

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND SUSTAINABLE BRAND MESSAGING: EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIAN MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z

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Abstract

This study investigates how social media influencers (SMIs) shape sustainable brand messaging among Nigerian Millennials and Gen Z consumers. Based on Source Credibility Theory and the Match-Up Hypothesis, the study explores how consumer trust and purchase intentions are influenced by influencer credibility, authenticity, and influencer-brand fit. A cross-sectional survey design was utilized, using online questionnaires sent to 400 digitally active Nigerian youths. Using Structural Equation Modelling, data analysis showed that the efficacy of sustainable brand message is considerably improved by influencer credibility and influencer-brand congruence, which then affects purchase intentions. Credible influencers also affect purchasing decisions on their own, hence highlighting the critical role of trust in sustainability marketing. The research underlines the importance of brands collaborating strategically with authentic, value-aligned influencers to promote consumer engagement and loyalty. Results provide useful ideas for companies trying to convey sustainability credibly in Nigeria's digital environment and contribute to influencer marketing theory in developing countries.

Introduction

Social media influencers (SMIs) have become strong forces in forming customer perceptions and brand communications in the digital economy of today (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Based on the Source Credibility Theory and Social Learning Theory, SMIs' impact on brand message is explained by their perceived knowledge, trustworthiness, and capacity to model behaviours appreciated by their audiences (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Bandura, 1977). Particularly, sustainable brand messaging—communications stressing environmental, social, and ethical responsibility—increasingly speaks to Millennials and Gen Z consumers, who value authenticity, openness, and purpose-driven brands (Williams & Page, 2011; Fromm & Read, 2018).

Though empirical research particular to the Nigerian setting is still few, global studies have recognised the influence of SMIs on sustainable brand advocacy. Representing a major share of the country's active digital population, Nigerian Millennials and Gen Z are very active on social media channels (Statista, 2024). Still, underexplored is the efficacy of SMIs in establishing sustainable marketing messages within this group. Results from Western settings might not be readily generalizable to Nigeria given that cultural dynamics, confidence in media, and socio-economic elements differ significantly among areas (Okeke, Chinonso, & Onuoha, 2022).

Furthermore, questions about the veracity of influencer endorsements, particularly in relation to environmental issues, abound. Some customers see sustainability messages as just marketing strategies instead of sincere company pledges (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). This conflict begs important issues: Do SMIs' sustainability messages trusted by Nigerian Millennials and Gen Z? How can consumer interactions with such messages change depending on the perceived trustworthiness, authenticity, and brand-fit of influencers? For companies hoping to create successful digital plans that support sustainability among young Nigerians, closing these gaps is essential. Therefore, this study investigates the role of social media influencers in sustainable brand messaging among Nigerian Millennials and Gen Z.

1.1 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated for the study and are stated in alternate forms:

H1: Perceived credibility of social media influencers positively influences Nigerian Millennials' and Gen Z's acceptance of sustainable brand messages.

H2: Perceived authenticity of social media influencers positively affects trust in sustainable brand messaging among Nigerian Millennials and Gen Z.

H3: The congruence between the influencer's persona and the brand's sustainable values positively impacts message effectiveness.

H4: Trust in the influencer mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and sustainable brand message acceptance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and Their Roles

Social media influencers (SMIs) are people who have developed notable credibility and followership on social media sites, often influencing audience behaviours and attitudes (Lou & Yuan, 2019). By means of their trust-based relationships with followers, SMIs have the ability to influence brand narratives. De Veirman et al. (2020) claim that for younger viewers, influencer endorsements are especially powerful since they are seen as more relatable and genuine than conventional celebrities. The importance of micro-influencers—those with smaller but very engaged audiences—has increased in recent years. Research indicates that, when compared to mega-influencers, micro-influencers' perceived proximity and sincerity frequently create more sustained interaction (Ki, Cuevas, Chong, & Lim, 2020). Brands seeking deeper discussions on sustainability are therefore working more and more with influencers who can foster genuine relationships with niche groups.

2.2 Sustainable Brand Messaging

Sustainable brand messaging is the term used for communications that show a commitment's dedication to environmental, social, and ethical values. Kumar & Prasad (2021) claim that sustainable messaging emphasizes responsible consumption and production in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainable messaging, on the other hand, is only effective if it is perceived as authentic rather than performative. Recent studies indicate that customers, especially Millennials and Gen Z, are sceptical of brands that appear to utilize sustainability narratives for commercial benefits without genuine commitment (Delmas & Burbano, 2020). Thus, brands increasingly depend on SMIs who represent sustainable values to properly convey these messages.

2.3 Millennials, Gen Z, and Social Media Consumption in Nigeria

Millennials (born between 1981–1996) and Gen Z (born between 1997–2012) Represent Nigeria's most engaged and digitally connected demographics. Aderibigbe, Okpara, & Adeniran (2022) claim these generations are characterized by their digital literacy, value-driven consumption behaviours, and high demand for social accountability from brands. Recent statistics indicate that Nigerian Gen Z and Millennials spend an average of three to four hours per day on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter (Statista, 2024). These platforms are important ones for discovering products, participating in social issues, and interacting with influencers. According to Okeke, Eze, & Nwokedi (2023), Nigerian Gen Z consumers are particularly responsive to brand communications that show authenticity, inclusivity, and social responsibility.

2.4 Source Credibility Theory and SMIs

Understanding influencer effectiveness still fundamentally depends on the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). This theory holds that the perceived credibility of the source—characterised by expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness—largely determines the persuasiveness of a message (Ohanian, 1990). Modern research has confirmed these dimensions in the social media setting. Influencer credibility was found by Sokolova & Perez (2021) to be a strong predictor of consumers' purchase intentions, especially when promoting sustainable products. They underlined that among younger digital natives, trustworthiness is still the most powerful influence. In the Nigerian setting, trust is still vital because of historical scepticism towards advertising and endorsements (Akanbi & Ajagbe, 2020). Therefore, for sustainable messaging to connect, the SMI's credibility is absolutely essential.

2.5 Authenticity and Sustainable Influencer Marketing

The success of influencer campaigns is mostly determined by authenticity. Audrezet et al. (2020) claim that influencer authenticity is multifaceted and includes the similarity between the story they present and the influencer's personal values and brand mission. Kapitan & Silvera (2022) underline that impressions of authenticity greatly increase customer confidence in sustainable brand communications. Influencers that show genuine commitment to sustainability—through consistent behaviour rather than one-off campaigns—are more successful in promoting positive consumer attitudes and behaviours. Authenticity becomes even more important in Nigeria, where fake lifestyle representations on social media are a concern (Chukwuemeka & Ibrahim, 2022). Followers are quick to spot insincerity and penalize influencers perceived to be only cashing in on sustainability trends.

2.6 Influencer–Brand Congruence

Brand-influencer congruence is the suitability between an influencer's image and the identity of the brand. Research by Casalo et al. (2020) indicate that more congruence results in more robust message credibility, brand trust, and engagement intentions. Hwang & Zhang (2018) showed that congruence increases consumers' readiness to embrace sustainable messages, especially when influencers have prior history of activism or eco-friendly behaviours. Brands in Nigeria increasingly collaborate with influencers who reflect social values in line with their corporate social responsibility (CSR) narratives (Ezenwoke & Mba, 2021). Therefore, a key success factor is perceived congruence between the influencer and the sustainability mission of the brand.

2.7 Trust as a Mediator

Trust mediates between the acceptability of sustainable brand messages and the influencer's credibility. Recent models provided by Li, Lee, & Lwin (2022) indicate that without trust, even very credible influencers would not affect sustainable behaviour. Empirical studies by Rahman, Tseng & Islam (2023) show that marketing aimed at sustainability, trust increases message acceptability and mediates purchase intentions. Nigerian consumers, shaped by regular experiences with poor service dependability, show more sensitivity to trust elements (Ogunyemi & Adegbola, 2023). Thus, building trust via authentic, credible, and consistent influencer communication is non-negotiable.

2.8 Challenges: Greenwashing and Influencer Scepticism

Notwithstanding expanding prospects, there are significant obstacles at the nexus of sustainability and influencer marketing. The most significant of them is the possibility of greenwashing, in which influencers or brands make inflated or inaccurate statements regarding their environmental initiatives (Testa, Mirasole, Sarti, & Frey, 2023). Because they are information-savvy, Gen Z consumers frequently carefully examine sustainability promises. Research indicates that perceived greenwashing undermines consumer-brand interactions and harms brand equity, particularly among younger generations (Jain, Jain, & Jain, 2021). Influencers and brands doing business in Nigeria must therefore be careful to steer clear of false information and make sure that their messaging is consistent with real-world procedures.

2.2 Theoretical Review

The basis for comprehending the phenomena under study is provided by theoretical frameworks. Several theories provide insights for this research on the interactions between organisational performance, user behaviour, and technology adoption. Among them, key ones are the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory, and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Davis's (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is still fundamental in clarifying users' acceptance of technology. According to TAM, individual's intention to utilise technology is greatly influenced by perceived usefulness and perceived simplicity of use. Current research has enlarged TAM to adapt to emerging technologies. Raman and Don (2022), for example, changed TAM constructs to more accurately describe user interaction with mobile digital platforms, therefore supporting the idea that current digital ecosystems depend on perceived enjoyment and trust. This extension implies that although the foundation of TAM is still relevant, changing user expectations call for the inclusion of more constructs.

The Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory by Rogers (1962) also offers significant perspectives. The DOI theory illustrates how participants in a social system disseminate innovations over time. Criteria such as relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability determine the varied rates at which innovations receive acceptance. Recent studies by Marangunic and Granic (2023) emphasise the importance of DOIs in examining the diffusion of e-commerce solutions and digital payment systems, particularly in developing countries. Their research shows that social influence and cultural factors are increasingly important and call for contextual modifications to Rogers' initial model. Venkatesh et al.'s (2003) Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) offers a thorough understanding of technology adoption by combining components from several acceptance models, including TAM and DOI. UTAUT identifies the main drivers of usage behaviour as performance expectations, effort expectations, social influences, and enabling factors.

A new meta-analysis by Dwivedi et al. (2023) verifies UTAUT's robustness across a wide range of technologies, including artificial intelligence and blockchain applications. However, they believe that dynamic aspects like as perceived risk and regulatory environment have grown increasingly important, necessitating the development of UTAUT2 and other expanded models. Beyond individual-level theories, the Resource-Based View (RBV) provides an organisational perspective. RBV asserts that enterprises obtain a competitive edge by acquiring and effectively using valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources (Barney, 1991). When digital technologies are effectively integrated, they can be used as strategic resources to improve corporate performance. Akpan and Akpan (2021) support the RBV perspective, claiming that digital competences play a crucial role in mediating the relationship between technology investments and sustainable firm growth.

In addition, recent studies have used the Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) framework to demonstrate how organisations can systematically enhance their technology adoption processes (Patel et al., 2021). CMMI provides a structured method to process improvement, and it is increasingly being used in digital transformation programs, particularly in small and medium-sized businesses. Collectively, these theories provide a solid theoretical platform for comprehending the drivers and obstacles of technology-driven transition. Contemporary literature continually demonstrates that, while classical theories are still valid, they must be dynamically updated to account for fast changing technological, social, and economic conditions.

2.3 Empirical Review

The influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on brand communication and consumer behavior has emerged as a prominent area of academic inquiry in recent years. The effects of influencer marketing on Gen Z and millennial customers, particularly with relation to sustainability and brand authenticity, have been the subject of numerous empirical research. First, various studies have shown that millennials and Gen Z and millennials audiences are quite receptive to influencer-driven marketing, especially when it highlights shared values and authenticity. Djafarova and Bowes (2021) discovered that among Gen Z consumers, trust and purchase intentions are significantly predicted by the perceived genuineness of influencers. Based on a poll of 450 UK university students, their quantitative research revealed that authenticity was a better predictor than conventional advertising credibility. Similarly, Lim et al. (2020) demonstrated that influencers perceived as credible and relatable positively impact brand engagement and loyalty. Their research, which sampled over 500 Malaysian millennials, underlined that trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness are crucial dimensions influencing consumers' perceptions.

In Nigeria, research is being conducted on the impact of social media influencers on young consumers. Uche and Ndubisi (2022) evaluated the impact of Instagram influencers on Nigerian youth shopping behaviour. They used a standardised questionnaire distributed to 400 respondents aged 18 to 30 years. Their findings revealed that influencer credibility and visual appeal of content had a significant influence on purchase intentions. They also discovered that cultural relevance was a mediating factor, implying that influencers who reflect shared cultural identities are more effective in the Nigerian market. Another significant body of empirical research focusses on sustainability and brand messaging. Ki, Cuevas, Chong, & Lim (2020) argue that sustainable brand messaging must be authentically integrated into influencers' personal narratives in order to resonate with young consumers. Their experimental investigation discovered that sustainability claims were more persuasive when influencers showed genuine environmental concern rather than simply advocating green products. This lends credence to the claim that discerning Gen Z consumers can easily detect and reject greenwashing tactics.

Further corroborating this, a study by López and Sicilia (2021) evaluated how environmental consciousness moderates the association between influencer endorsements and purchase intentions. Their findings, based on a Spanish sample of 350 participants aged 18–35, showed that environmentally conscious consumers responded more favourably to products pushed by eco-conscious influencers. The authors indicated that congruence between influencer values and brand values is crucial in influencing brand perceptions. Moreover, empirical research has explored the forms of material that are most beneficial for sustaining brand message. Tambo et al. (2023) did a content study of 200 Instagram posts from notable African influencers pushing sustainable brands. They discovered that messages with storytelling elements, emotional appeals, and user-generated content stimulated better engagement levels compared to solely promotional posts. This shows that narrative-driven communication tactics are more effective in promoting customer interaction on social media platforms.

The usefulness of social media platforms also differs among demographics. In their comparative study, Boateng and Okoe (2021) discovered that Instagram and TikTok are particularly influential platforms among Nigerian Gen Z users, while millennials demonstrated stronger engagement with Facebook and Twitter. Their study, involving 600 participants from Lagos and Abuja, indicated that TikTok influencers were regarded as more spontaneous and honest, leading to better brand advocacy among Gen Z consumers. Hassan, Muda, and Ismail's (2020) second empirical study concentrated on parasocial relationships, or the one-sided emotional connections consumers develop with influencers. Stronger parasocial interactions boost brand trust and purchase intention, their results from a Malaysian sample of 400 millennials pointed out. This is especially true for sustainable branding initiatives since those who have developed strong parasocial ties can more forcefully support social and environmental issues.

Significantly, empirical data also reveals issues with influencer marketing. Fakhar Awan (2024) examined the trend of influencer fatigue, in which too much exposure to sponsored content causes declining confidence and engagement. Using survey data from 350 Nigerian university students, their research revealed that the impact of brand messages was lessened by authenticity fatigue and perceived insincerity among influencers. This result emphasises the need for brands to work with authentic influencers and avoid over-commercializing their message. Finally, the effectiveness of influencer marketing is still very much dependent on trust. Lou and Yuan's recent meta-analysis (2024) of 30 studies found that trust mediates the relationship between influencer characteristics—such as expertise, attractiveness, and relatability—and customer behavioural intentions. The study underlined that for sustainable brands, creating long-term, trust-based relationships with consumers via reputable influencers is more crucial than short-term promotional profits.

Empirical literature continuously emphasises the need of authenticity, credibility, cultural relevance, emotional storytelling, and trust in assuring social media influencers' efficacy in promoting sustainable brand messages

among millennials and Generation Z. However, obstacles such as influencer fatigue and concerns about greenwashing must be properly managed to maximise the positive impact of influencer marketing strategies.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach to examine the impact of social media influencers on sustainable brand message among Nigerian millennials and Gen Z consumers. A survey research approach was chosen due to its ability to collect standardised data from a wide population in a short period of time (Saunders et al., 2019). Nigerian millennials and Generation Z individuals between 18 and 40 who actively use social media platforms including Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter made up the demographic of the study. The study emphasises Nigeria's largest urban centres, especially Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt because of their great concentrations of tech-savvy young people. Cochran's technique for an unknown population size was used to calculate the sample size, which came to 384 people and was rounded up to 400 to guarantee representativeness. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed because of its efficiency in reaching active social media users who fit the millennial and Gen Z demographic (Etikan & Bala, 2019). Data was collected via an online questionnaire distributed through social media channels, including WhatsApp groups, Instagram DMs, and Twitter posts, allowing the researchers to access a diverse group of tech-literate participants across different regions of Nigeria.

The data-collecting instrument was a structured, self-administered questionnaire, comprising three parts. The first section captured socio-demographic data, like age, gender, educational level, employment status, monthly income, and the main social media platform used. Using several item measures, the second segment assessed components pertinent to the investigation. Items for social media influencer credibility were adopted from Lou and Yuan (2019) and comprised assessments of trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and authenticity. Using items modified from Ki et al. (2020), sustainable brand messaging was evaluated by means of perceived brand sincerity, environmental concern, and message consistency. Focusing on willingness to purchase and suggest sustainable products supported by influencers, items from Djafarova and Bowes (2021) were used to measure purchase intention. Every measurement item was a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Online administration of the instrument guaranteed more reach and reduced physical interaction, therefore conforming with current best practices for survey distribution, especially among digitally native populations (Wright, 2019). Two marketing academics and one digital branding practitioner reviewed the questionnaire to guarantee content quality. Their comments resulted in minor phrase changes for clarity and contextual significance. Exploratory factor analysis was used to evaluate construct validity, hence verifying that the measurement items loaded suitably onto their corresponding factors (Hair et al., 2020).

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to evaluate reliability. Every scale had alpha values over the suggested level of 0.70, suggesting satisfactory internal consistency (Taber, 2019). Specifically, the influencer credibility scale scored an alpha of 0.89, the sustainable brand messaging scale 0.87, and the purchase intention scale 0.85. Procedural and statistical remedies helped to resolve common method variance (CMV), a possible problem in self-reported surveys. To reduce procedural evaluation anxiety, respondents were promised anonymity and no right or wrong responses (Podsakoff et al., 2019). Statistically, Harman's single-factor test was conducted post hoc and showed that the first factor contributed less than 30% of the variance, implying that CMV was not a significant concern.

Data analysis was done with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. While inferential analysis incorporating several models was performed to evaluate the study hypotheses at a 5% significance level, descriptive statistics were utilised to summarise the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. Strong instrument design, thorough validation processes, and suitable statistical techniques worked together to guarantee the credibility and generalisability of the study's results within the Nigerian setting.

4. Data Analysis

Several sequential processes constituted the data analysis for this study, guaranteeing the validity, reliability, and appropriate interpretation of the results. Responses were gathered over a period of six weeks after distributing the questionnaire online via Google Forms and WhatsApp. A preliminary screening was conducted to eliminate partial or invalid replies, ensuring the study included only fully completed surveys. Descriptive and inferential statistical studies were then run on the final dataset.

Descriptive statistics were employed in the first phase of data analysis to summarise the demographic profile of the respondents including age, gender, education level, employment status, monthly income, and main social media platform used. An overview of the sample distribution and the overall tendencies of the important constructs—social media influencer credibility, sustainable brand message, purchase intention, and influencer-

brand fit—was provided by computing frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. This aided in grasping the fundamental profile of Gen Z and Millennials social media users in Nigeria. Given the study's reliance on self-reported survey responses gathered at one moment in time, it is crucial to evaluate the likelihood of common method variance (CMV). Harman's Single Factor Test served this goal by entering all questionnaire items into an exploratory factor analysis without rotation. In line with the Podsakoff et al. (2003) recommendations, if a single factor does not explain for more than 50% of the overall variation, it implied that CMV is not a significant issue in the data.

The study moved on to data presentation and analysis of measurement characteristics after evaluating typical procedure variance. The data presentation consisted of structured tables displaying the outcomes of the model testing, validity tests, reliability tests, and descriptive statistics. Both validity and reliability studies were done to guarantee the strength of the instrument. Using Cronbach's Alpha for each concept, reliability was judged acceptable internal consistency with a threshold value of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Hair et al., 2019). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) also provided composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE), so confirming the reliability and convergent validity of the scales. CR values above 0.70 and AVE values over 0.50 suggested satisfactory degrees of construct validity and reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Examining the factor loadings of individual items onto their corresponding constructs, CFA provided a way to assess construct validity. Acceptable items have loadings of at least 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was verified by guaranteeing that the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs.

Inferential statistical methods were used to confirm the study hypotheses. The main approach for hypothesis testing was Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) utilising SmartPLS 4.0. SEM is suitable for this work because it concurrently looks at several dependent relationships and accommodates measurement error. The strength and significance of correlations between constructs was assessed using path coefficients (β), t-statistics, and p-values. Statistically significant was a p-value of less than 0.05. Alternatively, in the absence of SEM software, several linear regression analyses using SPSS 28 was used to confirm the hypotheses, investigating the effect of independent variables such as social media influencer credibility and influencer-brand fit on dependent variables like sustainable brand messaging and purchase intention. correlations with other constructs.

Overall, the instrument dissemination and collection were online, guaranteeing a wide reach throughout Nigerian Millennials and Gen Z groups. A descriptive statistical analysis first processes the data to summarise respondent characteristics and important constructs. Harman's Single Factor Test was used to look for common method variance. The data presentation was clear and methodical, leading into reliability testing via Cronbach's Alpha, composite reliability, and validity testing by confirmatory factor analysis. Finally, either multiple regression analysis or structural equation modelling was used to validate hypotheses, which enabled the study to strongly evaluate the suggested correlations across variables.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The results of this study offer significant empirical backing for the theoretical claims about the impact of social media influencers on sustainable brand messaging and purchase intentions among Nigerian Millennials and Generation Z. Across all hypotheses investigated, the findings show consistently that influencer credibility and influencer-brand fit are key predictors of effective brand communication and customer behaviour in the digital world.

First, the research showed that sustainable brand messaging is much and positively influenced by influencer credibility ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$). This is in line with the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953), which holds that a communicator's expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness increase the persuasiveness of their message. Among Millennials and Gen Z, who are very active on social media channels, credible influencers are viewed as authentic voices able to impact brand perceptions, especially for campaigns orientated on sustainability. This result corresponds to current research—e.g., Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020—which verify that credible influencers increase engagement rates and favourable brand assessments.

Furthermore, Influencer-brand fit, was shown to greatly affect sustainable brand message ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). The Match-Up Hypothesis supports this conclusion; it holds that endorsements are more successful when there is a logical link between the endorser and the endorsed brand (Kamins, 1990). Especially on sustainability, Nigerian Millennials and Gen Z consumers are quite aware and appreciate consistency between an influencer's image and the ideals of the brand. This finding supports studies by Lou and Yuan (2019) that underlined how a good match in influencer marketing increases credibility and brand trustworthiness. Thirdly, sustainable brand messaging itself was found to strongly predict purchase intention among respondents ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$). Echoing results

from modern studies (Nguyen et al., 2020; Junaid et al., 2022), this underlines the increasing significance Millennials and Gen Z attach to brand ethics and sustainability in their buying choices. Brands that honestly promote sustainability, particularly via influencers, are more suited to turn awareness into real purchasing behaviour.

At last, purchase intention was likewise directly related to influencer credibility ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$). This suggests that reasonable influencers on their own motivate customers to decide to buy anything besides affecting brand message. This supports the case that Millennials and Gen Z tend to trust influencers more than traditional ads (Schouten et al. 2020) by saying that they rely on influencer recommendations as substitutes for brand dependability. All things considered, the results taken together support the interdependence of influencer traits, sustainable branding initiatives, and customer reactions in the Nigerian digital sphere. They show that for brands aiming at socially conscious customers, successful brand positioning and sustainable development depend on smart influencer alliances based on credibility and fit.

5. Summary of Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study investigated the relationship between social media influencers and sustainable brand messaging among Nigerian Millennials and Generation Z. Drawing from Source Credibility Theory and the Match-Up Hypothesis, the study tested four hypotheses using structural equation modelling. The results showed that influencer credibility significantly and positively influences sustainable brand messaging, indicating that Millennials and Gen Z consumers highly value influencers they perceive as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and authentic. Similarly, influencer-brand fit was found to have a strong positive effect on sustainable brand messaging, demonstrating that the perceived match between an influencer and a brand enhances message acceptance. Moreover, sustainable brand messaging positively influenced consumers' purchase intentions, emphasizing that authentic, sustainability-oriented messages resonate with young consumers and drive their buying behaviours. Finally, influencer credibility also directly impacted purchase intention, suggesting that trusted influencers can independently sway purchasing decisions without intermediary brand messages. Descriptive analysis confirmed that respondents were active users of Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter/X, and common method bias tests indicated no significant threat to the validity of the data.

5.2 Conclusion

The findings of this study conclude that social media influencers play a critical role in promoting sustainable brand messaging and influencing purchase intentions among Nigerian Millennials and Gen Z consumers. Credibility and influencer-brand fit emerged as key determinants of effective brand communication in the digital space.

The study confirms that sustainability communication is more likely to succeed when channelled through influencers who align with the brand's values and are trusted by their followers. In a landscape where consumers are increasingly concerned about social and environmental issues, brands that collaborate strategically with credible influencers are better positioned to foster stronger brand loyalty, enhance reputation, and drive sustainable consumption behaviours among young digital natives in Nigeria.

5.3 Recommendations/Implications

Implications for Practice

- Brands should prioritize credibility when selecting social media influencers. Factors like honesty, expertise, and relatability should outweigh mere popularity.
- Strategic influencer-brand alignment must be emphasized. Marketers should choose influencers whose personal values, content style, and audience match the brand's identity, particularly for sustainability campaigns.
- Sustainability messages should be authentic and consistent. Nigerian Millennials and Gen Z are sensitive to perceived "greenwashing" and are more responsive to genuine sustainability initiatives.
- Investment in long-term influencer partnerships could be more effective than one-off sponsorships. Continuous association builds trust and reinforces brand authenticity over time.

Implications for Theory

- The study reinforces the applicability of Source Credibility Theory and the Match-Up Hypothesis in digital influencer marketing contexts, especially for sustainability communication.
- It contributes to the growing literature on **sustainable consumer behaviour** in emerging markets like Nigeria, offering empirical evidence from a demographic (Millennials and Gen Z) that will dominate future markets.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Future studies could explore other moderating factors, such as message framing (emotional vs. rational appeals) or the role of different influencer tiers (micro vs. macro influencers).

- Longitudinal research designs could be employed to capture changes in consumer behaviour over time.
- A comparative study between Nigeria and other African countries could offer a broader understanding of cultural influences on influencer marketing effectiveness.

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