
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sustainability claims on social media in relation to brand trust in teenagers

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| ABSTRACT

Concerns have arisen about the environmental impact of the fashion industry, which is facing exponential growth. In recent times, as a result, brands are increasingly prompted to utilise social media platforms for sustainable messaging, and findings show that Instagram and TikTok are the primary platforms for exposure. However, it has been noticed that a major portion of respondents encounter environmental messaging only occasionally despite the abundance of social media accessibility worldwide. Therefore, this study examines how this communication influences brand trust and consumer behaviour amongst the adolescent target demographic aged 13-19 in Singapore. Additionally, throughout the research, there is a deeper focus on authenticity and greenwashing awareness, which have been deemed as important factors to consider when discussing how teenagers and the Gen Z audience place their trust in brands today. An online survey was conducted via the process of convenience sampling, and a sample size of 50 adolescents aged 13-19 was requested on a voluntary basis to fill out the survey. The specific structure of the questions asked enabled the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. Additionally, as a result of the survey results, it was overall noticed that authenticity forms a robust link with transparency, consistency, and third-party validation in place of influencers and celebrity endorsements, which have become increasingly prevalent in recent years, and therefore, this suggests that for brands to engage a teenage consumer base, they must prioritise credibility, consistent communication and integrate environmental mindedness alongside competitive product appeal to bridge the gap between awareness, intention and action.

| KEYWORDS

Cognitive dissonance, Greenwashing, Sustainability, social media, Brand perception, Adolescents, Consumer behaviour

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Introduction

With a global net worth of \$1.84 trillion and a projected market value of \$1.26 billion in Singapore alone, the international fashion industry has been booming with a significant surge in its revenue (Cardona, 2025; Statista, n.d.). However, concerns have arisen in the context of this industry being a major driving force behind the emergence of pollution worldwide. Statistics claim that approximately 63% of the fashion brands around the world are falling behind on their 2030 decarbonization goals (Cardona, 2025) and in addition to this dilemma, the demand for clothing is forecasted to increase by nearly two-thirds by 2030 if consumer habits continue on their current trajectory (Cardona, 2025). Overall, this will result in intensified environmental pressures and possible impacts on the profit margins of such fashion labels. Moreover, in response to mounting consumer pressure and environmental urgency, numerous fashion labels, especially those targeting younger demographics, have begun publicizing sustainability initiatives.

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These include the prevalent use of recycled materials, reducing water consumption, ensuring ethical labour practices and achieving carbon neutrality. Additionally, common social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok and YouTube are considered to be key marketing tools, and brands often use these platforms to highlight their sustainability credentials. For teenagers, social media plays a massive role not only as a source of entertainment but also as a space where they learn about the world, form opinions, and make decisions. Therefore, understanding how sustainability messaging on these platforms affects brand trust and consumer behaviour among teenagers is increasingly important in both marketing and sustainability research.

Bridging the gap

This study adds to sustainability marketing and consumer psychology research by providing new evidence from an underexplored demographic of adolescents aged 13–18 in Singapore on how social media sustainability claims influence brand trust. It builds on a gap found in Asia-based teenage consumer research, as the majority of the previous studies were centred around Western or adult populations. Going further into its regional significance, this study also tests the impact of authenticity and third-party validation as opposed to influencer culture, thereby unravelling that credibility sourced from independent environmental organisations is more effective in honing in on brand trust. Therefore, by highlighting how adolescents navigate authenticity claims in sustainable messaging, this research advances understanding of the formation of digital trust in Asian contexts and offers practical guidance for brands aiming to engage this audience ethically and effectively.

Aims and objectives

Social media can be viewed as a malleable digital platform as it forms consumer perceptions through various campaigns sponsored by brands and influencers. Furthermore, as environmental literacy is becoming exponentially prevalent across the main social media platforms (Instagram and TikTok) and it is essential to examine how the target audience perceives and responds to such narratives.

The primary aim of this research is to investigate how sustainability messaging on social media influences brand trust and consumer behaviour among teenagers. To achieve this aim, the study sets out the following objectives:

To dive deeper into whether adolescents are aware of sustainability claims made by clothing brands on social media. Overall, this involves identifying the digital platforms on which they encounter such claims and the distinct messages that resonate with them.

To assess whether these ‘green’ claims have any impact on the measure of trust the target audience places in the brand. This includes investigating the processes involved in evaluating authenticity and whether trust is influenced by brand transparency, third-party endorsements and influencer involvement.

Overall, by investigating further into these two objectives, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital sustainability shapes consumer behaviour whilst offering indispensable implications for marketers, educators, and environmental activities.

Literature Review

This review addresses the concepts of fast fashion, digital media and environmental literacy, which are all focal points in understanding adolescent consumer behaviour. Brands that are currently facing mounting pressure to adopt such eco-friendly habits in their textile production are simultaneously aiming to increase their leverage on social media to promote green messaging.

Additionally, there are four central themes around which this review is organized.

Theme 1: The intersection of fast fashion and sustainability

Theme 2: The influence of social media platforms on teenagers' perception of authenticity

Theme 3: Role of influencers and third-party validation in shaping credibility

Theme 4: Impact of these factors on brand trust and consumer behaviour

Overall, these themes aid in establishing a framework for understanding the way in which sustainability claims on social media influence adolescent audiences in Singapore. Furthermore, through this lens, the review draws on existing academic sources to contextualize how teenage audiences perceive, evaluate and respond to sustainability narratives online.

Fast Fashion and Sustainability

The definition of fast fashion is the accelerated production of trend-driven, affordable clothing that rapidly responds to the latest fashion cycles. Prominent fast fashion labels include Shein, H&M and Zara as these companies have built highly profitable business models by leveraging immediacy-focused approaches, thereby enabling them to translate runway trends into mass-market clothing lines swiftly. There are various factors that contribute to the framework of the fast fashion construct, including individual belief systems, socioeconomic status, access to sustainable alternatives, and personal proximity to the social and environmental consequences of garment production (Sierra, 2024). Overall, this model fosters a consumer environment where speed and originality are prioritized over durability and ecological responsibility.

The intention–action gap in sustainable consumption

Survey evidence from a report from China reports that approximately 50% of GenZ shoppers aim to avoid fast fashion (UN Environment Program, 2018); however, market analysis conducted by McKinsey and Company (Balchandani et al., 2024) highlighted that a significant gap exists between action and intention. This directly aligns with the psychological phenomenon called the cognitive dissonance theory, wherein individuals experience discomfort when their actions conflict with their values or beliefs. Therefore, through an environmental lens,

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The Rise Of Sustainable Fashion

In spite of prevalent environmental messaging, eco-fashion struggles to gain popularity amongst consumers who prioritize visual appeals and style over ethical factors that play into the craftsmanship of the garment (Joy et al., 2012). Multiple studies have noted that the vast majority of consumers often see eco-fashion to be short of aesthetics or trend relevance, which has therefore translated into diminishing purchasing intention despite the ethical alignment. Furthermore, for sustainable fashion to evoke a futuristic change, it must be malleable towards the preferences of the target market. However, this suggests a modest optimism that with forward-thinking

modifications to sustainable fashion, progress can be made in terms of betterment of responsible consumption patterns (Joy et al., 2012).

The Role Of Corporations In The Prevalence Of Fast Fashion

"Sustainable fashion should become their dream, and all stakeholders in the fashion industry should strive toward this goal" (Joy et al., 2012). This statement highlights the tendency of modern business tycoons to restructure their narratives strategically. Businesses often involved in the emergence of fast fashion attain significant power to influence a change in the current status quo and to achieve the ubiquitous goal of many. This overall means that leading businesses in the industry can govern a new era of consumer behaviour and thus a potential change in the current consumerism trajectory.

Teenagers, Social Media, and Green Messaging

Contemporary society involves the abundant integration of technology and social platforms. Nearly 95% of teenagers are known to have smartphones, and amongst this portion, 45% of them are said to be utilizing these phones "almost all the time" (Ding & Li, 2023). Hence, the prevalence of social media platforms has now emerged as the primary battleground for sustainability messaging directed at teens, with each respective platform providing distinct affordances for message dissemination, engagement, and trust-building.

Instagram: Visual storytelling and product discovery

Through leveraging highly visual, lifestyle-oriented content to integrate sustainability narratives into aspiration imagery, Instagram has stood out as one of the most widely used platforms amongst younger demographics (Montag et al., 2021). Data from the industry suggests that 61% of users discover products on the platform (Zote, 2025), thereby highlighting its commercial potential. However, it has been noted by critics that Instagram curates an emphasis on aesthetics, which may thereby encourage superficial engagement with environmental mindedness positioned as the focal trend in place of honing in on value.

TikTok: Participatory culture and in-app commerce

TikTok fosters a participatory culture. It is known to be driven by trends, challenges, and viral frameworks that have created a rapid amplification of opportunities for sustainability awareness (Leaver et al., 2020). The app attains an integrated TikTok shop feature, which further enhances the convenience factor for users along the purchasing pathway, thereby enabling a direct conversion from content to consumption. Although this immediacy can benefit sustainable brands. The platform's rapid content cycles and algorithmic patterns pose a risk to diluting complex sustainability narratives in favour of entertainment-oriented engagement.

YouTube: Long-form content and deeper engagement

Educational sustainability has the potential to thrive on YouTube as this platform supports in-depth, long-form video formats that have been known to foster greater knowledge retention and attitudinal shifts (Evans et al., 2017). However, audience engagement has been noticeably slower to build as the platform competes with higher-frequency ones like TikTok. Additionally, algorithmic curation may limit exposure to diverse sustainability perspectives.

Opportunities and risks of social media sustainability campaigns

Social media serves as a dominant green marketing tool, which offers both opportunities for mass communication across parties and engagement. However, there are risks of reputational harm. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube alike are perceived as authentic, which is critical, especially with messages seen as exaggerated, inconsistent, or opportunistic. These types of messages can provoke a rapid backlash (Vraga & Bode, 2017).

Furthermore, in spite of the excessive use of these platforms for sustainability promotion, there lies a limited comparative research on how platform-agnostic features influence a teenager's perception of 'green' claims, a gap which this paper seeks to address.

Influencers' Credibility And Teen Perception

Influencers lie at the heart of the social media ecosystem. According to Djafarova & Rushworth (2017), online celebrities are perceived as more relatable than traditional celebrities. This is because online celebrities possess certain factors that enhance their persuasive power in digital marketing, thereby fostering a culture of changing adolescent consumer behaviour. Additionally, peer validation and identity exploration play an important role in the malleability of adolescent consumer behaviour, especially those in the developmental stage (Lee, 2009).

However, recent studies have shown that social media figures with a smaller yet increasingly engaged following, often referred to as micro-influencers in comparison to high-profile celebrities, are more effectively cultivating brand trust and driving environmentally responsible purchasing behaviour than celebrity endorsers due to their closer proximity to followers and generally less commercialized image (Marques et al., 2020).

Furthermore, (Ata et al., 2022) attests that such micro-influencers resonate strongly with younger audiences who tend to be skeptical of over-advertising and seek genuine, transparent endorsements. As such, credibility among teen audiences hinges not only on the platform but also on the perceived integrity and authenticity of the messenger.

Social Media Influence on Sustainability Perceptions

Statements about a product or a company's commitment to environmental or social responsibility are referred to as sustainability claims. These can serve as powerful brand unique selling points, especially amongst younger consumers who have a heightened environmental awareness (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Seele & Gatti, 2017). However, the literature cautions that generic or unsupported claims have given rise to skepticism and accusation of 'greenwashing' (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). (Seele and Gatti (2017)) argue that verifiable claims made with credible certifications (e.g., Fairtrade, Organic) can enhance the trust factor, while ambiguous content can erode it. In recent times, the trends and patterns show that authentic engagement, such as transparent behind-the-scenes content and direct responses to consumer inquiries, is what works.

Teenagers as a Distinct Consumer Group

Teenagers form a unique and influential consumer group, and research indicates that this age group is especially receptive to brand messaging and using sustainability as a form of self-expression (Lee, 2009; Oprilyani et al., 2024). Furthermore, research into cognitive development suggests that evaluation skills, including:

1. skepticism of advertising claims
2. social signalling of certain individuals

All mature throughout adolescence as teenagers have adapted themselves towards discerning between genuine eco-claims and superficial marketing tactics (Pechmann et al., 2005).

Emerging Anti-Consumerism Among Youth

According to "Fast Fashion, Sustainability, and the Ethical Appeal of Luxury Brands" (n.d.), it highlights the rise of anti-consumerism within contemporary consumer behaviour. It was said that "some consumers, however, are disenchanted with mindless consumption and its impact on society." This captures the growing sentiments amongst

individuals who reject the fast fashion construct and digital marketing. The main point of this is that it reflects a shift towards intentional consumption behaviour, which involves consumers actively distinguishing themselves from unsustainable purchasing habits in favour of socially ethical alternatives.

The Prevalence Of Greenwashing

Greenwashing can be defined as a deceptive marketing practice wherein companies falsely present their products, services, or corporate practices as environmentally friendly without significant action. Over time, an increasing number of companies have begun adopting non-eco-friendly habits that have led to the deterioration of the environmental challenges we face today in the textile production industry. (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020) identifies 4 main greenwashing practices that have been derived from how and where the false proclamations are made.

Firm-level execution: Branding using certain logos, colours, images, or symbols that seem ‘green’ without real action

Firm-level claim: making false company-wide claims concerning sustainability

Product-level execution: using the design or packaging to make the business seem environmentally-friendly at a product level

Product-level claim: making specific claims about a product’s environmental benefits that are false or misleading

Moreover, as greenwashing practices are becoming increasingly prevalent, the spread of misinformation, sponsored content and undisclosed partnerships are simultaneously contributing to the public skepticism factor behind this phenomenon (Bode & Vraga, 2018).

Brand Trust and Consumer Loyalty

Thousands of campaigns emerge on our social media feeds daily; however, it isn't simple to determine the legitimacy of each piece of content as some can be considered a hoax as a means of generating revenue and brand awareness. It is known that brand trust is the level of confidence the consumer places in a business’s reliability, integrity and honesty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Rahman et al., 2021).

A research method involving gathering data from real-world evidence rather than theory is referred to as an empirical study. Hence, these studies suggest that trust is an important predictor of brand loyalty, which thereby influences purchasing decisions and advocacy (Chen & Chang, 2013; Ebrahim, 2019).

Additionally, when brands use credible and trustworthy sustainability claims, it has been noted that it fosters enhanced and enduring consumer relationships (Filip et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025), which, in the long run, aids in benefiting a company’s long-term profitability. Furthermore, trust can be broken down into one that is affective (emotionally driven) and cognitive (logically driven). Such multifaceted mechanisms are what help to bolster a brand’s status amongst the youth demographic (Zhao et al., 2021).

The Problem Statement

Numerous brands now make sustainability claims online; however, their genuine impact on consumer perception and behaviour remains vague, especially amongst the adolescent consumer group. From these consumers, a significant portion view these claims with skepticism, thereby concerned about greenwashing, whilst others may trust such statements but fail to produce actionable results due to competing factors like price, peer influence or style. And therefore, the existing literature highlights a critical gap in understanding how teenagers as a distinct

demographic process and respond to sustainability claims of social media, thereby necessitating a focused examination of their perceptions, attitudes and behaviours in this context. To address the gap, the research will conduct a focused examination of the importance of sustainable messaging and how various factors contribute to the target demographic's brand perceptions.

Methodology

Several global clothing brands have recently highlighted their sustainability practices related to the production of the garments they manufacture. However, are these proclamations Green or just seen? This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the contradiction between how the adolescent consumer target demographic places their trust in sustainability claims and whether these campaigns are solely created as superficial marketing strategies aimed at increasing brand appeal and profits.

To investigate the crux of this matter, an online survey was conducted using Google Forms. Furthermore, a digital outreach method was adopted, and the survey was sent to the target audience of individuals aged 13-19 residing solely in Singapore. This specific inclusion criterion aids in capturing a critical development period where major psychological, social, and behavioural changes occur amongst such adolescents, and studying this range of observations can lead to new insights within the same cultural context. For the sampling method, a non-probability convenience sampling method was adopted. The way in which the survey was circulated was that the questionnaire was sent out digitally using Google Forms. A link to the survey was shared with the target audience via social media messaging platforms, specifically Instagram. This method helped increase reach, making it easier for respondents to complete the questionnaire on their personal devices, thereby enhancing convenience.

This approach was chosen due to time and resource constraints, while still enabling targeted outreach to the desired demographic. Another inclusion criterion was a sample size of 50 adolescents (N= 50), as it provides a reliable platform in terms of depth and breadth. It makes the data analysis large enough to display general patterns, trends, and gather meaningful insights, while still being small enough to ensure a detailed analysis of individual data points. Overall, this sample size enables a statistically meaningful and pragmatically manageable data collection process, allowing deeper analysis parameters without being too complex.

The survey itself assessed a wide array of factors, from participants' trust levels in brands to their awareness of greenwashing practices. In the context of the formulation of the survey questions, a variety of question types were used, such as the Likert scale, multiple choice, and open-ended responses. This variety keeps the survey dynamic and allows for both quantitative comparisons and richer qualitative insights. Additionally, the questions were clear and written in casual language that resonates with teens. Therefore, technical jargon was avoided to prevent confusion and erroneous data gathering.

However, considering the limitations of this method of sampling is also essential to analyze. As convenience sampling was used, a potential bias can occur as participants may not exactly represent the wider population. Additionally, because the sample is not randomly selected, the findings may reflect the specific traits or opinions of this group rather than the broader adolescent population. Therefore, the results were interpreted with caution and viewed as exploratory rather than conclusive.

Overall, a survey method was chosen to gather data as it enables the efficient collection of standardized information from a dispersed adolescent audience, and the online format aligns with the digital habits of this age group as well.

Responsible Data Collection Methods

Moreover, to attain responsible data collection, the responses collected were kept anonymous and confidential, with no identifiable information linked to the participants' responses in this final report. Secondly, participation was completely voluntary, and participants were aware that they could withdraw at any given point in time. Lastly, a

major factor in creating the survey questions was to minimize psychological discomfort among the participants; therefore, the questions asked were not triggering or sensitive and were mainly closed-ended.

Analysis Methods Specific To The Survey Questions

Question	Question Type	Analysis Approach	How to Analyze
Age	Multiple choice (single answer)	Frequencies & Percentages	Count how many respondents are in each age group and calculate percentages. Use as demographic data.
On which social media platforms do you encounter sustainable marketing for clothing brands? (Tick all that apply)	Multiple choice (multiple answers)	Multiple Response Frequencies & Percentages	Count how many times each platform is selected; calculate the % of respondents who use each platform.
How often do you actively use social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok?	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers to scale (e.g., 1 = Never, 5 = Very Often), calculate mean score, and show frequency distribution.
How important are sustainability claims to you when choosing clothing brands?	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate the mean importance score, and show how many respondents chose each point.
It is important for clothing brands to be transparent about their sustainability practices.	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate a mean agreement score, and the frequency distribution.
How often do you see posts from clothing brands about their sustainable practices on social media?	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate the mean frequency, and show the frequency distribution.
Sustainability is one of the top three factors I consider when buying clothes.	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate the mean score, and show the distribution.
I am more likely to engage (like, share, comment) on posts about sustainable fashion than other brand content.	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate mean engagement likelihood, and show distribution.

When you see sustainability messages on social media, how likely are you to research more about the brand?	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate the mean likelihood, and show the distribution.
Who do you trust most when it comes to sustainability claims by clothing brands? (Select all that apply)	Multiple choice (multiple answers)	Multiple Response Frequencies	Count how many times each option is selected; calculate % of respondents choosing each.
What makes a sustainability message feel authentic on social media?	Open-ended	Thematic Coding	Read all responses, group into themes (e.g., transparency, evidence, brand history), count frequency of each theme.
I'm more likely to stay loyal to a brand if I believe they care about the environment.	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate the mean loyalty score, and show the distribution.
Have you ever stopped buying from a clothing brand because you didn't trust their sustainability claims?	Yes/No	Frequencies & Percentages	Count "Yes" and "No" responses; calculate percentages.
How important is a brand's sustainability messaging on social media in shaping your long-term opinion of them?	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate the mean importance score, and show the distribution.
Which matters more for long-term brand loyalty?	Multiple choice (single answer)	Frequencies & Percentages	Count responses for each option and calculate percentages.
I worry that some clothing brands use sustainability as a marketing tactic without making real changes.	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate the mean agreement score, and show the distribution.
I know what "greenwashing" means and can identify it when I see it.	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies + Cross-Tabulation	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate mean awareness, and cross-tabulate with trust levels to see correlation.

I have seen brands claim to be sustainable, but act in ways that contradict those claims.	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate the mean score, and show the distribution.
Seeing conflicting information about a brand’s sustainability makes me trust them less.	Likert scale	Average & Frequencies	Assign numbers (1–5), calculate the mean trust drop, and show the distribution.

Analysis and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey responses were primarily concentrated in the 15–17 age range, with age 16 forming the largest group (42% of respondents) (n= 21). Only 4% of participants (n= 2) were aged 13, and 8% (n = 4) aged 19, ensuring perspectives from both younger and older ends of the adolescent spectrum. This distribution provides insights from a cohort that shares similar stages of social development while also incorporating diversity across the selected age range.

Social Media Use and Exposure to Sustainability Messaging

Frequency	% value	Number value where (n = x)
Always	37.8%	n = 19
Often	54.1%	n = 27
Sometimes	6.1%	n = 3
Rarely	2%	n = 1
Never	0%	n = 0

When asked how often the target audience uses social media, over half of the respondents (n=27) reported doing so “often,” aligning with Geiger’s (2024) finding that 45% of adolescents are “almost always” on their phones.

On which social media platforms do you encounter sustainable marketing for clothing brands? Tick all that apply
50 responses

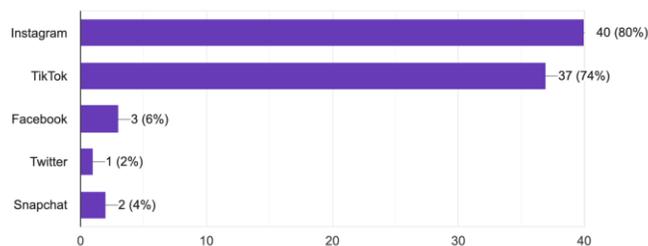


Fig 1.1

Instagram emerged as the dominant platform for exposure to sustainable fashion marketing as seen in Fig 1.1 , cited by 80% of respondents (n = 40) , followed by TikTok at 74% (n = 37). This reflects Instagram’s role in visual brand storytelling (Montag et al., 2021) and TikTok’s participatory culture (Leaver et al., 2020) as key channels for brand communication. However, despite this platform's engagement, sustainability messaging was not consistently encountered. Nearly half (49%) (n = 24) reported seeing such posts only “sometimes,” 14.3% (n = 7) “often,” and none (n = 0) “always.” This irregular exposure limits the potential for repeated reinforcement, which is often necessary to influence long-term attitudes (Vraga & Bode, 2017). The lack of consistent content represents a missed opportunity for brands to engage an increasingly environmentally aware audience.

Impact on Brand Trust and Loyalty

Question: Who do you trust most when it comes to sustainability claims by clothing brands? (Select all that apply)

An entity in which consumers place their trust the most	% value	Number value where (n = x)
The brand itself	55.1	27
Influencers/Creators	22.4	11
Friends or peers	49	24
Environmental organisations	63.3	31
Celebrities	14.3	7
News/Media outlets	26.5	13
I don't trust any source	4.1	2

The results show that 63.3% (n = 31) place their trust in sustainability claims coming directly from third-party, environmental organizations rather than celebrity figures (14.3%)(n = 7) and influencers (22.4%) (n = 11). This data, directly correlates with an article by (Marques et al., 2020), which discusses that relatable micro-influencers (social media figures with smaller but more engaged followings), in comparison to high-profile celebrities, are

more effectively cultivating brand trust and driving sustainability-related purchase behavior than celebrity endorsers or inauthentic brand partners due to their closer perceived proximity to followers and their generally less commercialized image. Although a significant portion still trusts brands themselves, the reliance on outside validation (like environmental organizations) suggests a desire for transparency and accountability in sustainability messaging. Therefore, relatively low trust in influencers and celebrities reflects growing consumer awareness of potential biases in sponsored content, which can be seen as a symbol of hope that consumers are becoming environmentally aware.

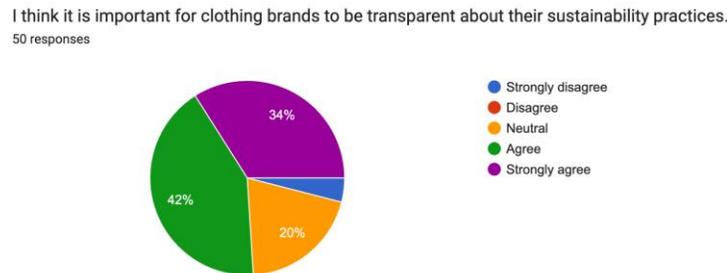


Fig 1.2

Fig 1.2 indicates that of the 50 respondents, 42% (n = 21) agree and 34% (n = 17) strongly agree that clothing brands must be transparent about their sustainability practices. On the other hand, however, the 20% (n = 10) indicated that they are “neutral” which creates a sense of ambivalence regarding this matter, as some consumers may think that for the brand to openly claim that it produces ecologically, it should provide evidence; however, simultaneously, from an entrepreneurial standpoint, not being transparent about sustainability practices can prevent a business from having to deal with PR (public relations) problems. Overall, the data demonstrates a clear expectation from consumers for brands to openly communicate their sustainability efforts, highlighting transparency as a key factor in building trust and credibility.

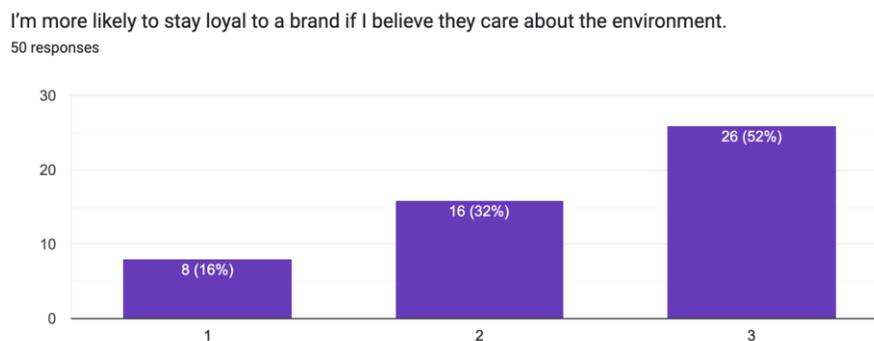


Fig 1.3

In Fig 1.3, more than half of the respondents (n = 25) selected a 3, and therefore, this shows that the target audience views environmental responsibility as a significant factor in brand loyalty. It is not just a bonus for the consumers but a core expectation; therefore, by interpreting this data, it can be attested that when brands actively care for the environment rather than passively, it evokes a stronger and longer-lasting relationship with their consumers and enhances the brand loyalty

Have you ever stopped buying from a clothing brand because you didn't trust their sustainability claims?
50 responses

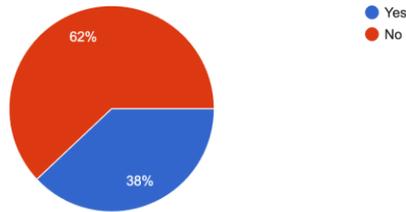


Fig 1.4

Whilst a significant 38% (n = 19) of individuals actively refrain from purchasing from brands if they suspect “greenwashing”, 62% (n = 31) show that they buy such garments regardless of the claims as shown in the pie chart (Fig 1.4). This thereby suggests that although a majority do not take immediate action, a large minority does. This links back to how consumers view sustainability and brand loyalty. While people reward brands that display genuine care for the environment, a substantial portion of them are quick to walk away from dishonest claims. This suggests that authentic sustainability practices build loyalty; however, trust erodes it just as quickly.

Question: Which matters more for long-term brand loyalty?

Factor	% Value	Number value where (n = x)
Quality and style	90%	45
Price	68%	34
Sustainability and ethical practices	48%	24
Social media presence	4%	4
Trendiness and Popularity	20%	20

Based on the cross tab, quality and style were voted as the number one priority, with 90% (n = 45) of the voters electing it. This provides brands with an understanding of their consumer needs and wants and tells them that aesthetics and quality are foundational to retaining customers. Additionally, 68% (n = 34) of respondents view price as the second priority to the emergence of eco-friendly fashion. Oftentimes, the visual appeal of sustainable fashion is said to be “dull and boring” (Joy et al., 2012). While the prices are kept high to ensure that a brand gets a profit

since the production costs for eco-fashion are normally quite high. This is also a driving reason as to why sustainable clothing is not as prevalent in society as it should be. Furthermore, only 20% (n = 10) chose this, implying that staying "in style" isn't enough to keep long-term loyalty. It may attract initial attention, but not lasting commitment.

Seeing conflicting information about a brand's sustainability makes me trust them less.
50 responses

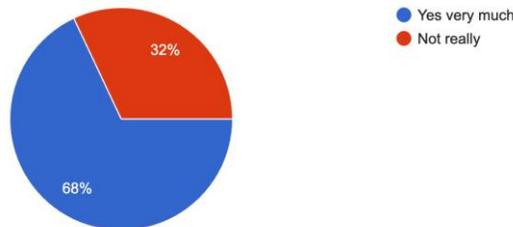


Fig 1.5

From Fig 1.5, it can be asserted that the majority of the respondents (68%) (n = 34), it can be interpreted that there is a clear expectation from the target audience for transparency, accountability, and consistency from brands in their ethical messaging. However, the minority (32%) (n = 16) of individuals, which is nearly a third of the respondents, are not significantly affected by inconsistent sustainable messaging as they may prioritize other factors such as price and quality, or may not be a part of the demographic that is actively engaged with ethical branding narratives.

Counterarguments, greenwashing concerns, and teen perceptions on sustainability claims

I worry that some clothing brands use sustainability as a marketing tactic without making real changes.
50 responses

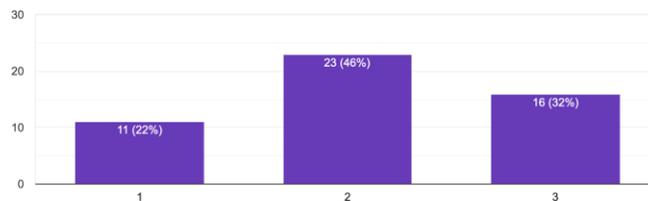


Fig 1.6

As seen in Fig 1.6, the question assesses the essence of whether or not the target audience is concerned about greenwashing claims. A total of 78% (n = 39) of the 50 respondents chose 2 and 3, which thereby indicates some extent to which they have concern for greenwashing practices made by brands. In relation, the majority of the respondents elected 2, which suggests that although consumers are not completely cynical, they are cautiously questioning the authenticity of said sustainability claims. However, the minority of respondents (22%) (n = 11) seem to trust that brands are genuine, or at least aren't worried about deceptive sustainability claims. This may indicate that some consumers still give brands the benefit of the doubt, or perhaps aren't as engaged with sustainability issues.

I know what "greenwashing" means and can identify it when I see it.

49 responses

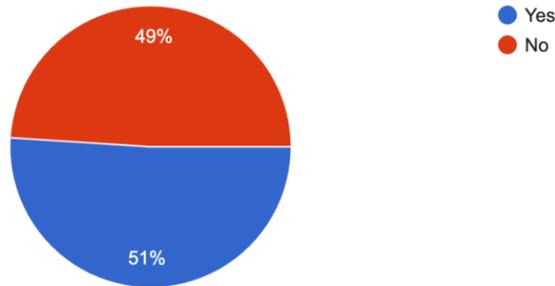


Fig 1.7

Fig 1.7 illustrates the responses to the statement, "I know what 'greenwashing' is and can identify it when I see it." Results were nearly evenly split, with 51.0% (n = 26) of respondents indicating "Yes" and 49.0% (n = 24) answering "No." This suggests that awareness of the term greenwashing and the ability to recognize it are relatively balanced among participants. While the slight majority who claim they can identify such practices reflects a modest level of environmental literacy, the nearly equal proportion who cannot underscores the need for greater education and awareness on the topic.

Building on this, when respondents were asked about the broader influence of sustainability in their purchasing decisions, the findings revealed that awareness does not always translate into action. Out of 50 participants (N = 50), 38.0% (n = 19) ranked sustainability as one of their top priorities, while a majority of 56.0% (n = 28) considered it a secondary but still relevant factor. Only 6.0% (n = 3) reported that sustainability had little influence on their choices. These results indicate that, although many adolescents are conscious of environmental issues such as greenwashing, their purchasing behaviour remains primarily guided by practical considerations like price, style, and convenience, reinforcing the persistent intention–action gap identified in prior research.

Conclusion

This study examined how sustainability messaging on social media influences brand trust and consumer behavior among teenagers in Singapore, with a focus on identifying the factors that shape authenticity perceptions and loyalty. The findings reveal that while adolescent audiences are highly active on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, exposure to sustainability-related content remains inconsistent, limiting opportunities for sustained engagement.

Through the survey conducted, participants demonstrated a clear preference for messages backed by credible, independent validation, particularly from third-party environmental organizations, over claims made by brands, celebrities, or influencers. Transparency, consistency, and evidence-based communication emerged as core drivers of trust, echoing existing literature on source credibility and verifiable claims.

However, purchase behaviour is still primarily influenced by quality, style, and price, underscoring the persistence of the intention-action gap, where stated environmental values do not always lead to ethical purchasing decisions. Furthermore, awareness of greenwashing was mixed, with nearly half of respondents unable to define the term, yet a majority recognized its practice in brand communications. This highlights the importance of consumer education, as greater literacy around deceptive marketing could increase scrutiny and push brands toward more authentic sustainability strategies.

Some possible limitations of this research could be the sample size. As it only accounted for 50 adolescents based in Singapore, it may not completely capture the heterogeneity of socio-economic backgrounds, school types, and cultural differences that shape consumer perceptions. Additionally, differences in algorithmic exposure and content formats were not thoroughly analyzed through this review. This may have repressed the understanding of how platform technicalities influence message credibility.

Ultimately, sustainability messaging holds moderate influence over teenagers' long-term brand perceptions, generating curiosity but rarely immediate behavioural change. For brands, this suggests that while sustainability narratives can strengthen trust and differentiate them in the marketplace, they must be integrated with competitive style, quality, and pricing to translate interest into loyalty. Consistency across platforms, alignment between claims and actions, and partnerships with credible validators are essential to bridging the gap between awareness and action among this demographic.

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