
ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING AND CONTENT MARKETING IN ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The growing urgency of environmental degradation, climate change, and resource depletion has compelled businesses worldwide to adopt sustainable practices. In this context, digital marketing and content marketing have emerged as powerful tools for promoting sustainability, influencing consumer behavior, and enhancing corporate accountability. This paper explores the role of digital and content marketing in advancing sustainable business practices by enabling transparent communication, fostering consumer awareness, and supporting ethical consumption patterns. Digital platforms provide businesses with cost-effective, scalable, and measurable channels to disseminate sustainability-related information, while content marketing helps build trust and long-term relationships with stakeholders through storytelling, education, and value-driven engagement.

Furthermore, the integration of sustainability into marketing strategies allows organizations to align their brand identity with environmental and social responsibility, thereby improving brand loyalty and competitive advantage. The study also highlights how data analytics, social media, and personalized content contribute to targeted sustainability campaigns and behavioral change among consumers. However, challenges such as greenwashing, lack of authenticity, and information overload are also discussed. Overall, digital and content marketing play a crucial role in transforming business models toward sustainability by bridging the gap between corporate initiatives and consumer expectations.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, sustainability has evolved from a peripheral concern to a central component of business strategy. Organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of

balancing economic growth with environmental protection and social responsibility. Sustainable business practices encompass a wide range of initiatives, including reducing carbon footprints, minimizing waste, adopting renewable energy, and ensuring ethical supply chains. However, the success of these initiatives largely depends on effective communication and stakeholder engagement, where digital marketing and content marketing play a significant role.

Digital marketing refers to the use of online platforms, technologies, and data-driven strategies to promote products, services, and brand values. It includes channels such as social media, search engines, email marketing, and websites. Content marketing, a subset of digital marketing, focuses on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience. Together, these approaches have transformed how businesses interact with consumers, offering new opportunities to promote sustainability in an engaging and impactful manner.

One of the key advantages of digital marketing in sustainability is its ability to reach a global audience instantly and cost-effectively. Businesses can share information about their environmental initiatives, certifications, and sustainability goals in real time. Social media platforms, in particular, enable two-way communication, allowing consumers to actively engage with brands, provide feedback, and hold companies accountable for their actions. This transparency encourages businesses to adopt genuine sustainable practices rather than superficial efforts.

Content marketing further strengthens this process by educating consumers about sustainability issues and promoting responsible consumption. Through blogs, videos, infographics, and case studies, companies can explain complex environmental concepts in an accessible way. Storytelling plays a crucial role in highlighting the impact of sustainable initiatives, such as reducing plastic waste or supporting local communities. As consumers become more informed, they are more likely to support brands that align with their values, thereby driving demand for sustainable products and services.

Moreover, advancements in data analytics and artificial intelligence have enhanced the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. Businesses can now analyze consumer preferences, track engagement, and deliver personalized content that resonates with specific audiences. This targeted approach increases the likelihood of influencing sustainable behavior, such as choosing eco-friendly products or supporting ethical brands.

Despite its benefits, the use of digital and content marketing in sustainability also presents challenges. The rise of greenwashing—where companies falsely promote environmentally

friendly practices—can undermine consumer trust. Additionally, the vast amount of digital content available today can make it difficult for genuine sustainability messages to stand out. Therefore, authenticity, transparency, and consistency are essential for building credibility and achieving meaningful impact.

In conclusion, digital marketing and content marketing are indispensable tools for advancing sustainable business practices. They not only facilitate communication and awareness but also empower consumers to make informed decisions, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and responsible global economy.

2. Digital Business Models

With the rapid advancement of emerging technologies and the expansion of the Internet, innovative business models have recently emerged that emphasize the integration of sustainable strategies into corporate identity and marketing frameworks [13]. As these technologies evolve, the concept of sustainability has broadened beyond environmental concerns to include sustainable development, resource utilization, and the adoption of advanced technological tools by organizations

The Internet has become a critical enabler of sustainable business growth, compelling organizations to redesign their operational models to facilitate round-the-clock (24/7) product and service availability. Additionally, companies are increasingly adopting sophisticated e-commerce strategies to support global distribution and enhance market reach

These modern business models are largely driven by user behavior on digital platforms, particularly social media networks. This involves examining user-generated content (UGC) and understanding the digital tools and platforms utilized by consumers

3. Digital Marketing Techniques

This study highlights a wide range of digital marketing techniques that are closely associated with corporate sustainability initiatives. A key challenge, however, lies in ensuring that consumers genuinely perceive these strategies as authentic and environmentally responsible, while also delivering positive and engaging messages that resonate with online audiences. Commonly employed digital marketing strategies include search engine optimization (SEO), search engine marketing (SEM), social media marketing, programmatic advertising, and influencer marketing. These techniques are increasingly supported by advanced algorithms capable of analyzing user sentiments and reactions to brand communications across digital platforms

It is essential for digital marketing efforts to consistently communicate messages that reinforce sustainability, environmental responsibility, and long-term business success. This is crucial for shaping consumer perceptions and ensuring that organizations are recognized for their ongoing commitment to sustainable practices

4. Knowledge-Based Analysis Techniques

User-generated content (UGC) has become a primary data source for analyzing information derived from social media platforms and search engine interactions . Consequently, both researchers and organizations have adopted various analytical approaches to explore sustainability and sustainable development trends.

These approaches include text analysis, sentiment analysis, and data mining, which are widely utilized to identify key indicators and variables that can enhance business models and digital strategies.

Through the application of these techniques, large volumes of data can be systematically examined to uncover meaningful patterns and establish correlations between user-generated content and organizational objectives. The field of knowledge-based analytics is increasingly adopting a global perspective, significantly contributing to the study of environmental sustainability and digital resource utilization.

5. Social Media Analytics

Social media platforms have evolved into dynamic ecosystems where users actively exchange opinions, experiences, and perspectives on a wide range of topics. These platforms can be effectively leveraged to identify trending topics through methods such as topic modeling, categorize them into relevant indicators, and assess how organizations utilize these insights [9].

Moreover, social networks serve as communities where like-minded individuals unite to support shared causes and disseminate their views to a broader audience.

Research has demonstrated the importance of analyzing user-generated content using key indicators such as hashtags on platforms like Twitter . Such analyses help in identifying major user concerns and evaluating whether sustainability-driven business strategies influence brand loyalty and consumer perceptions regarding eco-friendly products and services.

6. Digital Behavior and Neuromarketing

In the digital landscape, understanding user interactions requires a comprehensive analysis of bidirectional communication between organizations and consumers. Studying digital

behavior and neuromarketing is therefore essential for gaining deeper insights into how users perceive sustainability initiatives and environmentally responsible business models.

Neuromarketing techniques are employed not only to analyze user behavior but also to develop hypotheses about consumer decision-making processes in digital environments. Methods such as eye-tracking, facial expression analysis, and behavioral response monitoring help identify user attention, emotional reactions, and engagement with digital content.

These insights enable organizations to refine their communication strategies, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of messages aimed at promoting sustainability and supporting environmentally conscious initiatives.

7. Customer Relationship Management Systems

In an increasingly digital ecosystem characterized by the continuous emergence of new communication channels and content distribution platforms, information systems play a vital role in data management and administration. These systems store and process data generated through user interactions and engagement with online marketing and communication strategies.

Efficient data management tools contribute to the sustainable use of organizational resources by optimizing the processes of data collection, storage, and analysis. Furthermore, modern business models can enhance operational efficiency and profitability by reducing reliance on manual labor and leveraging automated systems or algorithms for data analysis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology adopted in this study is a **meta-textual review**, which facilitates the identification and extraction of relevant information from previously published studies, as well as a critical evaluation of existing literature. This approach is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine high-quality and relevant research articles focusing on consumer engagement through direct interaction with social media marketing.
2. To develop an integrative framework that offers a comprehensive understanding of the influence of social media marketing on consumer engagement in sustainable consumption.
3. To determine existing research gaps and propose directions for future investigations.

A **systematic literature review** provides structured evidence from prior studies by rigorously analyzing peer-reviewed publications using standardized reporting guidelines and a meta-

analytical framework such as **PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)**. PRISMA serves as a well-defined review protocol that incorporates a four-stage flow diagram illustrating study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion.

The selection of PRISMA is justified by its thoroughness and its ability to ensure consistency and transparency across systematic reviews. To carry out this review, four key stages were implemented:

- (1) Defining inclusion and exclusion criteria for study selection.
- (2) Identifying relevant and high-quality studies.
- (3) Critically analyzing the selected literature, and
- (4) Presenting and interpreting the findings.

2.1 Evaluation of Search Keywords

The literature search was conducted using a widely recognized multidisciplinary database of peer-reviewed academic publications, namely **Web of Science**. According to Li et al. this database has gained substantial recognition across various scientific disciplines and geographical regions.

Search strings were constructed by grouping selected keywords into three distinct categories. The first category included terms related to consumer engagement, the second encompassed concepts associated with social media marketing influence, and the third focused on sustainable consumption. These combined search strings are illustrated.

The keywords were primarily searched within titles, abstracts, and keyword sections, resulting in the identification of 7,652 articles. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria and refining the selection based on journal relevance and publication timeframe, the number of articles was narrowed down to 1,684, as depicted.

2.2 Evaluation of Relevance

An initial screening of article titles and abstracts led to the exclusion of studies that did not address consumer engagement and social media marketing within the context of sustainable consumption. Additionally, non-scholarly sources such as trade publications, editorial materials, duplicate or overlapping studies, and dissertations were excluded to maintain consistency and reliability in the dataset.

The decision to include studies published after 2014 is based on several considerations. Firstly, it enables the analysis of recent methodological advancements and evolving research

techniques. Secondly, the scope of consumer engagement research has expanded significantly over time, shifting from traditional brand interactions to diverse domains such as hospitality, influencer marketing, and social media-driven engagement.

3. General Overview of Articles Included in This Review

3.1. Publication Trends

The annual distribution of publications illustrated in Figure 3 demonstrates a significant surge in the number of studies focusing on consumer engagement in the context of social media, particularly during the most recent years (i.e., 2021 and 2022). This trend indicates that the topic of consumer engagement is rapidly gaining scholarly attention and is currently experiencing a phase of substantial growth in terms of research output.

Notably, the volume of publications in the last two years has increased considerably, accounting for more than 65% of the total studies included in this review. This sharp rise reflects the growing importance and relevance of social media-driven consumer engagement in contemporary research.

3.2. Classification of Articles

To evaluate the progression of research on the impact of social media marketing on consumer engagement, the selected empirical studies were categorized into three methodological approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative studies primarily focus on non-numerical data to provide in-depth insights, whereas quantitative studies rely on statistical and numerical analysis. Mixed-method studies combine both approaches to offer a more comprehensive perspective.

Out of the 70 articles analyzed, only 7 studies employed a qualitative methodology, while 2 studies utilized a mixed-method approach. The majority of the studies were conducted using quantitative research methods, indicating a strong preference for data-driven and statistical analysis in this field.



Figure 1. The number of articles included in this review by the year of publication.

4. Meta-Textual Method

4.1. Theories

Consumer engagement within the domain of social media has increasingly attracted attention across multiple theoretical perspectives and academic disciplines, highlighting its broad impact. The present study identifies 57 research articles that have applied at least one theoretical framework. This section outlines the most frequently utilized theories in the study of consumer engagement (see Table 1).

Table 1. Theoretical frameworks applied in studies on consumer engagement in social media within the context of sustainable consumption.

Theories	Number of Articles	Examples
Relationship marketing and consumer engagement	16	[7,12,34–41]
Social exchange theory	10	[42–50]
Sustainable consumption theory	8	[25–28,51–54]
Uses and gratification theory	7	[55–61]
Other theoretical approaches	16	[35,62–75]

4.1.1. Relationship Marketing and Consumer Engagement

This section examines the interconnected concepts of relationship marketing and consumer engagement, which together account for approximately 25% of the total studies (16 articles). According to Pansari and Kumar , consumer engagement has emerged as a critical component of modern marketing due to its direct influence on relationship-building strategies.

They further emphasize that emotional connection and customer satisfaction serve as fundamental drivers of consumer engagement. Additionally, engagement can only be fostered when consumers develop a sense of belongingness toward a brand and establish long-term relationships. Gómez et al. argue that engagement through social media platforms is more effective than traditional brand communication alone.

Similarly, Ma et al. highlight that strong brand interaction—through posts, tweets, and continuous digital communication—plays a vital role in strengthening relationships and enhancing consumers’ behavioral, cognitive, and emotional involvement.

4.1.2. Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory, rooted in psychology, sociology, and economics , is also widely applied in studies of consumer engagement (16%, 10 studies). This theory primarily focuses

on understanding the motivations that drive consumers to participate in social media marketing activities.

According to Zhao and Chen, consumers tend to form stronger psychological connections when they are satisfied with a brand and its marketing involvement. Engagement in social media activities provides perceived benefits and satisfaction, reinforcing consumer participation.

Furthermore, Kim and Baek demonstrate the significant role of influencers in enhancing consumer engagement and facilitating the development of relational networks.

4.1.3. Sustainable Consumption Theory

Sustainability theory has gained increasing prominence in the context of online consumer engagement, particularly as consumers become more conscious of the environmental consequences of their purchasing decisions. This growing awareness has led to an increased demand for environmentally responsible and sustainable brands.

Kong et al. explore the effectiveness of sustainability-oriented communication in promoting luxury products, taking into account the cultural orientation of consumers. Nekmahmud et al. emphasize that consumers must develop a positive attitude toward eco-friendly products to strengthen their engagement with sustainable consumption.

Additionally, socio-environmental and socio-economic considerations play a significant role in enhancing sustainable brand performance. Zafar et al. highlight the importance of personalized advertising strategies in influencing consumers' intentions toward sustainable purchasing.

4.1.4. Uses and Gratification Theory

The uses and gratification theory, originally proposed by Katz et al. explains how individuals utilize media channels to satisfy specific needs. Initially developed to understand communication through traditional mass media, this theory has evolved with the emergence of digital and social media platforms.

In the context of consumer engagement, this theory focuses on understanding users' preferences and motivations for interacting with online content. It has been consistently applied in studies of social media engagement (seven studies, approximately 10%).

Research indicates that consumers engage with social media not only for informational purposes but also for cognitive benefits, social interaction, personal satisfaction, and entertainment. Bailey et al. highlight that consumer motivation for socialization and

participation in social media contributes significantly to achieving marketing and branding objectives.

4.1.5. Other Theoretical Perspectives

In addition to the primary theories discussed above, several other theoretical frameworks have been employed to explain specific aspects of consumer behavior. These are collectively categorized as “other theories” and account for approximately 25% of the studies (16 articles).

For instance, Liu et al. discuss the trust transfer theory, which explains how consumer engagement contributes to the development of brand trust. Similarly, Lourenço et al. introduce expectancy theory, which focuses on measuring the dimensions of consumer engagement and evaluating engagement levels through operational scales.

4.2. Context

This section outlines the geographical distribution of the studies included in the analysis. The findings reveal that Europe represents the largest contributor, with 31 out of 70 studies (44%). This indicates that European nations—particularly the United Kingdom, France, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands—play a leading role in research related to consumer engagement in sustainable consumption within the framework of social media marketing.

Asia emerges as the second-largest contributor, accounting for 25 studies (35% of the total empirical research), followed by the United States with 19 studies (27%), along with contributions from other regions. Interestingly, unlike traditional social science research, a significant portion of these studies is situated within emerging Asian markets. This trend can be attributed to the rapid economic growth and technological development observed in Asia over the past decade.

The review also highlights substantial opportunities for future research, particularly in underrepresented regions such as South America. Emerging economies like Brazil have shown limited contributions in this field, indicating a need for further exploration. Consequently, future studies should focus on these markets to broaden the scope of research. Additionally, it is recommended that future researchers examine cross-country consumer engagement on social media platforms, as cultural factors are likely to play a critical role in shaping consumer behavior (see Table 2).

4.3. Methods

This section discusses the reviewed studies from the perspective of research methodologies and analytical techniques used to examine relationships in consumer engagement research. Tables 3 and 4 summarize the data collection methods and analytical approaches applied in the studies.

Among quantitative methods, surveys are the most widely used technique. Other approaches identified include content analysis and latent profile analysis. Regarding data analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is the most frequently employed method, representing 42% of the total quantitative studies, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), which accounts for 37%.

It is also noteworthy that approximately 10% of the studies utilized mixed or qualitative methodologies, incorporating techniques such as in-depth interviews, observational studies, netnography, and tools like Google Vision AI.

A notable methodological trend is the increasing use of netnography, a specialized adaptation of ethnographic research conducted within online and social media communities [68]. Furthermore, a majority of the studies collected data through online surveys and social media platforms, reflecting the growing reliance on digital environments for research on consumer engagement.

Table 2. Articles included in the review by country.

Country	No. Of Article
China	11
United Kingdom	11
Austria	4
Belgium	4
Canada	4
France	3
Germany	3
Netherlands	3
Spain	3
Australia	2
Hungary	2
India	2
New Zealand	2
Poland	2
Portugal	2
Taiwan	2
Thailand	2
USA	18
Denmark	1

Chile	1
Egypt	1
Ghana	1
Greece	1
Jordan	1
Korea	1
Malaysia	1
Norway	1

5. Variables Used in the Reviewed Research Studies

This section examines the diverse range of independent, moderating, control, and dependent variables employed in studies on consumer engagement influenced by social media marketing, along with the relationships among these variables that have been analyzed to explain specific phenomena.

(Table 3. Variables investigated in social media consumer engagement research in the context of sustainable consumption)

Variables	No. of Studies	Examples	Contributing Theory
Independent variables			
Consumer-related variables	22	Interaction, advocacy and connection, message throw, consumption and creation, use of first person singular pronouns in consumer engagement, perception of the user, consumer trust, perceived benefits; sensory and behavioral outcome, value co-creation and research integration, hedonic value and ethical value motivations	Customer engagement theory, uses and gratification theory
Brand/marketer-related variables	20	consumer appeal, marketer-generated dialogs, brand engagement behavior, post information and post interactivity, brand gratitude, loyalty, perceived quality, message persuasiveness, brand trust, advertising, brand's global identity, brand post characteristics	NA
Social-media (SM)-related variables	18	strength of attachment to SM channels, communication, attitude, awareness, loyalty, user's perceived value and satisfaction, SM influence, SM interactions, likes, follows and tweets, post length, language complexity, text characteristics, tweet readability, tweet frequency	Socialization theory/network theory
Dependent variables			
Consumer engagement (intentional/behavioral)	21	WOM/eWOM, feedback, recommendations, conversations, endorsements, participation, community engagement, revenue, cognitive and emotional perspective, uncovering and cultivating posts, affection and cognitive processing, purchase intentions	Customer engagement theory
Relationship-based outcomes	11	likes, comments, and shares of the posts, a sense of being attracted to others, feeling at ease	Relationship marketing, social identity
Brand/marketer-related variables	11	stakeholder engagement, brand intimacy, value cocreation, brand performance, like and retweet, brand trust	NA
Consumer-related variables leading to sustainable consumption	8	Green buying, psychological state of well-being, focused on an issue, environmental activism	Sustainable consumption
Other consumer-related variables	5	attitude, purchase intentions, brand experience, purchase decision, user's global identity	NA
Social media engagement	4	likes, comments, story replies, profile checks, shares on Instagram, influence on m-banking acceptance	NA
Control variables			
Consumer-related variables	7	country of origin, posting experience, age, gender, visual perceptions on Instagram, timing of posts, customer trust, brand familiarity, network size	Commitment trust theory
Brand followers, exclusivity	3	brand community engagement, brand attachment	NA
Brand outcome with time	2	release time	NA
Moderating variables			

5.1. Independent Variables

The independent variables identified in the reviewed studies primarily include cognitive and affective states (8 articles, 12% of the sample), along with factors related to brand relationships and consumer engagement (14 articles, 22% of the studies) within the context of

social media marketing. These variables reflect various psychological states exhibited by consumers, such as perceived benefits derived from brands and behavioral outcomes associated with value co-creation and knowledge integration.

Consumer-related variables contribute to understanding engagement through dimensions such as interaction, advocacy, brand connection, and trust. Social media-related variables assess the strength of user attachment, trust in digital platforms, and the effectiveness of engagement mechanisms such as reposts, likes, comments, and shares.

Furthermore, brand-related variables emphasize enhancing consumer appeal, strengthening brand engagement initiatives, improving persuasiveness, fostering brand trust, and reinforcing the global identity of the brand.

5.2. Dependent Variables

The analysis of dependent variables indicates that most studies focus on intentional and behavioral aspects of consumer engagement, as well as relationship-oriented outcomes. Behavioral outcomes include word-of-mouth communication, user feedback, recommendations, and active participation in online communities.

These studies also examine emotional responses to social media and brand-generated content, as well as consumers' purchase intentions. Relationship-based outcomes involve engagement activities such as liking, commenting, and sharing brand-related posts across social media platforms.

Additionally, consumer-focused variables assess attitudes, overall brand experience, and purchase intentions, ultimately influencing buying decisions. In the context of sustainability, these variables extend to green purchasing behavior, psychological well-being, environmental consciousness, and the tendency to make environmentally responsible consumption choices.

5.3. Control Variables

The control variables examined in this research mainly include consumer-related and brand/marketer-related factors. Consumer-related variables encompass demographic characteristics and user activity patterns on social networking platforms. Other influential factors include visual perception, timing of content posts, and familiarity with social media platforms.

Brand- or marketer-related control variables focus on generating awareness and interest in products and services, sustaining engagement within brand communities, and fostering positive brand associations and attachments.

5.4. Moderating Variables

The moderating variables consist of both consumer-related and brand-related factors that influence the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Consumer-related moderators primarily include cultural influences, which play a significant role in shaping how individuals engage with brands on social media platforms.

Brand-related moderating variables include the nature, theme, and format of social media content, which can affect the effectiveness of engagement strategies and overall consumer response.

CONCLUSION

Digital marketing and content marketing have become essential drivers in promoting and advancing sustainable business practices in the modern digital economy. This study highlights that the integration of sustainability into digital strategies not only enhances brand visibility but also fosters meaningful consumer engagement and long-term relationships. Through tools such as social media marketing, search engine optimization, influencer collaborations, and data-driven personalization, organizations can effectively communicate their sustainability initiatives to a global audience.

The findings indicate that consumer engagement plays a pivotal role in shaping sustainable consumption behavior. Factors such as trust, emotional connection, perceived value, and transparency significantly influence consumer decisions toward environmentally responsible products and services. Moreover, content marketing—through storytelling, educational content, and interactive communication—helps in building awareness and encouraging behavioral change among consumers.

The study also emphasizes the growing importance of advanced analytical techniques such as sentiment analysis, data mining, and social media analytics in understanding consumer preferences and optimizing sustainability-driven marketing strategies. Additionally, emerging approaches like neuromarketing and netnography provide deeper insights into consumer behavior in digital environments.

However, challenges such as greenwashing, lack of authenticity, and information overload remain critical concerns. Businesses must ensure transparency, consistency, and credibility in their sustainability communication to maintain consumer trust. Furthermore, the influence of cultural differences, generational factors, and regional market dynamics suggests the need for tailored marketing strategies.

In conclusion, digital marketing and content marketing act as powerful enablers for sustainable business transformation. By aligning marketing strategies with environmental and social goals, organizations can not only achieve competitive advantage but also contribute to global sustainability efforts. Future research should focus on emerging markets, cross-cultural analysis, and the long-term impact of digital engagement on sustainable consumption patterns.

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