FROM EXPOSURE TO ACTION: HOW SUSTAINABILITY CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES GREEN LIFESTYLE ADOPTION AMONG VIETNAMESE GENERATION Z

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Abstract: ***This research focuses on how exposure to sustainability content on social media influences green lifestyle adoption among Vietnamese Generation Z consumers, based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework. Data were gathered from 586 respondents through a convenience sampling method. The hypotheses were tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicated that exposure to sustainability content on social media positively influences pro-environmental attitudes and perceived value toward green products. Furthermore, pro-environmental attitudes and perceived value were found to strengthen green trust. Green trust positively influences green lifestyle adoption. The findings contribute to the existing literature on sustainable consumption and emphasize the role of social media in shaping environmentally responsible behavior among young consumers. Furthermore, this study offers practical implications for marketers, policymakers, and sustainability practitioners in developing effective digital communication strategies to promote green lifestyle adoption.***

• Keywords: *generation z, green lifestyle, green trust, perceived value, pro-environmental attitudes, social media, sor theory, sustainability content.*

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Introduction

Technological advancement has long been associated with profound economic and social transformations. In particular, the emergence of the internet and the expansion of global connectivity have accelerated social change while making generational differences increasingly apparent. The rapid evolution of digital communication and interaction has become a key driver shaping the distinctions among generations in today's digital era.

Unlike previous generations, Generation Z (Gen Z) is widely regarded as a generation of true "digital citizens," having grown up alongside the rapid expansion of the Internet, smartphones, and social media platforms (Turner, 2015). Currently, Gen Z accounts for approximately 25% of the global population and 27% of the worldwide workforce (Gitnux, 2026). As both consumers and active social participants, this generation is often characterized as more pragmatic and value-driven than its predecessors. In particular, Gen Z places strong emphasis on personal values and demonstrates growing concern for sustainability-related issues. The importance of sustainability among Gen Z has been consistently highlighted in previous studies. According to a Deloitte survey (2025) conducted across 44 countries, nearly 70% of Gen Z respondents considered sustainability an important factor in business-related decisions, while approximately 65% were willing to pay a premium for sustainably sourced products. These findings reflect not only Gen Z's increasing environmental awareness but also their rising influence as ethically conscious consumers in the global marketplace.

It is important to note that Gen Z has a very high level of social media usage, and these platforms play a significant role in shaping users' attitudes and behaviors. According to DataReportal's report (2024), young people now spend an average of several hours each day engaging in online activities like social media, watching videos, and interacting with digital content (Kemp, 2024). The growing prevalence of digital environments has fundamentally transformed how younger generations communicate, access information, and develop behavioral patterns. In particular, the rapid expansion of digital media platforms has emerged as a major driver of generational differences in lifestyles, values, and

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behaviors. Prior studies have shown that social media functions not only as a communication channel but also as a space where young people can express their aspirations for meaningful social change (Confetto et al., 2023). Moreover, these platforms are especially appealing to younger users because they facilitate informal and interactive forms of social engagement, thereby serving as a potentially effective medium for promoting social and behavioral transformation.

It can be argued that the interactive nature of social media enhances Gen Z's awareness, interest, and engagement with sustainable development issues, thereby encouraging the adoption of more sustainable behaviors. Such influences are reflected in changes in lifestyle patterns, including daily habits, consumption behaviors, and participation in public activities that foster discussions surrounding sustainability. Despite its growing influence, social media has not been sufficiently examined as a channel for disseminating knowledge about sustainable development and green lifestyles, particularly among younger generations. In response to this research gap, the present study investigates the impact of exposure to sustainable consumption content on social media on Gen Z's attitudes, perceived value, green trust, and adoption of green lifestyles. From a practical and governance perspective, the study also highlights the role of corporate social responsibility in promoting sustainable values through social media platforms.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Social media

Social media refers to digital platforms and network-based communication technologies that enable users to create, share, exchange, and interact with user-generated content within virtual communities and online networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In today's digital era, individuals are increasingly immersed in social media ecosystems as part of their everyday lives. The number of global social media users has grown rapidly, with approximately 13 new users joining every second. Maintaining a consistent double-digit annual growth rate, the worldwide social media user base is projected to reach approximately 5.24 billion users by 2025, representing more than 63% of the global population (Kemp, 2024). At the same time, social media platforms such as YouTube, Zalo, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and Threads… have become increasingly diverse and influential through creative content strategies and interactive features aimed at attracting and retaining users. These platforms allow individuals not only to establish, maintain, and expand social relationships but also to engage in a wide range of activities, including shopping, learning, working, communication, and entertainment through digital devices.

Green lifestyle

As environmental challenges become increasingly severe, consumers are showing growing interest in environmentally responsible behaviors, commonly described as a green lifestyle. The concept of a "green lifestyle" or "eco-friendly lifestyle" refers to a modern way of living that incorporates practices, services, regulations, and policies aimed at minimizing negative impacts on ecosystems and the natural environment (Chwialkowska, 2019). A green lifestyle encompasses a wide range of sustainable behaviors, including the purchase and use of environmentally friendly products and services, such as organic food, eco-friendly cosmetics, sustainable consumer goods, environmentally sourced pharmaceuticals, and green transportation options. It also involves non-purchasing behaviors, such as avoiding products that are harmful to human health and the environment throughout their production, consumption, and disposal processes. Examples include products derived from resources exploited in endangered habitats, single-use plastic items, gasoline-powered vehicles, and products with excessive packaging. In addition, green lifestyle practices include activities such as reusing and recycling materials, using reusable coffee cups and shopping bags, conserving energy, reducing waste and unnecessary consumption, and participating in environmental protection activities such as tree planting. As public awareness of environmental sustainability continues to increase, researchers have shown growing interest in understanding both the determinants and consequences of green lifestyle adoption.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory originates from early behaviorist research, particularly Thorndike's Stimulus-Response (SR) theory (Thorndike, 1898), and was later developed into a more comprehensive framework by (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The SOR theory explains how environmental stimuli influence individuals' internal psychological states, which subsequently shape their behavioral responses. Within this framework,

Stimulus (S) refers to external environmental cues or information that influence individuals. Organism (O) represents the internal psychological processes, including cognitive and emotional states, triggered by such stimuli. Finally, Response (R) refers to the behavioral reactions that emerge after individuals cognitively and emotionally process external stimuli. Due to its strong explanatory power, the SOR framework has been widely applied in consumer behavior research to explain how environmental factors shape individuals' attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral outcomes.

In the context of this study, Gen Z consumers' adoption of a green lifestyle can be viewed as a significant behavioral response. Accordingly, this research applies the SOR theory to examine how exposure to sustainable content on social media, regarded as an external environmental stimulus, influences consumers' pro-environmental attitudes, perceived value, and green trust. These psychological states subsequently shape the adoption of green lifestyles, which represent the behavioral response within the SOR framework.

Hypothesis development

Social media presents new opportunities for individuals to access news, information, and messages, whether accidentally or as a result of their online activities. (Segovia-Villarreal & Rosa-Díaz, 2022) confirmed that information available on social media significantly influences consumer decision-making processes at cognitive, emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral levels. Such influence tends to be particularly strong during the early stages of attitude formation, as individuals are generally more receptive to information that is accessible, engaging, easy to understand, and freely available. In the context of sustainable consumption, previous studies have also demonstrated that information sharing on social media positively affects green consumer behavior (Simeone & Scarpato, 2020). These findings emphasize the important role of social media as a platform for promoting sustainability by creating an interactive environment that facilitates social influence and behavioral change. Based on this rationale, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Exposure to sustainability content on social media positively influences pro-environmental attitude.

Previous studies have demonstrated that exposure to social media content can significantly influence individuals' cognitive and emotional states, thereby shaping their attitudes and behavioral tendencies. Such influences may be gradually internalized or occur rapidly, leading to immediate reactions that subsequently affect various forms of behavior. Over time, these behavioral changes can extend to real-life contexts and contribute to broader lifestyle transformations (Confetto et al., 2023)). From this perspective, social media may play an important role in enhancing sustainability awareness among users (Hautea et al., 2021). In addition, interactions with friends and peers on social media platforms can influence individual decision-making processes, including decisions related to sustainable consumption (Salciuviene et al., 2022). Chwialkowska (2019)) examined how sustainability advocates encourage their followers on social media to adopt green lifestyles. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Exposure to sustainability content on social media positively influences perceived value.

A pro-environmental attitude is considered a significant psychological factor that shapes how individuals assess and respond to environmental issues. Research in the field of green consumer behavior indicates that a positive attitude towards the environment not only influences behavioral intentions but also affects related perceptions, including beliefs about green products and practices (Chen & Chang, 2012). Individuals with a strong concern for the environment tend to seek out, accept, and interpret information about sustainability more positively, which increases their trust in companies' environmental commitments and statements. Additionally, in the context of green consumption, green trust is built on consumers' evaluations of a company's reliability, capability, and goodwill in fulfilling its environmental commitments. Previous studies have also demonstrated that a positive attitude can enhance the willingness to trust environmental messages (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012). Based on this reasoning, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Pro-environmental attitude positively influences green trust.

Perceived value is defined as the overall assessment that consumers make regarding the net benefits of a product or service, weighing what they receive against what they give up (Chen & Chang, 2012). In the current competitive landscape, perceived value is a key factor that helps businesses increase consumer purchasing

intentions by boosting product value. A product can generate value for customers by offering superior benefits and distinguishing itself from competitors. Therefore, standout product value aids businesses in positioning and differentiating their offerings in the market. Perceived value has also been shown to positively impact customer trust (Kim et al., 2008). Previous research indicates a positive relationship between perceived value and customer trust, as higher perceived value can enhance confidence post-purchase (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Consequently, in the context of growing environmental awareness, this study posits that customers' perceived value positively influences their trust in green products, and proposes the following hypothesis:

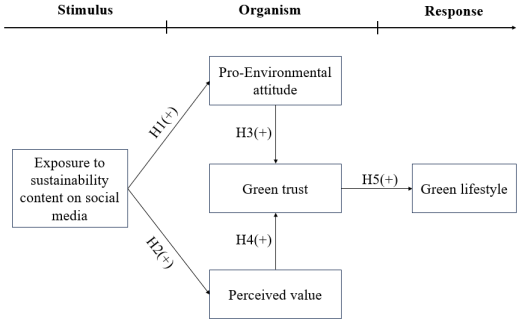
H4: Perceived value positively influences green trust.

In the context of the environment, Chen and Chang (2012) describes "green trust" refers to the degree of consumer reliance on a product, service, or organization, grounded in trust regarding their capability, reliability, and commitment to environmentally friendly actions. During the development of environmental behaviors, trust serves as a significant psychological foundation, assuring individuals when choosing and maintaining "green" behaviors, especially in market contexts filled with uncertainty or "greenwashing" occurrences. Previous studies have indicated that trust positively influences sustainable consumption behaviors, as consumers who trust the authenticity of environmental commitments are more likely to translate that trust into actual daily actions (Eid, 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that a higher level of green trust will encourage individuals to adopt and sustain a sustainable green lifestyle. Based on this, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H5: Green trust positively influences green lifestyle.

The research model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Research model



Nguồn: Tác giả

Research methodology

Data collection

Data were collected using a convenience sampling method. The survey questionnaires were distributed to Generation Z respondents between January and March 2026 in two major cities in Vietnam. Data collection was conducted at universities, shopping centers, cafés, public spaces, and other locations frequently visited by young consumers. Before participating in the survey, respondents were fully informed about the purpose of the study and assured that all personal information would remain confidential and secure. They were also encouraged to provide honest and objective responses. In total, 635 questionnaires were distributed, of which 586 valid responses were retained for data analysis. The descriptive characteristics of the research sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic statistics (N = 586)

Dimension	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	330	56.31
Female	256	43.69
Occupation status		
Student	239	40.78
Employees /Officials /Experts	206	35.15
Business	128	21.84
Others	13	2.22
Monthly income level (million VND)		
Less than 5 million VND	98	16.72
From 5 to 10 million VND	275	46.93
From 11 to 15 million VND	166	28.33
From 16 to 20 million VND	38	6.48
Above 20 million VND	9	1.54
Education level		
High school	4	0.68
College	26	4.44
University	488	83.28
Postgraduate education	68	11.60
Daily frequency of social media use (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Zalo, Threads...)		
Less than 1 hour	64	10.92
From 1 to 5 hours	265	45.22
More than 5 hours	257	43.86

Source: Author's own work

Measurement

The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The measurement items were adapted from previous studies (see Table 2). Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess the potential issue of common method bias. The results indicated that common method bias was adequately controlled, as the total variance explained by a single factor was below 30%, which is lower than the recommended threshold of 50%.

Table 2: Measurement scales

Measurement scales	Sourses	Outer loading	VIF
SM: Exposure to sustainability content on social media (α = 0.897; CR = 0.936; AVE = 0.829)			
SM1: Exposure to sustainable consumption content on social media influences my preference for green products	(Ho et al., 2018)	0.893	2.022
SM2: Exposure to sustainable consumption content on social media helps me realize that green products have higher usage value than conventional products		0.914	1.878
SM3: Social media posts about the benefits of green products make me consider reducing my use of environmentally unfriendly products.		0.925	1.507
AT: Pro-Environmental attitude (α = 0.922; CR = 0.945; AVE = 0.811)			
AT1: I believe that purchasing green products is a choice that contributes to promoting sustainability	(Hageman et al., 2024)	0.914	2.035
AT2: I feel that choosing products with a lower environmental impact is an important consideration		0.924	2.217
AT3: I consider reducing the purchase of conventional products as a way to support green products		0.907	2.466
PV: Perceived value (α = 0.895; CR = 0.935; AVE = 0.827)			
PV1: Green product's environmental functions provide very good value for me	(Patterson & Spreng, 1997)	0.855	2.420
PV2: Green product's environmental performance meets my expectations		0.879	2.339
PV3: I purchased a green product because it has more environmental concerns than other products		0.928	1.661
PV4: I purchased a green product because it is environmentally friendly		0.921	1.950
PV5: I purchased a green product because it has more environmental benefits than other products		0.892	2.941
GT: Green trust (α = 0.937; CR = 0.955; AVE = 0.842)			
GT1: I feel that the green product's environmental reputation is generally reliable	(Chen & Chang, 2012)	0.930	2.027
GT2: I feel that the green product's environmental performance is generally dependable		0.940	1.686
GT3: You feel that the green product's environmental claims are generally trustworthy		0.933	2.505
GT4: Green product keeps promises and commitments for environmental protection		0.866	1.898
GL: Green lifestyle (α = 0.846; CR = 0.906; AVE = 0.764)			
GL1: I think reducing waste and recycling old stuff is a kind of quality and rational lifestyle	(Ho et al., 2018)	0.898	1.654
GL2: I do not like using disposable products like plastic bags, paper cups, and chopsticks		0.917	2.282
GL3: I like and intend to participate in some environmentally friendly activities		0.804	3.093
GL4: I will bring my own shopping bag when I go to the supermarket and consider the environmental impact of the product when I buy it		0.872	2.090
GL5: I think I have in-depth knowledge of how to have a sustainable green lifestyle		0.896	2.807

Source: Author's own work

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM via SmartPLS 4 software. The analysis process comprised two steps: (1) assessing the reliability and validity of the measurement model, and (2) evaluating the structural model to test the hypotheses.

Results and discussion

Measurement model

The reliability of the measurement items was evaluated using outer loadings, which are recommended to exceed the threshold of 0.7. In addition, the reliability and validity of the latent constructs were assessed through Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability coefficients (CR), with all values surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.7. Convergent validity was further examined using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which should be greater than 0.5 when the indicators of a construct are positively correlated. The results in Table 2 indicated that the measurement scales meet the requirements for reliability.

To further ensure discriminant validity, this study employed the Fornell-Larcker criterion. According to this criterion, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct should be greater than its correlations with other constructs. As presented in Table 3, the square root of the AVE for every construct exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlation coefficients, thereby confirming discriminant validity in accordance with the Fornell-Larcker criterion. In addition, discriminant validity was further assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), for which all values were below the recommended threshold of 0.9, further supporting the discriminant validity of the measurement model (see Table 3).

Table 3: Discriminant validity of the measurement scales

Fornell-Larcker criterion						Heterotrait-monotrait ratio HTMT					
	GL	SM	GT	AT	PV		GL	SM	GT	AT	PV
GL	0.874					GL					
SM	0.312	0.911				SM	0.358				
GT	0.489	0.392	0.918			GT	0.539	0.423			
AT	0.622	0.344	0.696	0.900		AT	0.695	0.373	0.746		
PV	0.588	0.335	0.675	0.760	0.910	PV	0.666	0.371	0.737	0.835	

Source: Author's own work

Structural model

The VIF values for the variables regarding collinearity were all below the threshold of 5.0, suggesting no issues with collinearity (Table 2).

The model fit with the sample data is robust, as evidenced by a Normed Fit Index (NFI) well above 0.7 and a Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) of 0.048, confirming good model fit. The author then assesses the structural model using the R-Square indicator, which ranges from 0.319 to 0.569, indicating moderate to substantial explanatory power.

The f^2 effect size values of all constructs range from 0.109 to 0.314, indicating effects ranging from small to large. The Blindfolding technique was employed to assess the model's predictive capability through the Q^2 coefficient. With Q^2 values ranging from 0.295 to 0.467, the proposed research model demonstrates from medium to high predictive accuracy.

To test the hypotheses, the significance of the association between variables was assessed using p-values. A bootstrap technique was used to examine the precision of the hypotheses (see Table 4).

Table 4: Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	β	t	p	f^2	Q^2	Conclusion
SM → AT	0.344	6.135	0.000	0.135	0.295	Supported H1
SM → PV	0.335	6.079	0.000	0.127	0.391	Supported H2
AT → GT	0.433	5.976	0.000	0.170	0.444	Supported H3
PV → GT	0.346	4.614	0.000	0.109		Supported H4
GT → GL	0.489	7.168	0.000	0.314	0.467	Supported H5
R-Squared: 0.319 (AT)						
R-Squared: 0.352 (PV)						
R-Squared: 0.535 (GL)						
R-Squared: 0.569 (GT)						

Source: Author's own work

The hypothesis testing results, as presented in Table 5, show that all proposed hypotheses were statistically supported. Specifically, exposure to sustainability content on social media was found to have a positive effect on pro-environmental attitude ($\beta = 0.344$, $p < 0.05$), thereby supporting H1. Likewise, exposure to sustainability content also positively influenced perceived value, supporting H2. Furthermore, pro-environmental attitude was found to positively affect green trust ($\beta = 0.433$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H3. In a similar vein, perceived value had a significant positive impact on Gen Z consumers' green trust ($\beta = 0.346$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H4. Finally, green trust was confirmed to have a positive influence on green lifestyle adoption ($\beta = 0.451$, $p < 0.05$), thereby supporting H5.

Conclusion

Social media has become an integral part of modern social life, particularly among urban youth. The findings revealed that exposure to sustainability content on social media positively influences green lifestyle adoption among Vietnamese Gen Z, supporting the SOR framework. Specifically, sustainable content acts as an external stimulus that shapes pro-environmental attitudes, perceived value of green products, and green trust, which subsequently encourage the adoption of green lifestyles.

Exposure to sustainability content on social media positively shapes Gen Z's attitudes toward green products. Sustainability-related messages conveyed through visual imagery, short-form videos, creative content, and influencer-generated posts can effectively capture attention and strongly influence consumers' cognitive and emotional responses. Frequent exposure to such content may enhance young consumers' awareness of environmental issues, thereby encouraging more favorable attitudes toward environmentally friendly consumption behaviors and green lifestyles. To foster positive consumer attitudes toward green products, businesses should develop digital communication strategies that incorporate messages related to environmental protection and sustainable development. Communication content should be designed in a creative, relatable, and highly interactive manner to align with Gen Z's content consumption patterns on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

Exposure to sustainable content on social media positively enhances young consumers' perceived value of green products. Gen Z often relies on social media platforms to search for information and evaluate products before making purchasing decisions. As a result, positive reviews, shared consumption experiences, and sustainability-related campaigns on social media can strengthen consumers' perceptions that green products not only fulfill personal needs but also generate broader environmental and social benefits. Consequently, consumers may perceive green products as more valuable than conventional alternatives. In response to this trend, businesses operating in the green product market should strengthen their digital communication strategies by emphasizing the practical benefits of green products, including health improvement, environmental protection, and contributions to sustainable development, rather than focusing solely on functional product attributes.

Pro-environmental attitudes play a significant role in strengthening Gen Z's trust in green products. To enhance consumer trust, businesses should communicate their environmental commitments more transparently by providing clear information regarding product origins, green production practices, and environmental certifications. Greater transparency and the use of credible eco-certifications can help reduce consumer skepticism and reinforce green trust. Furthermore, companies may adopt storytelling strategies that highlight sustainable production practices and corporate social responsibility initiatives to enhance perceived value and foster long-term trust in green brands among Generation Z. Businesses should also emphasize positive customer experiences through high product quality, eco-friendly packaging, and interactive environmental activities that encourage stronger consumer engagement with sustainability initiatives.

Perceived value positively influences Gen Z's green trust. When consumers recognize substantial value in green products, their trust in both the products and the associated brands is significantly enhanced. This relationship is particularly important in the context of increasing concerns over "greenwashing," which has made consumers more cautious

when evaluating environmental claims made by companies. Accordingly, businesses should prioritize enhancing the perceived value of green products by improving product quality, strengthening functional benefits, and ensuring environmental sustainability throughout the production and consumption process. In addition, companies should communicate more transparently and effectively about the specific health, environmental, and social benefits of green products to foster a more comprehensive understanding of their value among consumers.

Green trust positively influences Gen Z's acceptance of sustainable green lifestyles. When consumers believe that green products genuinely contribute to environmental protection, health improvement, and the reduction of negative social impacts, they are more likely to engage in environmentally responsible behaviors such as using eco-friendly products, recycling, conserving energy, and reducing unnecessary consumption. In the context of increasing corporate adoption of "green" strategies, trust becomes a critical factor that helps consumers distinguish between genuine sustainability commitments and greenwashing practices. Therefore, businesses should prioritize building and maintaining consumer trust by ensuring product quality, providing transparent information, and consistently fulfilling environmental commitments. The use of credible green certifications, transparent disclosure of raw material sources, and openness regarding production processes can further strengthen consumer trust, particularly among Gen Z consumers.

In addition, companies should incorporate communication strategies that highlight the practical benefits and positive impacts of green lifestyles on both individuals and society, thereby encouraging consumers to translate their intentions into actual behaviors. Interactive social media activities, such as green lifestyle challenges, recycling reward programs, and community-based environmental campaigns, may also help foster green lifestyle adoption among young consumers. At the same time, regulatory authorities should strengthen the monitoring and control of misinformation and greenwashing practices in the marketplace to maintain and reinforce long-term consumer trust in green products and brands.

Contributions and limitations of the study

Although social media has increasingly emerged as an important source of information on sustainable development and green consumption, research in this area remains relatively limited. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to extending the applicability of the SOR theory by examining the relationship between digital communication and sustainable consumption among young consumers in developing countries. From a practical perspective, the findings provide several important managerial implications for businesses and regulatory authorities. In particular, strengthening social media presence can improve public reach and consumer engagement, especially among Gen Z, thereby encouraging the adoption of sustainable green lifestyles.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the use of convenience sampling may limit the representativeness of the sample and, consequently, the generalizability of the findings. Future research should apply alternative sampling methods to validate the results. Second, the study only examines the overall impact of sustainable content on social media without considering differences between platforms or specific types of content. Therefore, future studies could extend the research scope by using longitudinal data, incorporating moderating or mediating variables, and comparing the effects of different social media platforms on consumers' green lifestyles.

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