

THE PRIMARY EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL CAPITAL ON GREEN BUYING BEHAVIOUR: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The increasing significance of the link between millennials' social media use and their social capital is the focus of this paper. The objective is to provide a well-organized framework for grasping this connection, emphasizing the primary factors that affect environmentally conscious consumer behaviour. To accomplish this, the authors conducted an initial examination of secondary data from various sources, including library databases like Emerald, Science Direct, Scopus, Clarivate-WOS and EBSCOhost, as well as external sources such as Google Scholars. By meticulously applying 4-step selection criteria during the screening process, the authors structured and consolidated relevant concepts and terms associated with social capital, social media use, and green perceived buying behaviour (GPBB). The systematic review revealed intriguing discoveries, particularly in relation to GPBB in China, which suggests new research avenues in this field. The study also outlines potential directions for future research, providing valuable insights for scholars interested in understanding the factors that influence GPBB. This framework, as presented in this research, not only aids academics and practitioners in comprehending GPBB but also assists marketers in managing customer relationships and achieving sales goals. This exploratory data analysis marks the initial phase of establishing a well-structured framework for comprehending GPBB and its primary influencers, with the possibility of further research paradigms to yield more conclusive results.

Keywords: social media engagement, social capital, green perceived buyer behaviour, China.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China's fast economic expansion demonstrated how it has resulted in excessive resource use and environmental degradation [1]. Among these obstacles, the notion of green purchasing arises as a viable option to alleviate environmental issues, especially in light of millennials' significant environmental concerns, a group born between 1981 and 1996. This generation is not only prepared to spend more for environmentally friendly items, but they are also actively looking for companies that have strong corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. As a result of their large presence in the online business scene, internet marketing and advertising initiatives have increasingly targeted Chinese millennials [2][3]. However, the study identifies a significant gap: the need for more research on the influence of social media use on millennials' green purchasing behaviour in China.

Considering increasing global environment issues and concerns, the researchers suggested green buying as an effective solution to address environmental problems [4][5]. Green consumption or green buying behavior is an environmentally responsible behavior characterized by advocating nature and protecting the ecology, which has attracted enterprises and consumers' attention in recent years [6][7][8]. The public concern for the environment grew significantly in the 1960s, and media played its integral role in creating awareness among the masses about environmental issues [9]. Gradually with the expansion of mass media and digital media (internet), the

environmental knowledge and the purchase of environmentally friendly products emerged as a major consumer trend in the 1990s [10]. Mass media including radio, television, newspapers, the Internet, and films, and later digital media technologies such as Internet and social media effectively to inform the public about environmental issues [11].

Millennials are now a major segment of the sustainable market and have adopted greener lifestyles [12]. A study found that millennials are the generation most willing to pay extra for green products, especially when produced by firms with a record of positive socio-environmental contributions [13]. In addition, millennials seek employers that present clear, positive messages related to their CSR and sustainability initiatives [14]. As a result of this, extensive research has examined millennial' green purchasing behaviour. Several studies have focused on millennials' motivations to purchase sustainable goods and the effectiveness of green product advertising and labelling [15].

The millennials constitute an important group of consumers and spend their income quickly and more often through the web, and particularly through social networks like Facebook [16]. Resultantly, the online marketing and advertising increased to target these millennials [18] and likewise, academic research moved towards understanding online green buying behaviour of millennials [19]. The holistic analysis of millennials green buying behaviour suggests to extend research to understand the effects of their social media use and green buying behaviour [20].

In view of the significant vast number of issues pertaining to environmental concern, ubiquitous usage of social media and social capital idealism, the impact of which on green consumers is tremendous and impactful. It is with this mind that we formulate our research objective to explore further how these relationships could be diagnosed and a wider investigation of which could enlighten the young generation's proclivity towards more green products and hence, sustainable development nuanced in all possible aspect on earth, air and water. As such, our main research objective is to explore how the social media usage and social capital could have the effects on China's millennials green buyers.

According to the social capital theory, social ties are resources that may lead to the growth and accumulation of human capital. Social capital theory is considered because it is for people to have a connection to others who have similar interests and skills. Social capital theory includes three key concepts: social networks, trust, and norms [21]. Like the example Facebook, a social network is a brings together individuals who have common interests in order for them to exchange information, images, and videos with one another. People that participate in social networking could do so for personal reasons or for professional reasons as well [22]. The concept of trust is often brought up in the context of defining social capital. One such definition is that social capital consists of connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that result from them [23]. As for norms in social capital theory, it has such a significant level of influence on the patterns of human behavior, and they are an essential component of social capital. Strong social capital is linked to standards that promote prosocial behavior, prevent exploitation, and foster connection and collaboration for the benefit of all parties involved [24].

A community's level of social capital determines how successfully its members can collaborate toward the accomplishment of a shared mission or objective. It enables a community or organization, such as a company or a charity, to work together as a whole by fostering trust and a common identity, as well as rules, values, and reciprocal interactions among its members [25].

At the family level, having a secure home environment may be beneficial to one's ability to complete one's education and contribute to the growth of talents and credentials that are highly appreciated and rewarded [26]

In addition, social capital may be broken down into three categories: bonding, bridging, and connecting. Businesses may either thrive or fail based on their level of social capital. Some people are successful because they have a broad network of contacts, which enables them to do their task in a way that is both more effective and more efficient [27]. According to [28], the two key aspects to social capital are access and agency. Access relates to where one has the opportunity for the resources (such as friends) and agency relates to how much power they actually have from their connections with people who trust in their judgement [29].

Research demonstrates numerous that there are significant advantages connected to social capital, such as the fact that people who have greater amounts of social capital tend to be happier and have an easier time getting better employment. Because of the excellent connections that individuals have, they report having better health and higher levels of trust in their communities [29] This is another benefit of having great relationships. Other scholars have also mentioned the two types of social capital theory. People are more likely to engage in cooperative endeavours when they have cognitive social capital, which refers to the norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs that are held in common by a group of individuals. Relational social capital is a concept that is predicated on the qualities of social relationships [30].

In the context of millennials, it refers to those born between 1981 and 1996, constitute a sizable consumer demographic in today's market. They are increasingly concerned about environmental sustainability, with research indicating that they have generally good opinions toward Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies [31]. As a consequence, businesses are under increasing pressure to integrate sustainable practices into their business strategies in order to attract this population. Indeed, research indicates that product-related issues such as packaging materials and environmental effect have a significant influence in millennial purchase choices [31]. This pattern is likely to continue as more young individuals join the labour sector and contribute to the global economy. Businesses must identify this change in customer behaviour and respond appropriately by introducing long-term efforts in their operations. This would not only help the environment, but it may also enhance sales and brand loyalty among younger customers. Social capital theory is also used to describe the resources, that are available through social networks as well as a relationally defined capacity which helps an individual make use of their opportunities. It is typically intangible, and it may be built up or lost over time. For example, it is thought that *social capital* may continue to have a significant impact on one's life even when it is no longer visible or tangible [27]. In point of fact, social capital is the concept of which emphasizes the significance of individuals maintaining connections with others who possess interests and capabilities complementary to their own.

In today's digital age, social media has become a dominant force in shaping millennials' behaviours and attitudes. As this generation becomes increasingly concerned about the environment, their social media use is also impacting their green buying behaviour. While social media serves as a powerful tool for raising awareness and promoting sustainable products, it's essential to critically evaluate the information shared online. To promote green products, enterprises have increased their investments in green marketing and have emphasized the importance of social media (e.g., WeChat, microblogs and Twitter) in the promotion of green products. Social media plays an important role in shaping consumers' attitudes and purchase

intentions toward green products [32][33][34]. According to statistics released by “We Are Social” and “Hootsuite” in August 2017, the total number of social media users at home and abroad exceeded 3bn, and monthly active social media users in China exceeded 900m. Moreover, more than 80 per cent of consumers are able to recognise green propaganda on social media, and nearly half of consumers consider green propaganda to be credible [35].

Social media platforms have become a powerful tool for shaping consumer behaviour, particularly in regards to green purchases. By providing access to information on eco-friendly products and brands, allowing for price comparison and reviews, and fostering online communities focused on sustainability, social media plays a crucial role in promoting environmentally conscious behaviours.

In addition, the increasing usage of social media by millennials has a huge influence on their green purchasing habits. According to [36], social media has a strong impact on this age group's shopping habits, particularly when it comes to ecologically friendly items. With the development of eco-consciousness and sustainability concerns, millennials are turning to social media sites for green product information and suggestions. Influencers and sponsored content expose people to diverse companies that advocate sustainable practices, encouraging them to more responsible consumption habits. Social media also allows millennials to join in debates and express their perspectives on environmental concerns, establishing a feeling of community and encouraging them to make greener choices.

Furthermore, the ease of online buying through social media platforms makes green items more accessible to this tech-savvy youth. As a result, millennials' increased usage of social media has had a favourable impact on their green purchasing habits. Evidently, Social media revolutionised how consumers and firms communicate about green and non-green products, allowing consumers a more interactive and collaborative purchase experience [37][38]. Firms are seeking increased presence across various social media to engage consumers through digital channels. This is also because the majority of millennials and Generation Z use social media as their main source of information. This increase in social media use has affected not just their everyday habits, but also their purchase selections toward environmentally friendly items. According to the study's results, social media has a significant influence on moulding generation y and z groups' attitudes and behaviours toward environmentally aware purchasing choices [39]. Individuals are assaulted with messages on climate change, plastic waste, and other environmental problems with a single swipe across their page.

This continual exposure to such themes has prompted debate and boosted awareness among younger generations about the significance of making environmentally conscious decisions. As a consequence, many young customers are actively searching out environmentally friendly options while making purchases. Social media is an effective tool for disseminating information and teaching younger generations about environmental concerns, as well as motivating people to make more environmentally conscious decisions in their everyday lives. Social media has become a trustworthy method of contact with customers and is impacting their purchasing intentions [40]. However, not all information published on social media is true or reputable, and it is vital for users to assess sources closely before making purchase choices. With the development of influencer marketing and sponsored material on social media platforms, distinguishing between genuine recommendations and paid advertising may be difficult. When analyzing information on social media, consumers must examine the legitimacy of the source. They should also seek further proof or evaluations from other sources to substantiate social media

assertions. Individuals should also be cautious of disinformation distributed via social media outlets, which may impact their shopping choices. Consumers may make better informed purchasing decisions and avoid fraudulent advertising by being vigilant and skeptical of sources on social media. Individuals must take responsibility for checking information received on social media before making any important purchasing decisions.

In this study, it is important to understand the concept of social capital before proceeding to explore it in relation to social media. Social capital catches and mirrors the worth of social relations [41] and take-up in numerous disciplines brought about different clarifications and prompted hypothetical, theoretical and functional ambiguities [42] (As per the book "Social Capital Theory-Towards a Methodological Foundation" by [43], the expression "social capital" showed up first time in 1916 in the United States that examined "how neighbours can run and control a school"[44]. In spite of the fact that it is difficult to characterize social capital in a single term, in any case, it is "understanding among the general public individuals, their connections and shared qualities which gather people to work together and trust one another."

With the comprehensive coverage of the review based on the relationship between social media and social capital and its effects on green buying behaviour, the following key research propositions were formulated for further testing and measures which the authors would follow-up looking into the possibility of adopting the positivist paradigm.

P1: There is positive relationship between online *bonding* social capital and social media engagement.

P2: There is a positive relationship between online *bridging* social capital and social media engagement.

P3: Social media Use is related to social media engagement.

P4: Social media engagement is positively associated with green perceived buyer behaviour.

Following the theoretical underpinning, a proposed framework was also developed to determine the relationship between social media constructs and its possible linkage to green consumer behaviour. See **Figure 1** below.

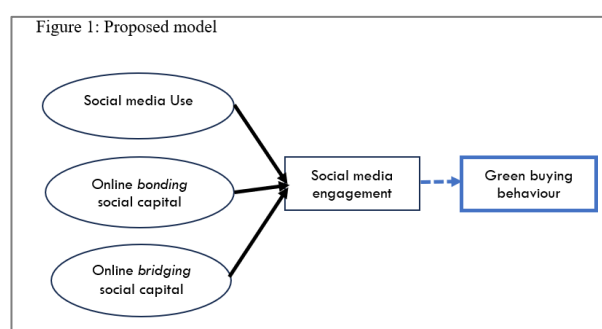


Figure 1 Research Model

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Adapting from [45] data collection method, this study follows the essential stages systematically by embarking on various steps of exploring and searching for relevant articles. We began by using key terms, concepts, terminology and words searching for all the relevant research findings,

collate, sieve and organise them for the period from 2019-2023 all-inclusive as shown in **Figure 2**.

Step 1: Initial identification of articles

The initial step vet through five electronic databases and external source were searched, namely: Emerald, Science Direct, Scopus, EBSCOhost, Google Scholars (both Web of Science (WOS) and SCOPUS selected articles). These sources of data extraction were selected because they contain wide and most up-to-date coverage of both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed research materials [46][47][45]. The search terms include ‘social media usage’, ‘social media engagement’, ‘social capital’, ‘green buyer behaviour’ and ‘green buyer in China’. The search was also limited to any empirical or research articles written in English. As shown in Figure 2, the initial identification stage resulted in a total of 3,000 results.

Step2: Screening and Filtering

During the screening process, the title and abstract of each article were screened to assess the relevance to the research questions and research objectives. The initial online database screening returned 1200 relevant published documents including journal and conference papers, book chapters, industry reports and research reports. The authors took 6 months on a shared basis to screen the articles one-by-one and eliminated some irrelevant articles and book chapters. Duplicates were then removed until it reached 300 papers.

Stage 3: checking eligibility of articles

In determining and confirmation of the eligibility of articles, full texts of 300 articles were thoroughly reviewed and recorded in excel file for reference and future edition of the most relevant articles.

Stage 4: inclusion of selected articles and synthesis

This process is subject to careful selection based on articles rated as Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 quartile-ranked journals in accordance with the SCImago Journal Ranking metric [48]. This resulted in a total of 180 articles. From the final selected articles, information such as: (1) article title; (2) publication source; (3) year published and (4) Name of authors and affiliations were systematically recorded.

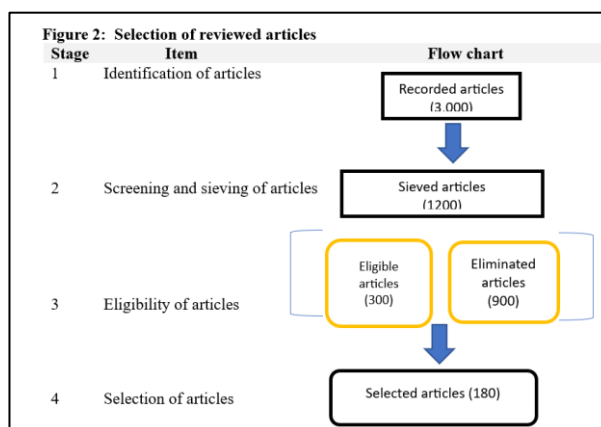


Figure 2 Selection of Reviewed Articles

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A well-known fact that has been recognised among research fraternity is that most research has been conducted in Western, developed countries [49]. Several notable studies of green purchases

in emerging countries found that consumers' attitudes towards green products and brands positively affected their purchase intention and commitment in countries such as Egypt [50] and India [51].

A significant generational transition is anticipated in the coming five years, where the initial wave of Millennials is expected to surpass older consumers as the largest group of spenders in mainland China (as indicated in the report "China's Connected Consumers: The Rise of the Millennials" from 2017). This case study also revealed that Millennials made up 40% of China's population in 2019, with 60% residing in urban areas. Projections indicate that this percentage will increase to approximately 65% of the urban population by 2025. Consequently, this research project is timely and aims to investigate how environmentally conscious purchasing behaviour among Chinese Millennials will impact environmental protection efforts.

The rapid growth of an energy-dependent economy and population, together with unsustainable consumption, have caused severe environmental problems and have doubled the carbon dioxide emissions [52]). Therefore, the research will be helpful for policy makers, who are working to secure environment, marketers who are adopting strategies to capitalize their financial benefits. Furthermore, it will also help in curriculum development in online purchase and specifically in green buying behaviour [53][54].

Our theoretical search of the related social media and social capital relationship reaffirmed the influence of attitude towards green purchase behaviour, which the authors have undertaken the study to explore further in China particularly and perhaps in other countries (ie Malaysia) generally. Hence, the proposed framework (Figure 1) could also serve as a foundation for future researchers to continue to explore other constructs pertaining to consumer attitudinal inclination to green product consumption, which may be influenced or affected by other possible influencing factors such as environmental concern and authority support.

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