



## The Impact of Social Media on Digital Empathy and Sustainable Online Purchasing Decisions

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### Abstract

Social media supports the increased interest in the environment and makes people aware of sustainability. This emotional connection, what is called digital empathy, makes people more willing to endorse and choose a friendly product for the environment. This paper examines the effect of social media on consumer behaviour in making sustainable buying decisions and building digital empathy. Social media enables people to understand environmental issues through stories, photos, and interactive posts, based on the opinion of 87 users who subscribe to sustainability content. Through their experience, influencers, organisations, and everyday users help people comprehend sustainability. The survey revealed that consumers tend to buy environmentally friendly products when they have an emotional attachment to the idea of sustainability, as depicted by social media. These results show that social media can be a viable way of encouraging ethical buying. Companies and legislators should use social media to create captivating and educational information that can help consumers make sustainable decisions. To sum up, social media enhances digital empathy, which influences consumer behaviour to a great extent. Research can be conducted in the future to compare the reaction of different demographics to sustainability messaging to improve online strategies of motivating environmentally conscious behaviour.

**Keywords:** Digital Empathy, Sustainability, Eco-Friendly, Consumerism, Green

### Introduction

Social media has become a key platform for raising awareness about sustainability and fostering digital empathy toward environmental issues. Digital empathy refers to the ability to understand and share the feelings of others through online interactions, often leading to stronger emotional connections with global causes, such as environmental protection (Susanto & Goodwin, 2021). Digital empathy is created on social media through various approaches that help individuals emotionally connect with environmental issues. For example, influencers and organisations share personal stories about their sustainable journeys, fostering a deeper understanding of environmental challenges (Kim & Li, 2022). Visual content, such as documentaries and impactful images,

highlights the consequences of issues like pollution and deforestation, making them more relatable (Johnson et al., 2020). User-generated content and community engagement also play a key role, with people sharing their sustainable practices and encouraging others to join in (Garcia & Wang, 2021). Interactive campaigns, like sustainability challenges and collaborations with environmental NGOs, further amplify the message, motivating followers to act and contribute to a shared responsibility for the planet (Lee, 2023). By engaging with content on social media, individuals develop a deeper emotional awareness of sustainability challenges, which can influence their purchasing behaviour (Brown & Taylor, 2021).

To bring an insight into how digital platforms could promote more sustainable consumer decision-making, this paper aims to explore how social media can enhance digital empathy and how social media can also affect customer buying decisions to make sustainable product purchases online. There is not understanding yet on how social media may encourage online empathy to environmental issues and persuade online purchases in the face of the emerging importance of sustainability. This research aims to examine how social media affects a customer to purchase sustainable products online as well as how it facilitates digital sympathy towards sustainability. The objectives are to examine the possibility of social media enhancing digital empathy regarding sustainability and how digital empathy influences the way customers make decisions when buying sustainable products online. The following are the research hypotheses:

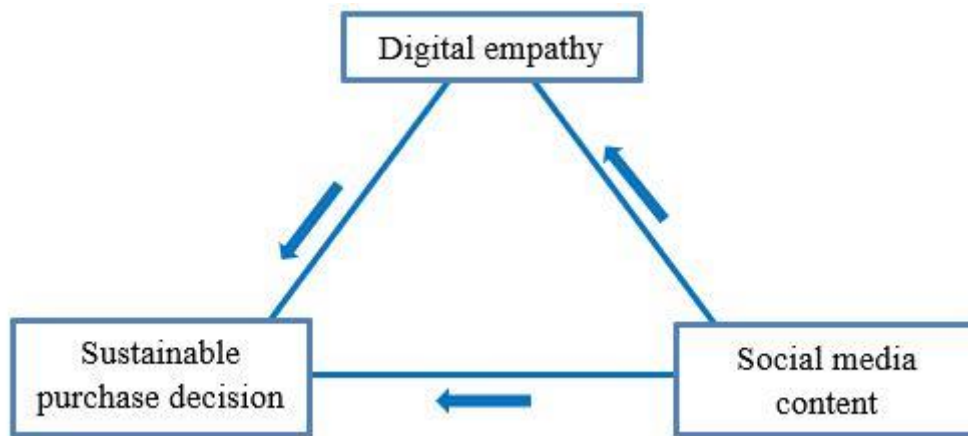
H1: Social media content increases digital empathy towards sustainability.

H2: Digital empathy positively influences consumers' decisions to buy sustainable products online.

## **Materials and Methods**

The study is descriptive. The study population consists of social media users who engage with content related to sustainability. A convenience sampling technique is used to select participants from online platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. A minimum of 87 respondents will be targeted to ensure adequate representation and statistical The primary data will be collected using a self-administered online questionnaire. Data Analysis Techniques used for the study were regression analysis to understand the relationship between social media usage, digital empathy, and sustainable purchase decisions. A percentage analysis was also done to analyse the demographic factors.

Figure 1, below, illustrates the relationship between social media content, digital empathy, and sustainable purchase decisions, where Social Media content is the Independent Variable (IV), Digital Empathy is the Mediating Variable (MV), and Sustainable Purchase Decision is the Dependent Variable (DV).



**Figure 1- Conceptual Model**

It proposes that social media content plays a crucial role in fostering digital empathy by exposing users to sustainability-related content, emotional narratives, and eco-conscious influencers. This increased digital empathy, in turn, influences consumers' decision-making processes, making them more likely to choose sustainable products when shopping online. The model highlights the mediating role of digital empathy, suggesting that social media indirectly impacts sustainable purchasing behaviour by shaping consumers' emotional and ethical awareness.

## Results and Discussions

The conclusions of the study indicate the importance of social media in creating digital empathy that, in effect, affects sustainable buying decisions. The results of the regression analysis provide strong statistical evidence that digital empathy is not just a result of using social media. Instead, it is a counterchecking force that shapes the impact of social media content on valuable activities, especially in the area of ethical consumption. The first section of the investigation has investigated the relationship between digital empathy (MDM) and social media use (MSU). The results indicated that the percentage of explained variation ( $R^2 = 0.611$ ) was very high and the positive correlation was significant ( $R = 0.781$ ). This implies that exposure and engagement of the participants to the information on sustainability-related social media explain approximately 61.1% of the differences in ratings of their digital empathy. Such a large explanatory power is significant in behavioural research, where the outcome is often affected by several complex factors. The ANOVA results on this model ( $F = 105.758$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) helped to support the importance of this association. It means that the chances that such a pattern can occur by chance are highly minimal. This result can be related to other studies that indicate that social media may have an empathy-promoting effect due to its ability to humanise and personalise global issues (Kim and Li, 2022; Garcia and Wang, 2021). Besides informing the user about issues related to the environment, users can also have an emotional connection to the issues on the sites, which do this in the form of interactive elements, movies, infographics, and personal stories.

In the second stage, we tested the link between digital empathy and sustainable purchase decisions (MPD). The statistical results were strong ( $R = 0.781$ ,  $R^2 = 0.611$ ,  $F = 131.690$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This shows that digital empathy alone accounts for over 60% of the differences in sustainable purchasing behaviour among the sample. This provides strong support for the idea that

digital empathy plays a mediating role. It indicates that social media influences consumer behaviour indirectly, significantly fostering empathy towards environmental and social issues.

**Table 1 Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.781 <sup>a</sup>	.611	.606	.56218
a. Predictors: (Constant), mdm				

**Table 2 ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	38.111	1	38.111	105.758	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	30.270	84	.360		
	Total	68.381	85			
a. Dependent Variable: mdm						
b. Predictors: (Constant), msu						

The regression analysis reveals a strong and statistically significant relationship between digital empathy and sustainable purchase decisions. The p-value is less than 0.05, indicating that the regression model is statistically significant. The model explains 61.1% of the variance in sustainable purchase decisions, highlighting the importance of digital empathy in driving ethical consumer behaviour. These findings suggest that fostering digital empathy through targeted strategies can significantly enhance sustainable purchasing practices.

**Table 3 Model Summary**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.781 <sup>a</sup>	.611	.606	.56218
a. Predictors: (Constant), mdm				

**Table 4 ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

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Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	41.621	1	41.621	131.690	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	26.548	84	.316		
	Total	68.169	85			
a. Dependent Variable: mpd    b. Predictors: (Constant), mdm						

The density of the relationships present here implies that emotional appeal, in particular, empathy can encourage sustainable buying more than the mere factual or logical appeal. The conventional sustainability advocacies have made use of facts, figures and rational facts in order to convince the consumers. Although these factors have remained significant, this paper indicates that greater behavioural influence can be achieved through the evocation of empathy by means of narratives and identification with relevant tales. Digital empathy is a motivational power which transforms the decision-making process of a person. Consumers who have an emotional attachment to people, communities or ecosystems that suffer because of unsustainable practices tend to be more inclined to choose environmentally friendly products, even though these products might be more expensive or inconvenient. Psychologically, empathy diminishes psychological distance between the consumer and the impacts of the choices they are making, which makes sustainable actions seem so present and close to them. These outcomes also confirm the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion, which states that emotionally sensitive content might induce a lasting change in attitude in case it is combined with credible information. It appears that social media can provide a perfect medium for such a combined strategy, which provides both emotional appeal and reliable information in a format that is easy to access and share.

In the case of businesses, the implications of these findings are straightforward: empathic storytelling should be part of sustainability marketing. Brands can attract consumers by simply telling them the human and environmental stories behind their products, rather than just highlighting the technical aspects of environmentally friendly products, such as biodegradable or carbon-neutral. The examples of such strategies can be behind-the-scenes footage of craftsmen or farmers benefiting because of fair-trade practices, before-and-after shots that demonstrate the positive effect of sustainable sourcing on the local ecosystem, customer spotlights of the individuals who have adopted sustainable lifestyles and their reasons, and partnerships with micro-influencers whom people regard as credible sources of information about sustainability.

The fact that the R<sup>2</sup> of both models is only 61.1% indicates that having empathy has a significant effect on determining whether to purchase the product. Thus, a long-term gain in consumer loyalty and brand support is likely to be provided by investing in the content that helps to find empathy. Policy implications and recommendations to Policymakers and NGOs. From a policy perspective, what social media has done to enhance digital empathy suggests that government and non-government agencies should utilise the platforms to conduct awareness campaigns to the people. Since the social media outreach is extensive and commonly cost-efficient, emotional storytelling combined with specific actions to be taken (e.g., product certifications and recycling) might be used to reach large numbers of people and impact consumer behaviour at a greater level.

Additionally, collaborations between policymakers and content creators might contribute to the fact that sustainability messages are correct and interesting. This plays a vital role in combating fake news that can undermine the sustainability process. Societal and Cultural Factor: The impact of digital empathy on the concept of sustainable purchasing might vary among demographics and cultures. Social media, being more active among the younger generation and adopting value-based branding, could be more responsive to empathy-based sustainability messages.

Nevertheless, the older audiences are becoming more active users of social networks, such as Facebook, where community-oriented materials might also stimulate empathetic interaction. The cultural varieties of stories that produce empathy might be different. Narratives that emphasise the well-being and self-reliance of the community or a specific group might work better in the collectivist culture, and narratives about individual responsibility and influence on others might be more effective in the individualist culture.

This research contributes to the emerging body of literature that has identified social media as a strong influence in consumer behaviour, not only in the transmission of information but in the formation of emotional and moral sentiments. The results suggest that emotional involvement is a crucial stage between knowledge and action in sustainability situations. This is in line with the recent demands to adopt combined models of sustainable behaviour, taking into consideration emotional, cognitive, and social factors. The theoretical construct that is put to the test in this theory is that social media content manipulates buying behaviour with the intermediary effect of digital empathy. The conceptual framework that can be applied to any other fields, including health promotion, political participation, and social justice activism, is that one.

## Conclusion

The statistical and philosophical results of the study show that digital empathy is one of the key psychological processes connecting social media content and sustainable purchase decisions. Social media has the potential to move consumers to active and moral participation rather than passive awareness through the development of emotional attachment to environmental and social issues. This highlights the significance of employing an empathetic approach in their sustainability messages by companies, legislators and educators. In practice, the paper supports the premise that consumers tend to be more sustainable when they feel the impact of their actions on individuals and the environment than they would have been had they been trained on them. The opportunity now is vast and timely to use the influence of social media positively for society and the environment as it gets integrated into our daily lives.

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