change through marketing practices over social media tools like Instagram and YouTube to showcase their initiatives and influence buying. Hence, this study focuses on how brands like Mamaearth, The Bodyshop, Forest Essentials and Plum communicate their environmental and social commitments, going beyond just profits. Additionally, the values play a significant role in setting and meeting the consumer expectations in order to stay competitive and sustainable (Gaikwad, 2014). The research targets young adult consumers aged 18–45, who are among the most active users of social media and a key consumer group for beauty and personal care products.

3. Objectives of Study

- To examine the impact of social media communication on consumer attitude towards sustainable beauty and personal care brands in Mumbai
- To identify the essential components of social media communication, like influencer credibility, brand transparency, and sustainability messaging, to shape consumers view on sustainable beauty/personal care brands
- To analyse the relationship between social media engagement and customers' intention to support or purchase sustainable beauty/ personal care brands

4. Literature Review

Nabivi (2025) stated that there are cultural variances when it comes to sustainable social media marketing by experimenting on 2035 participants across Poland and U.S focusing on factors like informative, entertainment and brand attitude. Hu et al .(2024) found that ongoing social media marketing activities like influencer collaborations, interactive engagement content, enhancing green values and showing environmental concern are helped improving and ultimately leading towards purchase intentions . However the study suggested the need for cross cultural and longitudinal research. The study by Bulmer et al. (2024) titled "Sustainability, brand authenticity and Instagram messaging," analysed consumer responses on a single brand "Patagonia" finds that sustainability messages do promote brand reliability. As the study was confined to a single brand and a single social media platform it restricts generalization.

While the core principals of transparency, consumer engagement and influencer credibility do increase the purchase intentions of consumers for big sustainable brands. Sipo (2024) suggested that smaller brands can focus on strategies tailored to their scale which is resource efficient and helps building dedicated and passionate communities sharing the same set of values. Abdelrazek and El-Bassiouny (2023) found that millennial's are more likely to support brands which own sustainability tags. The author recommended future research to expand to compare different age groups and cultures through longitudinal studies.

Francis and Sarangi (2022) Indian young adults act more sustainably when their actions are routed towards more convenient, enjoyable and manageable habits. Brands should align themselves with their personality and internal values rather than just external awards. Finally leveraging social media and building community these behaviours can become long-lasting and can be lifestyle fixtures. Agarwal et Al., (2021) demonstrated that while entertaining social media ads can

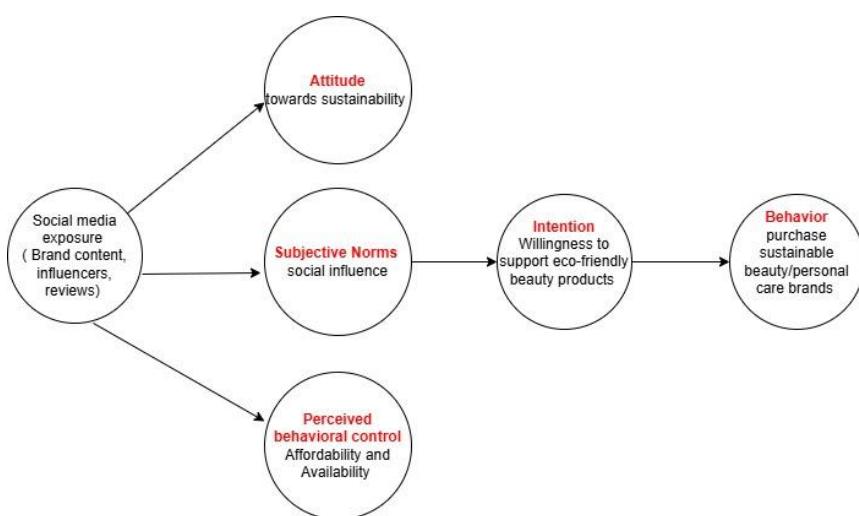
easily capture GenZ's attention but they don't always lead to buying. The study suggests trustworthy influencers and informative content to build brand reliability necessary for long term sustainable environmental commitments.

Sun and Wang (2020) discussed that social media marketing enhances subjective norms, perceived consumer effectiveness, and product knowledge, which collectively strengthen green purchase intention. Price consciousness weakens this intention, with varying effects across consumer groups. The study suggests cross-national and longitudinal analyses addressing emotional and cultural dimensions of sustainability messaging. Saeed et al., (2019) found that sustainability focused social media content directly shapes the Pakistani consumer behaviour. Positive post driving to green purchase while negative one discouraging them. The study calls for broader across different platforms so see if the research holds the same essence elsewhere in different markets outside Pakistan.

5. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) proposed by Ajzen in 1991 explains how individual behaviours are guided by intentions which are determined by three key factors: attitudes, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control. According to the theory attitude is referred to the positive or negative evaluation of a particular behaviour by an individual. The conceptual framework of the study is based on theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991) and explains how social media influences the attitudes of consumers towards sustainable beauty/ personal care brands in Mumbai. In this study social media exposure can be seen as an independent variable influencing all the three components: attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



In this framework social media exposure acts as an independent variable and consumer attitude towards sustainable beauty/ personal care brands can be dependent variable. The combined influence of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control are shaped by social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube portraying sustainable brands more socially desirable resulting in framing favourable attitude towards sustainable beauty/ personal care brands.

6. Research Methodology

Research Design: The study used mixed method approach to examine how social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube influence consumers' attitude towards sustainable beauty/ personal care brands in Mumbai. A structured cross sectional survey was designed based on some common themes seen in the literature review such as brands communication their sustainable intentions via social media, consumer purchase intentions, and sustainable branding to capture respondent opinion in quantitative components (Likert scale) 1 to 5 where 1 being strongly agreed and 5 being strongly disagreed and qualitative components (open ended questions) to give a comprehensive look to the research problem.

Sampling and Participants: For this research a dual sampling strategy was used to ensure that data is relevant and accessible. The young adults aged 18 to 45 and above were targeted to the residents of Mumbai who are active users of social media and form a major consumer base for sustainable beauty/ personal care brands. For a simple reason that it was

a convenience sampling due to time constraints and participants availability. Along with purposive sampling ensuring geographical focus of research is maintained.

Data Collection: The questionnaire to the population of 105 young adults residing in Mumbai was circulated via online platforms like email Whatsapp and Instagram out of which 52 complete responses were received in the initial phase representing a response rate of 49.5%

Hypothesis of Study

Main hypothesis (H1): Social media communication have significant positive impact on consumer attitudes towards sustainable beauty and personal care brands in Mumbai.

H1a: Influencer credibility, brand transparency, and sustainability messaging significantly shape consumer attitudes toward sustainable beauty and personal care brands.

H1b: Higher social media engagement is positively related to consumers' intention to support or purchase sustainable beauty and personal care brands.

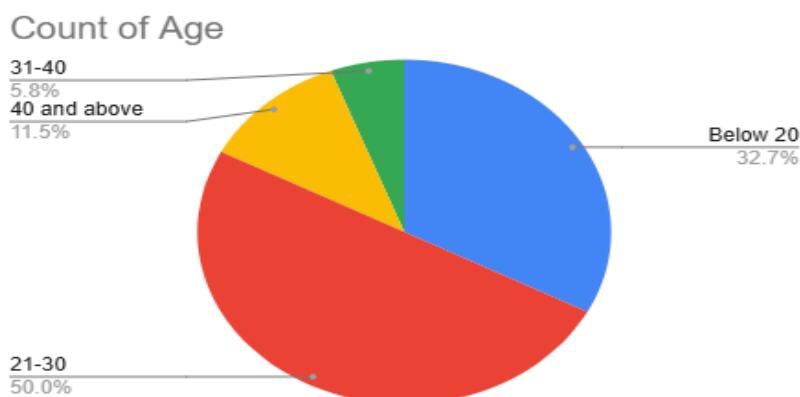
Data Analysis and Interpretation: To keep the analysis practical and aligned with the research scope, the study utilises two distinct phases. The first analytic phase was the quantitative analysis including frequencies, percentages and average and were calculated using Microsoft excel. Also to overall understand the sentiments of the participants there responses were interpreted using likert scale from 1 to 5 where 1 being strongly agree and 5 being strongly disagree. These statistics offered a simple comparison of how different groups of people use social media. For the open ended questions, thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes, ideas and patterns so the spectrum of consumer view point could be understood. The research employs a simple structure method to explore the Impact of social media on consumer attitude towards sustainable beauty/personal care brands in Mumbai without relying on advanced statistics. This approach gives us simple yet meaningful and direct interpretations. The main objective of the study was to understand customer trust and behaviour, especially regarding sustainability claims, brand communication, and influencer recommendations. This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of primary data collected through an online survey conducted among young social media users from Mumbai.

7. Analysis

Demographics and social media usage profile: The first section of the questionnaire was established and the demographic profile of 52 respondents were collected. The sample includes individuals from the diverse age groups educational background with most of the participants being active users of social media and the do follow sustainable beauty/personal care brands online.

A Respondents Demographics: The sample displayed a clear skew of younger educated individuals regularly engaged with social media.

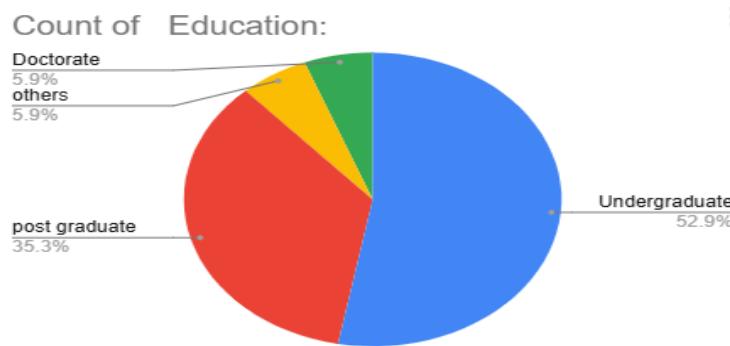
Figure 1: Age



Age Profile: the vast majority of people fell into the younger age group. Below 20 : 17 respondents i.e. 32.7%; 21 - 30 years : 26 respondents i.e. 50 %; 31 - 40 years : 3 respondents i.e. 5.8 %; above 40 years: 6 respondents i.e. 11.5 %. Taking

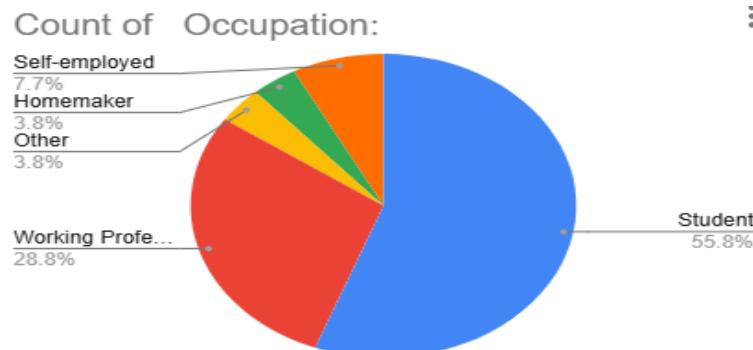
30 years old and younger respondents constitute 82.7 % of the sample indicating major participation of GenZ's and younger Millennial of Mumbai region.

Figure 2: Education



Educational Attainment: the sample was highly educated or pursuing higher education; undergraduate: 27 respondents i.e. 52.9 %; postgraduate : 18 respondents i.e. 35.3%; This high level of education indicates that the respondents were highly digitally literate and can easily access and evaluate the information available online.

Figure 3: Occupation



There were students: 29 responses i.e. 55.8%; working professionals: 15 responses i.e. 28.8%. These demographics show potentially high exposure to social media trends.

Figure 4: City-Wise Distribution

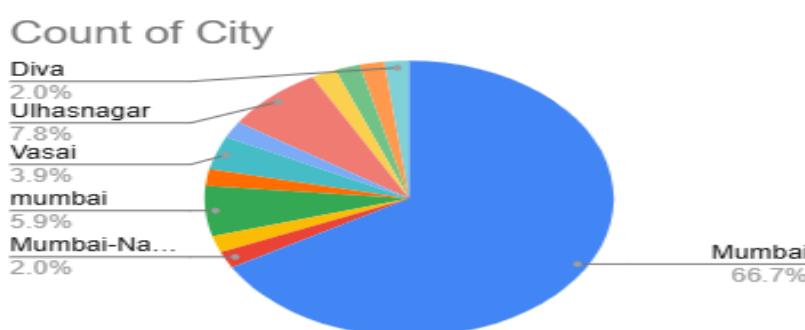
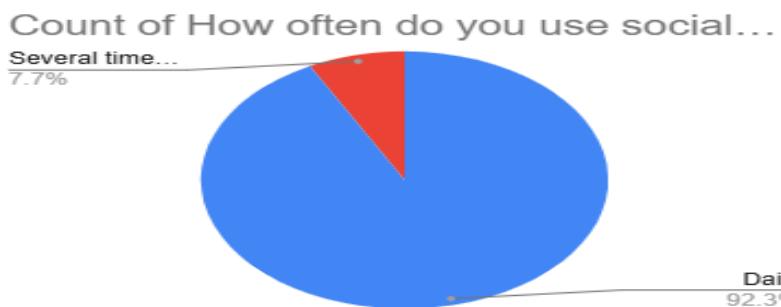


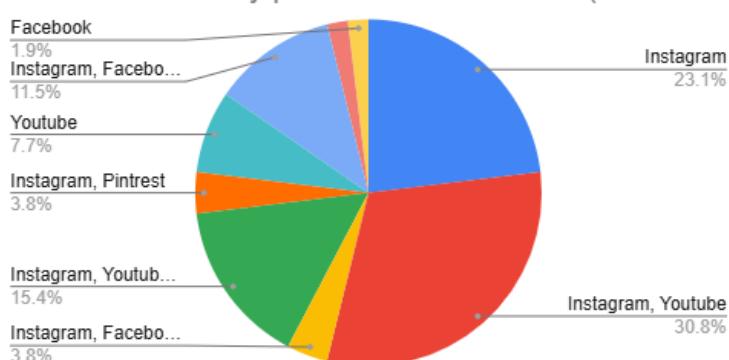
Figure 5: Social Media Use Frequency



The finding that **92.3%** of respondents use social media **daily** is crucial. This high engagement rate confirms the importance of social media platforms as a primary communication and information source for the target demographic in Mumbai, validating the focus of the sustainable beauty/ personal care brand towards social media platforms.

B Social media platform usage for beauty/ personal care brands

Count of Which social media platforms do you use to learn about beauty/personal care brands? (Select all that apply)



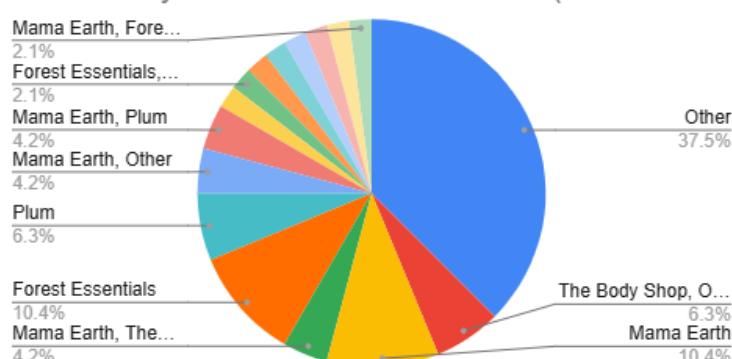
Interpretation: Instagram is definitely a dominant platform used by almost every respondent (90.4%) to learn about the sustainable beauty/ personal care trends. YouTube was the second strongest platform used by (69.2%) of the respondents. Whereas Facebook and Pinterest play a slightly smaller supporting role. Hence an effective social media strategy must strongly focus on Instagram and YouTube for these demographics in Mumbai for spreading information about sustainable Beauty/personal care brands.

C Brand Following and awareness

This last part of the section examines the brand awareness and brand following patterns of the sustainable beauty/ personal care industry.

Sustainable beauty/ personal care brands followed:

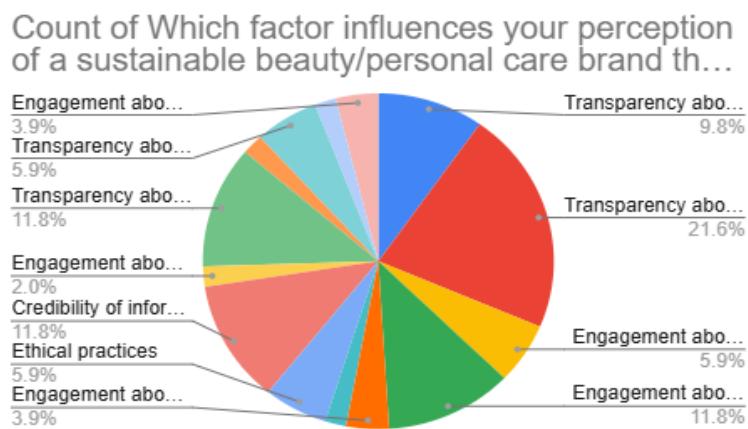
Count of Which sustainable beauty/personal care brands do you follow on social media? (Select all that apply)



Mamaearth (33.3%) and The Body Shop (25%) emerged as the most followed and recognised brands within the sample. Which shows that they have the highest brand awareness and engagement strategy in context to Mumbai. Followed by Plum (18.8%) and Forest Essentials (16.7%) with moderately smaller sections. There is an opportunity to explore factors driving Niche brands (others) and to investigate lack of following amongst the other 8 respondents despite using social media daily.

D Perception and the credibility of Sustainable brands on social media

This section explores the primary factors influencing the respondent's perception of sustainable beauty/ personal care brands and the importance of verified information, authentic reviews, and transparent communication and influencer's credibility.



Interpretation: Transparency is undoubtedly a primary factor selected by the majority of respondents (61.5%). These indicators that consumers in Mumbai are with “what is in the product” giving brands sustainable Tags. Followed by credibility of information (40.4%) and ethical practices (36.5%) suggesting consumers go beyond influencers endorsements and brand claims alone.

How important is transparency about ingredients in your purchasing decision?

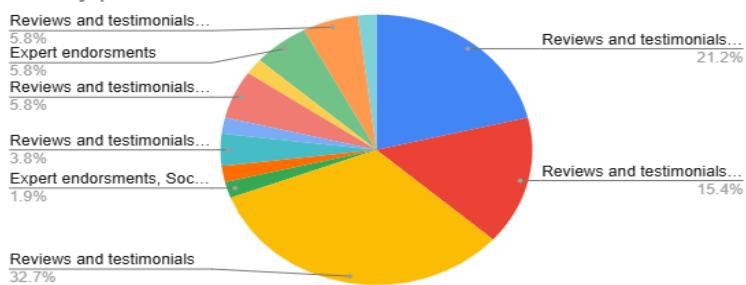
(Likert Scale: 1 = Extremely Important, 5 = Not Important at all)



- Transparency of ingredients used is extremely important to almost half of the population buying sustainable beauty and personal care products. 42.3% of consumers choose 1 (very important) on a likert scale although 13.5% of consumers also choose 5 (not at all important) on the likert scale. This suggests there are 2 distinct groups of people: one group highly values ingredient transparency whereas other groups prioritise factors like price, packaging and brand loyalty.

Credibility assessment and recommendation likelihood

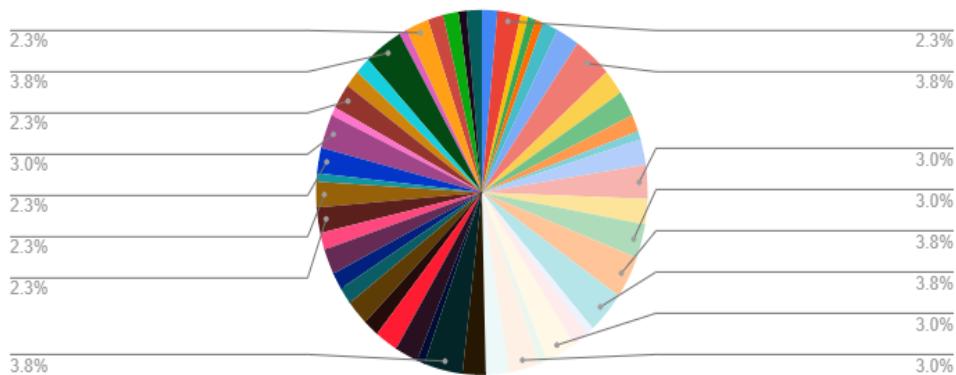
Count of How do you assess the credibility of a sustainable beauty/personal care brand on social media?



Interpretation: While assessing genuine credibility of the brands 86.5% of the respondents trusted reviews and testimonials showing the power of user generated content and peer review. Expert endorsement (36.5%) and brand certificates (30.8%) shared almost equal importance stating that third party verification is also valued but less than peer review. Social media influencers showed the lowest credibility as the consumers are a lot aware these days and they know these are all paid collaborations.

Likeliness towards recommendations about sustainable beauty/personal care brands

How likely are you to recommend a sustainable beauty/personal care brand to a friend based on their social media presence?

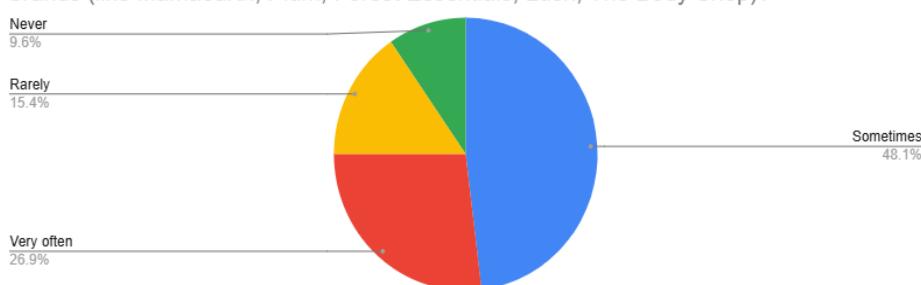


The results are highly indicating the neutrality towards recommending sustainable brands, as the highest frequency (is at scale 3- Neutral) i.e. 33.3% and followed by (scale 2 i.e. 25.5% and scale 1 i.e. 21.6%) giving a mean score of 20%. This suggests that while social media is helpful in creating brand presence and appeal, brands do not receive recommendation and positive word of mouth publicity only based on their online presence.

E: Content exposure and attention drivers.

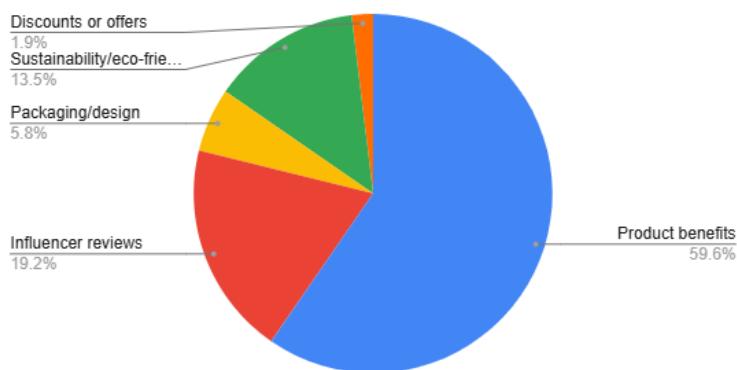
This section investigated the frequency of how these sustainable beauty and personal care brands interact with the consumers and what exactly are the factors influencing the purchase drive.

Count of How often do you come across posts about sustainable beauty/personal care brands (like Mamaearth, Plum, Forest Essentials, Lush, The Body Shop)?



- The majority of 48.1% of respondents sometimes come across these sustainable brands advertisements on social media, followed by very often (26.9%) and then rarely (15.4 %). This questions the regularity of activity online by these sustainable beauty /personal care brands, leaving room for more brand outreach.

Count of When you see content about these brands, what catches your attention most?

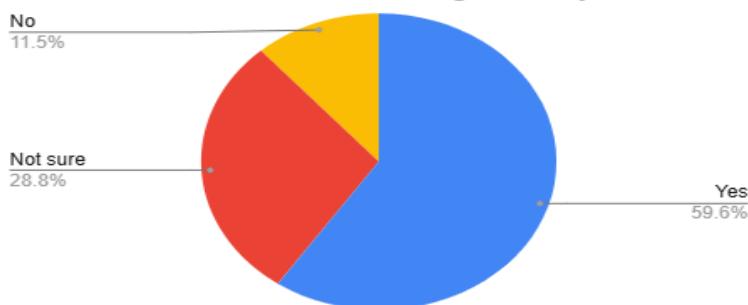


- Despite the high priority seen towards transparency and credibility, the element that catches your eye at first glance is product benefits i.e. ("what will this product do for me"). This is a critical finding that to sell a product first highlights its utility towards consumers (59.6%) only then consumers investigate the sustainable claims (13.5%).

F: Opinions and experiences

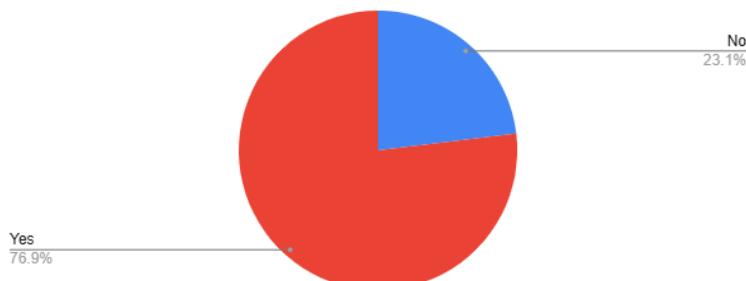
This section addresses the direct outcomes of social media exposure and it supports the problem statement answering which factors actually influence consumers towards sustainable brands.

Count of Do you believe social media helps you understand which brands are genuinely sustainable?



- 59.6% of respondents feel that social media comes handy when it comes to understanding the genuinely of sustainable brands. However 28.8% of respondents were not sure which indicted scepticism towards threats of green washing, these claims may be exaggerated and certificates may not be fair.

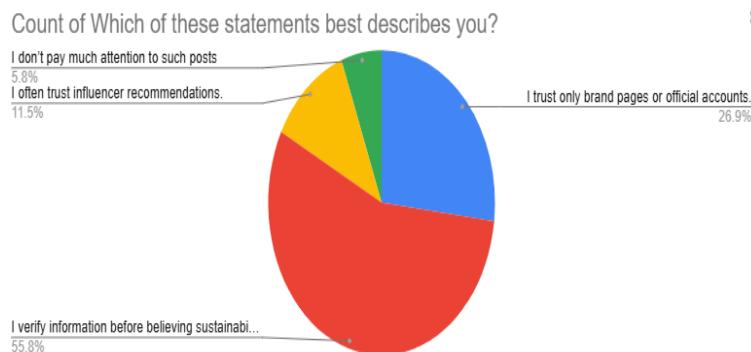
Count of Have you ever purchased a product after seeing it promoted on social media as "eco-friendly" or "sustainable"?



- A strong majority of respondents (76.9%) have purchased the product after it being tagged sustainable on social media. this means that social media is definitely a strong influential channel for beauty/personal care brands in Mumbai, despite the fact that (28.8%) of respondents were sceptical about the claims made online transparency, genuine certification, third party validation, peer review, user generated content along with continuous brand commitment can lead to purchase intentions.

G: Trust and verification

This last set of closed ended questions looks for what can consumers connect more with, is it content drivers, influences , their commitment towards brand or just the brand imagery.



- As the major chunk (55.5%) of respondents verify information before believing sustainability claims, confirms the finding from 2.2.2A that 28.8% of respondents are not sure about the brand claims which leads them to do their own research before purchase. 26.9% of respondents only trusted official brand pages. A very few respondents (11.5%) amongst the sample shows the trust influencers, showing that consumers are much more aware and educated. Influencers can be helpful in gaining attention at first but without verifying the claims Mumbai consumers do not generally make purchases for sustainable beauty/ personal care products.

H: Open ended question (qualitative analysis) for contextual preferences

Respondents were asked an open-ended question about the kind of social media content that makes them more likely to buy. This qualitative data was analysed using Thematic Analysis.

Q1. In your opinion, what kind of social media content makes you more likely to buy from sustainable beauty and personal care brands?

Four primary themes were prominent here: **Authenticity and transparency**: - content must be genuine and trust worthy, coming from real people rather than influencers, respondents want proof of authenticity and not just promises. **Results/ utility**:- The sustainable content must solve problem, answers the questions, and gives context that audience find useful as well as entertaining often referencing with a term “ edutainment.” **Shared values (the “why”)**:- the consumer is concerned about the sustainable issue for e.g. plastic waste, cruelty free testing or ethical ingredient sourcing and if the brand publicity is addressing the exact same issue this alignment of values creates instant bond leading to conscious long term loyalty. **Emotional connection**:- The sustainable communication done by the brands should evoke emotional connection is highly effective in driving purchase intentions.

Q2. Can you describe a specific instance where social media influenced your decision to purchase from a sustainable beauty/personal care brand?

Out of 37 respondents who previously stated that they had purchased these sustainable beauty/ personal care products after seeing their claims online the answers were grouped into two main categories: **Discovery and immediate purchase**: - few of the respondents stated that the brand's communication was so compelling that they directly felt trying the product. **Validation and reinforcement**: social media was used to validate the existing knowledge about the brand and the continuous interaction with the brands advertisement lead towards purchase decisions. **For example**: one of the respondents Quoted - "I became aware about The Forest Essentials from Instagram, but it did ask friends and family before

purchasing." / "Yes, once when I was planning to order from our personal care brand, I watched several influencer videos on YouTube for better insights and reviews."

8. Findings of Study:

The analysis of 52 respondents across Mumbai have yielded several qualitative and quantitative findings for the impact of social media on consumer attitude towards sustainable beauty/personal care brands.

1. **Demographics and usage of social media:** The sample heavily skewed towards youth (32.7%) being under the age of 30 with mostly (88.2%) being students, highly engaged with social media (92.3%) of the audience uses social media on daily basis. Instagram and YouTube enjoys the dominance over other social media platforms where brands like Mamaearth and The Body Shop were amongst the most followed social media accounts for sustainable beauty/personal care products in context to Mumbai.

2. **Hypothetical verification:** The interpretation of the hypothesis shows varying level of support as the main hypothesis "social media communication has a significant positive impact on consumer attitudes towards sustainable beauty and personal care brands in Mumbai" was strongly supported as (76.9%) portion of respondents were seen to be more likely to purchase after being exposed to the sustainability communications by brands online. Whereas the first sub-hypothesis "Influencer credibility, brand transparency, and sustainability messaging significantly shape consumer attitudes toward sustainable beauty and personal care brands." It was partially supported as transparency and sustainable communication can influence the consumers, but the credibility of influencers was highly questioned. Also the second sub hypothesis "Higher social media engagement is positively related to consumers' intention to support or purchase sustainable beauty and personal care brands" was seen supported as (59.6%) respondents stated that more they seen such sustainability content online their likelihood towards purchase intention increases

- **"What" drivers of brand perception:** The analysis identified certain factors necessary for building consumer perception and trust. Transparency for Ingredients were the most important factor agreed by (61.5%) and extremely important for their purchase decisions and hence brands should prioritise clear description of ingredients used for building trust. Scepticism was seen and (28.8%) of respondents confirmed that they verify the sustainable claims made by the brands before buying. Hence the marketers must back their claims with valid proofs and certifications. Sustainability claims act as a secondary driver as (59.6%) of respondents first pay attention to product utility and effectiveness.

- **"How" social media is influential for purchase decisions:** The findings clearly mentions how social media can be effectively used to influence consumers to purchase the sustainable beauty/ personal care products in context to Mumbai. Peer validation for assessing brand credibility (86.5%). Using social media as a sales channel they said they bought the product after seeing it as promoted eco- friendly online. Trust gaps were seen as (59.6%) said they buy products watching online as sustainable but (28.8%) also said that they are "not sure" about the genuineness of the content showing concerns for green washing. Specific purchase instances show that content demonstrating **authenticity** (e.g., "zero-waste packaging and how they partnered with local farmers") and **validation** (e.g., cross-checking with friends/family/reviews) is key to driving final sales.

9. Limitations of the study

While this study offers useful insights, it does come with certain limitations. Since all respondents were from Mumbai, the results mainly reflect the behaviour of consumers within an urban metropolitan setting. This means the findings may not fully apply to people in smaller towns or regions where digital habits, income levels, and exposure to sustainable brands differ. The study also relies on self-reported answers, and there is always the possibility that some participants may have overestimated or underestimated their behaviour. Another limitation is focus on influencer credibility, brand transparency, and sustainability messaging, leaving out other factors like brand loyalty, price sensitivity, or awareness about environmental issues, which could also shape consumer attitudes. Finally, the analysis was descriptive in nature and did not use advanced statistical tools, which naturally limits the depth of conclusions that can be drawn from cause-and-effect relationships.

10. Conclusion

All of the discussion and data insights indicate that social media is undoubtedly a major influencing factor when it comes to purchasing decisions by using transparency and active consumer engagement by sharing claims backed with proofs supported by real data, real stories, genuine and continued efforts towards sustainability as peer review helps reduce concerns for green washing.

11. Future Directions

For future researchers, there is plenty of room to build on these findings. To know the more diverse view of consumer behaviour the study can be expanded towards other cities of India. As this study used basic statistical methods for more clear and diverse pictures, sophisticated advanced methods can be employed like regression analysis or cluster analysis to have deeper understanding on data points. Further research could incorporate new variables like purchase habits, paying capacity and role of availability. Lastly other qualitative methods like interview and focus group can be taken for getting in depth understanding into what consumer truly looks for when choosing sustainable beauty and personal care products.

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