Role of Social Media in building Consumer attitudes towards Sustainable FMCG & Consumer goods branding: The mediating role of Brand Trust

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Abstract: The growing significance of sustainability has compelled the FMCG and consumer goods firms to consider using social media as one of the main means of reaching consumers and advocating environmentally friendly behavior. This paper researches how the Social Media Engagement, User-Generated Content and Influencer Persuasiveness affect consumer Purchase Intention when the mediating variable is Brand Trust. Structured questionnaire was used to gather data on 202 subjects in Chennai city. Regression-based mediation was used according to Baron and Kenny method, and the value of indirect effects was tested with the help of the Sobel test.

The findings demonstrate that Social Media Engagement and User-Generated Content have a significant role in Purchase Intention both directly and indirectly, mediated by Brand Trust, which implies partial mediation. Influencer Persuasiveness, in its turn, has a direct impact on Purchase Intention, and does not affect Brand Trust. The predictive power of Brand Trust itself was established as high.

The paper emphasizes the role of integrating trust-building, including consumer engagement and peer content, and persuasive influencer-based approaches to enhance sustainable branding activities. The results offer practical implications to FMCG companies in developing a viable social media strategy that create credibility, trust, and sustainable consumer behavior.

Keywords: Sustainable branding, FMCG, Social media, Brand trust, Influencer persuasiveness, User-generatedcontent, Purchase intention, Chennai

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is an issue that has gained critical importance in the past years both to businesses and consumers, especially consumers in the FMCG and consumer goods market. As more people become aware of the issues surrounding the environment and social responsibility, the brands are experiencing pressure to ensure that their practices are in line with the pursuit of sustainability. Meanwhile, social media has become one of the strongest means of reaching consumers, influencing consumer attitudes, and making purchasing decisions. Social media gives the brand a chance to interact directly with the audiences, increase the peer-generated content, and cooperate with the influencers to popularize sustainable products. Nevertheless, the success of these strategies to create trust and purchase intentions towards sustainable FMCG products is also a valuable field of research.

Problem Statement
As much as FMCG firms are increasingly engaging in sustainability-based campaigns on social media, consumers tend to be skeptical and worry about green washing, which tend to restrict its impact. It remains unclear whether brand-led engagement, user generated content, or influencer promotion are perceived by the consumers as an effective source of information regarding sustainability. Moreover, although trust is commonly perceived as the significant variable in consumer decision-making, little is known about how the brand trust and the social media communication interact to impact the product purchase intentions in terms of sustainable FMCG branding.

Objectives of the Study
1. Examine the direct influence of social media engagement, influencer persuasiveness, and user-generated content on purchase intention Peer of sustainable FMCG brands.

2. Determine how these factors of social media affect brand trust.
3. Investigate the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between social media factors and purchase intention.
4. Provide managerial recommendations for FMCG firms to leverage social media effectively for sustainable branding.

Research Gap

Although the current literature confirms the role of social media engagement, the persuasiveness of the influencers, and user-generated content in brand trust and purchase intentions, most of the studies have analyzed the variables separately or under general digital marketing settings as opposed to the sustainable FMCG industry. Little literature focuses on how these drivers of social media work in combination to create consumer attitudes towards sustainable brands. Also, the importance of brand trust is frequently discussed, but little attention is given to its mediating influence between social media use and actual purchase intention in the framework of the sustainability-oriented branding of FMCGs. This poses a requirement of empirical studies that combine these forces into a single model in order to have a better comprehension of social media influence on consumer attitudes on sustainable purchase behaviors.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The emergence of social media has changed the way consumers and brands relate with each other especially in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry where competition is fierce, and customers often make buying behaviors routine. One of the most important triggers in consumer attitudes and buying behaviors is set to be the social media engagement. Engagement enhances closer consumer-brand relationships and has a positive impact on purchase intention among the customer groups. Studies indicate that the engagement stimulated by either discounts, trends, or loyalty drives the trust and purchase intention (Matin et al., 2020). The interaction between social media strategies and decision-making in FMCG is also partially mediated by consumer engagement, as the latter emphasizes interactive involvement (Sharma & Menka, 2023). Additional insights indicate that interaction via user-created contests leads to greater actual purchasing habits as it enhances more interest in the brands (Malthouse et al., 2016).

Consumer trust and consumer purchasing behaviors are also influenced by the persuasiveness of the influencer, especially in branding of an FMCG. Such aspects as credibility, attractiveness of the influencer and expertise are influential factors, which affect the consumer decision-making. YouTube influencers were identified as particularly convincing when it comes to the Ghanaian FMCG market and the formation of a purchasing pattern (Bansah et al., 2023). In the same way, social media influencers raise intentions to purchase through the promotion of brand trust and authenticity (Zafar et al., 2025). In sustainable branding, influencer credibility is essential in establishing consumer confidence and participation especially in the promotion of products that are eco-friendly (Sipos, 2024).

It has also been found that user-generated content can have a more significant impact on brand trust and loyalty and also purchase intention. UGC lets people genuinely contribute to communities, creating a community and strengthening brand relationships. Research proves that UGC is a great way to enhance the level of trust and the intention to buy (Niu, 2025). In addition, UGC proves to be more efficient in raising purchase intention than brand-generated posts because it does not provoke the feeling of consumer skepticism (Mayrhofer et al., 2019). UGC is consistent with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to consume sustainable products in the context of sustainable consumption (Hasbullah et al., 2020).

Research reveals that the trust in the brand along with the brand image enhances the positive association between consumer purchase intentions and social media marketing activities in FMCG market (Abdullah, Yulianto, & Nugruho, 2025). In the same way, social presence factors and consumer-generated content are directly positively related to brand trust, which consequently improves engagement and purchase intention (George and Joseph, 2023).

It can be concluded that social media activity, influencer credibility and user-generated content have a beneficial impact on consumer attitudes and purchase intention, especially when it comes to FMCG and sustainable branding. Brand trust is always found to be the most important mediator that helps to change these social media interactions into purchase behavior, thus it is core to effective sustainable branding strategies.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used a quantitative and cross-sectional survey design to examine how social media communication affects consumer intention to purchase sustainable FMCG brands and the mediating variable was brand trust.

The target group was a group of active social media users in the city of Chennai that has potential consumers of the FMCG products and the information was gathered using a structured questionnaire. The sampling method adopted was snowball sampling, in which the respondents to the survey were asked to distribute the survey link to their networks. The reason behind the use of this approach was that the study specifically sought to engage digitally active consumers, and snowballing is a good technique of reaching such populations which are otherwise hard to access with the traditional probability sampling techniques. There was a total of 202 valid responses that were collected and subjected to analysis.

The research factored in three independent variables, i.e. Social Media Engagement, Influencer Persuasiveness, and User-Generated Content where Brand Trust is mediating variable with Purchase Intention being dependent variable.
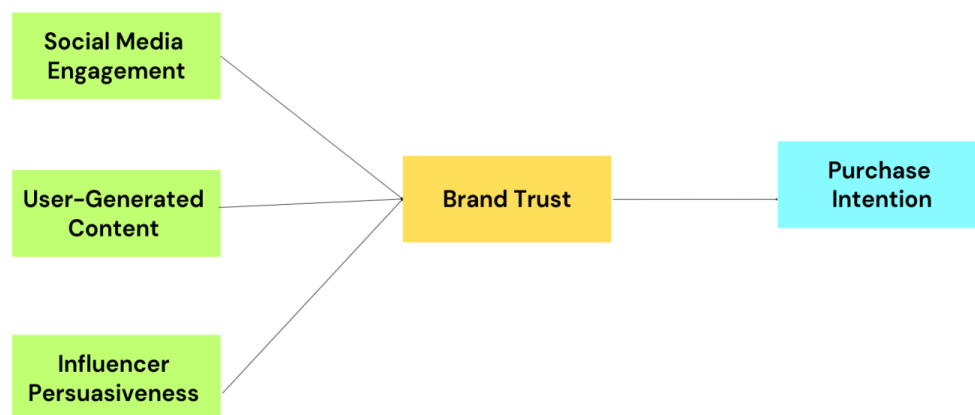
Five statements on 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree) were used to measure each construct, adapted from a validated source as appropriate. Cronbach alpha was used to determine reliability. The hypotheses were tested using a regression analysis to measure both the direct influence of independent variables on the purchase intention and the indirect influence through brand trust respectively. The Sobel test was used to justify the importance of indirect effects and the mediation process of Baron and Kenny (1986) was undertaken.

IV. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The social media users in Chennai were sampled to obtain 202 responses. The younger cohorts dominated the sample with most of them being in the 18-24 and 25-34 age brackets which constituted almost 69% of the respondents. Respondents around the middle age comprised a smaller proportion and only a few individuals were older than 45 years. Such distribution is due to the fact that younger consumers are the majority on social media and more likely to pay attention to brand communication about sustainability. The gender ratio was balanced with a bit of male dominance.

In terms of income, the highest proportion of the respondents came in the range of Rs.25,000 to 50,000 monthly income, and the second category was lower than Rs.25,000 incomes. A lower proportion of 14.9% was those with above Rs.1,00,000 income. This means that the sample is mostly a representative of the lower- to middle-income group of consumers.

Reliability analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Media Engagement	0.814
User Generated Content	0.711
Influencer Persuasiveness	0.798
Purchase Intention (DV)	0.802
Brand Trust (Mediator)	0.831

All constructs reported values well above the recommended threshold of **0.70** (Nunnally, 1978), indicating good reliability.

Regression 1: **Effects of Independent Variables on Purchase Intention**

The first regression model examined the direct influence of **Social Media Engagement (SME)**, **User-Generated Content (UGC)**, and **Influencer Persuasiveness (IP)** on **Purchase Intention (PI)**.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.722ᵃ	.521	.514	.75798
a. Predictors: (Constant), IP, UGC, SME				

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	123.931	3	41.310	71.902	.000ᵇ
	Residual	113.759	198	.575		
	Total	237.689	201			
a. Dependent Variable: PI						
b. Predictors: (Constant), IP, UGC, SME						

The regression results show that the predictors collectively explained **52.1% of the variance in Purchase Intention (R^2 = .521)**, and the overall regression equation was statistically significant (**F = 71.902, p < .001**).

Coefficient Analysis:

H1: Social Media Engagement (SME) has a positive effect on Purchase Intention (PI).
H2: User Generated Content (UGC) has a positive effect on Purchase Intention (PI).
H3: Influencer Persuasiveness (IP) has a positive effect on Purchase Intention (PI).

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.051	.262		-.195	.846
	SME	.405	.053	.418	7.635	.000
	UGC	.356	.052	.372	6.892	.000
	IP	.258	.075	.175	3.455	.001
a. Dependent Variable: PI						

H1 supported: SME has the strongest effect (β = .418, p < .001), confirming its role in shaping sustainable purchase intentions.

H2 supported: UGC significantly predicts PI (β = .372, p < .001), showing peer-generated content drives consumer decisions.

H3 supported: IP has a positive but comparatively weaker effect (β = .175, p = .001), suggesting influencers impact purchase intentions, though less than SME and UGC.

Together, these findings confirm **all three hypotheses (H1–H3)** and establish that social media engagement, user-generated content, and influencer persuasiveness directly enhance purchase intentions.

Regression 2: Direct Effects of Independent Variables on Brand Trust

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.692ᵃ	.479	.471	.85778
a. Predictors: (Constant), IP, UGC, SME				

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	133.875	3	44.625	60.650	.000ᵇ
	Residual	145.684	198	.736		
	Total	279.560	201			
a. Dependent Variable: BT						
b. Predictors: (Constant), IP, UGC, SME						

The regression results show that the predictors collectively explained **47.9% of the variance in Brand Trust (R² = .479)**, and the overall regression equation was statistically significant (**F = 60.650, p < .001**).

Coefficient Analysis:
H4: Social Media Engagement (SME) positively influences Brand Trust (BT).
H5: User-Generated Content (UGC) positively influences Brand Trust (BT).
H6: Influencer Persuasiveness (IP) positively influences Brand Trust (BT).

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.568	.297		1.914	.057
	SME	.381	.060	.363	6.356	.000
	UGC	.484	.058	.466	8.286	.000
	IP	-.046	.084	-.029	-.547	.585
a. Dependent Variable: BT						

H4 supported: SME significantly and positively predicts BT ($\beta = .363$, $p < .001$), confirming that consumer engagement with brand-related content fosters higher trust.
H5 supported: UGC is the strongest predictor of BT ($\beta = .466$, $p < .001$), highlighting that peer-generated content plays a crucial role in building brand trust in sustainable FMCG and consumer goods.
H6 not supported: IP does not significantly predict BT ($\beta = -.029$, $p = .585$). This indicates that while influencers may persuade consumers directly, their persuasiveness does not enhance trust toward sustainable brands.

Regression 3: Effects of Independent Variables and Brand Trust on Purchase Intention

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.780[a]	.609	.601	.68703
a. Predictors: (Constant), BT, IP, SME, UGC				

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	144.704	4	36.176	76.643	.000[b]
	Residual	92.985	197	.472		
	Total	237.689	201			
a. Dependent Variable: PI						
b. Predictors: (Constant), BT, IP, SME, UGC						

The predictors together explained **60.9% of the variance in Purchase Intention (R² = .609)**, and the regression model was statistically significant (**F = 76.643, p < .001**).

Coefficient Analysis:
H7: Social Media Engagement (SME) positively influences Purchase Intention (PI) when controlling for Brand Trust (BT).
H8: User-Generated Content (UGC) positively influences PI when controlling for BT.
H9: Influencer Persuasiveness (IP) positively influences PI when controlling for BT.
H10: Brand Trust (BT) positively influences PI.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.265	.240		-1.107	.270
	SME	.261	.053	.269	4.946	.000
	UGC	.173	.054	.181	3.186	.002
	IP	.275	.068	.186	4.066	.000

BT	.378	.057	.410	6.634	.000
a. Dependent Variable: PI					

H7 supported: SME continues to significantly predict PI (β = .269, p < .001), though its effect is weaker than in Regression 1, indicating **partial mediation** through BT.

H8 supported: UGC significantly predicts PI (β = .181, p = .002), again with a reduced coefficient compared to Regression 1, showing **partial mediation** through BT.

H9 supported: IP significantly predicts PI (β = .186, p < .001). Since IP was non-significant in predicting BT (Regression 2), this confirms that its effect on PI is **direct-only and not mediated by BT**.

H10 supported: BT strongly predicts PI (β = .410, p < .001), reinforcing its central role as a mediator in the model.

Sobel Test & Indirect Effects

Path	Indirect Effect (a×b)	Sobel z	Sig.	Mediation Type
SME → PI via BT	.149	4.82	.000	Partial
UGC → PI via BT	.191	5.71	.000	Partial
IP → PI via BT	–.012	–0.52	.601	None (Direct)

The mediation analysis confirmed that both the Social Media Engagement (SME) and User-Generated Content (UGC) possess a strong indirect effect on Purchase Intention mediated by Brand Trust and, thus, have partial mediation. Conversely, there was no significant mediation effect of Influencer Persuasiveness (IP) and it means that the influence of the latter on Purchase Intention is direct.

V.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The current research conducted the investigation of the implications of the social media in consumer attitudes in sustainable FMCG and branding consumer goods. In detail, it examined the effect of the Social Media Engagement, User-Generated Content, and Influencer Persuasiveness on Purchase Intention mediated by Brand Trust.

The findings indicate that User-Generated Content and Social Media Engagement are good predictors of Purchase Intention. The consumers who view sustainable brand content or base their decisions on the reviews left by peers are more likely to trust the brand and plan to buy sustainable products. The partial mediation of both variables by Brand Trust was found; that is, they do not only directly affect the purchase intention but partly their effect is conveyed through the trust in the brand.

Conversely, Influencer Persuasiveness also affected Purchase Intention but Purchase Intention was not affected significantly by Brand Trust. This implies that influencers are those that persuade people to buy more products without any brand trust building. Lastly, the Brand Trust itself was revealed to be one of the **significant** predictors of Purchase Intention, which supports its leading position in the sustainable branding.

Altogether, Social Media Engagement and User-Generated Content have a direct and indirect impact on Purchase Intention with Brand Trust, whereas Influencer Persuasiveness has a direct impact on Purchase Intention.

VI.   RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Encourage Eco-Friendly Interaction:** FMCG brands must conduct interactive campaigns on eco-friendliness activities such as green package and waste management.

2. **Capitalize on User-Generated Content**: Consumers should be encouraged to post sustainability stories and reviews and display them on brand pages as a way of building trust.

3. **Use Influencers to increase Awareness**: Hire influencers with the primary purpose of creating buzz about sustainable products, and not to build trust.

4. **Be Transparent**: Provide information on sourcing, production and certifications that can be verified to build brand credibility.

5. **Segment Communication**: Customize the sustainability campaigns to suit the young audiences because they are sensitive to influencers, whereas older audiences are sensitive to peer reviews that are authentic.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this study, snowball sampling was applied; this method was good in accessing the participants but does not necessarily reflect the overall population. The study also considered just the chosen social media variables, and has not taken into consideration other potential variables like brand credibility or environmental concern. Larger and more heterogeneous samples should be employed in future studies using other sampling methods to enhance generalizability. Other variables like the eco-labels, certifications and the consumer lifestyle values can also be touched on to give more insights on sustainable branding.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper explore**s** the purpose of social media in sustainable branding in the FMCG and consumer goods industry. The results endorse that Social Media Engagement and User-Generated Content have positive effects on Purchase Intention in a positive and indirect way via Brand Trust, whereas Influencer Persuasiveness has a positive impact without necessarily being mediated by trust. Brand Trust as such was found to be an effective predictor of Purchase Intention, which is why it is vital in sustainable branding attempts. The findings point to the twofold significance of establishing trust based on genuine consumer interaction and peer-created content, as well as using influencers to create instant awareness and action. Knowing these dynamics, FMCG companies are able to develop more efficient strategies to build the consumer confidence and promote sustainable consumption. Overall, the research offers valuable findings to academicians and practitioners by demonstrating how the social media can be exploited to facilitate sustainability-based branding and stimulate consumer buying intentions within the FMCG industry.

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Scales Used for Questionnaire

- **Social Media Engagement Scale**: Adapted from [Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan (2012)] and [Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas (2016)] – focused on consumer interaction, participation, and involvement with brand-related social media activities.

- **Influencer Persuasiveness Scale**: Adapted from [Ohanian (1990)] and [Ki & Kim (2019)] – capturing credibility, expertise, and persuasive impact of influencers on consumer attitudes and decisions.

- **User-Generated Content (UGC) Scale**: Adapted from [Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer (2012)] and [Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme (2012)] – emphasizing authenticity, reliability, and influence of peer-created brand content.

- **Brand Trust Scale**: Adapted from [Delgado-Ballester (2004)] and [Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001)] – measuring consumer confidence, reliability, honesty, and integrity associated with the brand.

- **Purchase Intention Scale**: Adapted from [Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal (1991)] and [Spears & Singh (2004)] – assessing likelihood of purchase, first-choice preference, willingness to buy, and recommendation behavior.