



The Mediating Role of Social Media in Influencing the Sustainable Fashion Buying Behavior of Gen-Z Consumers

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Abstract

The growing influence of social media has significantly transformed consumer behavior, particularly among Gen-Z, a generation increasingly motivated by environmental concerns. This study investigates the mediating role of social media in shaping the sustainable fashion purchasing decisions of Gen-Z consumers in Thailand, addressing a gap in understanding how environmental factors—knowledge, attitudes, concerns, and responsibility—impact buying behavior. The research aims to fill this gap by examining how social media influences sustainable fashion consumption, focusing on the relationship between environmental factors and purchasing decisions. Understanding these dynamics can guide the development of effective marketing strategies for sustainable fashion brands. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, gathering data from 408 Thai Gen-Z respondents through structured surveys. Descriptive statistics summarized respondent demographics. Simple linear regression analyzed the impact of social media on consumer behavior, while multiple linear regression examined the direct effects of environmental factors on buying behavior. Mediation regression analysis assessed whether social media mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge, attitudes, concerns, responsibility, and buying behavior.

The findings confirmed that social media significantly impacts sustainable fashion choices, both directly and indirectly, by enhancing environmental awareness and motivation. Environmental knowledge and attitude were found to be the strongest influencers, with social media strengthening the link between environmental consciousness and purchasing decisions. This study offers practical insights for sustainable fashion brands, marketers, and policymakers, highlighting the potential of social media to promote eco-conscious behavior and emphasizing the importance of environmental education in fostering sustainable consumption habits.

Keywords: Sustainable Fashion, Social Media Influence, Buying Behavior, Generation Z, Environmental Concerns

1. Introduction

The fashion industry is one of the largest contributors to global pollution, with its production methods significantly affecting environmental sustainability through pollution, deforestation, and climate change. In response to these challenges, consumer concerns have grown, particularly among Gen Z, leading many to increasingly adopt sustainable fashion choices. Social media plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior and has become an essential tool for promoting sustainable fashion, especially in countries like Thailand, where internet access and social media penetration are widespread. This study examines how social media influences consumer behavior, attitudes, and purchase intentions toward sustainable fashion, with a specific focus on Gen Z in Thailand.

Sustainable fashion refers to the production of garments with minimal environmental impact utilizing eco-certified materials such as hemp, bamboo fabric, Tencel, recycled polyester, and organic cotton, as well as production techniques like upcycling and recycling (Palomo-Dominhuez, 2023). In this study, sustainable fashion includes both clothing and accessories, focusing on eco-friendly materials and ethical production methods. In an effort to move away from the negative consequences of fast fashion—such as overproduction and unethical labor practices—many fashion brands have been shifting toward sustainability. Some of the local Thai brands leading this movement are Earthtone, a brand that creates biodegradable products with less waste, made from organic, renewable, or recycled materials, Patagonia, known for making

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clothes from recycled materials and promoting environmental activism, and Pangaia, which develops innovative fabrics from sources like seaweed fiber and plant-based dyed to create stylish, sustainable garments. However, the adoption of sustainable fashion remains relatively limited in emerging markets like Thailand, highlighting a gap in understanding how social media influences Gen Z's purchasing decisions regarding sustainable fashion.

The widespread use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok has significantly increased Gen Z's awareness of environmental issues. These platforms serve as key sources of information, educating young consumers about sustainability and eco-friendly fashion while also fostering interest in both the ethical and stylistic aspects of their fashion choices. Moreover, social media enables direct engagement between brands and consumers, facilitating conversations and experience-sharing related to sustainable fashion (Panjaponphuchit, 2022).

Environmental concerns—including pollution and the depletion of natural resources—are among the primary factors influencing consumer behavior. Prior studies suggest that environmental responsibility, encompassing knowledge, attitudes, and concerns for sustainability, plays a crucial role in shaping consumer decisions, particularly among younger generations (Zafar et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2019). In Thailand, Gen Z consumers exhibit strong environmental awareness when making fashion purchases, often considering a brand's ethical practices alongside product design and price (Rakhang, C., 2020).

Environmental knowledge, attitudes, and responsibility have been identified as key predictors of a consumer's intention to purchase sustainable products (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). These factors significantly influence the purchasing behavior of Gen Z consumers in Thailand, as they become more conscious of the environmental impact of their choices. Increased awareness of fashion's contribution to pollution and textile waste enhances the likelihood of choosing eco-friendly products (Maichun et al., 2016).

Social media also plays a crucial role in shaping Gen Z's intentions to purchase sustainable fashion. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube provide spaces for sharing content that promotes sustainable fashion, including vlogs, blogs, and advertisements (Xie et al., 2023). These platforms not only facilitate learning about the benefits of sustainable fashion but also foster a sense of community around environmental responsibility, further influencing consumer purchasing behavior.

Recent studies indicate that Gen Z consumers seek uniqueness in their fashion choices, often balancing style with sustainability. This generation prefers products that are trendy yet environmentally responsible, gravitating toward high-quality, adaptable, and timeless designs (Zhang et al., 2023). The growing demand for sustainable fashion reflects a shift in consumer preferences, where environmental and social responsibility now hold greater importance than traditional factors such as price and design.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by exploring how social media influences young Thai consumers' engagement with sustainable fashion. It provides insights into the role of environmental knowledge, attitudes, concerns, and responsibility in shaping the purchasing behavior of Gen Z consumers. The findings aim to offer valuable perspectives for brands and policymakers seeking to engage this generation through education, content creation, and the promotion of sustainable consumption practices.

Despite the fashion industry's significant environmental impact, the adoption of sustainable fashion remains limited, particularly in emerging economies like Thailand. However, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for Gen Z, shaping their attitudes and behaviors by increasing awareness of environmental issues and the benefits of sustainable fashion. While sustainability campaigns on social media are becoming more prevalent, a gap exists in understanding their actual influence on the purchasing decisions of young Thai consumers. The key challenge lies in identifying the factors that drive Gen Z to make eco-friendly purchasing choices. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of social media in influencing the purchasing behavior of Thai Gen Z consumers toward sustainable fashion. Ultimately, it aims to provide insights that can help foster greater adoption of sustainable fashion and environmentally responsible consumption in Thailand.



2. Objectives

- 1) To analyze the impact of social media on the buying behavior of Thai Gen-Z consumers toward sustainable fashions.
- 2) To examine the influence of environmental knowledge, attitudes, concerns, and responsibility on the buying behavior of Gen-Z consumers toward sustainable fashion, as mediated by social media.

Based on the research objectives, five hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Social media has a significant positive impact on the buying behavior of Thai Gen-Z consumers toward sustainable fashion.
- H2: Environmental knowledge positively influences the buying behavior of Gen-Z consumers toward sustainable fashion, mediated by the influence of social media.
- H3: Environmental attitude positively influences the buying behavior of Gen-Z consumers toward sustainable fashion, mediated by the influence of social media.
- H4: Environmental concerns positively influence the buying behavior of Gen-Z consumers toward sustainable fashion, mediated by the influence of social media.
- H5: Environmental responsibility positively influences the buying behavior of Gen-Z consumers toward sustainable fashion, mediated by the influence of social media.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a quantitative research approach to investigate the influence of social media on Thai Gen-Z consumers' buying behavior toward sustainable fashion. The target population consisted of Thai Gen Z consumers aged between 18–25 years who lived in Bangkok and the surrounding provinces. These individuals actively engaged with social media and were aware of sustainable fashion trends. Since the exact population size was unknown, Taro Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1973) was used to determine the sample size. A total of 408 respondents were collected, exceeding the initial target of 400 to enhance data reliability and ensure a 95% confidence level. Due to accessibility constraints, non-probability convenience sampling was employed.

A structured survey questionnaire was the primary data collection tool, designed to measure key variables including environmental knowledge, attitudes, concerns, and responsibility, as well as the influence of social media on buying behavior. The independent variable, environmental knowledge, indicated their understanding of sustainability and eco-friendly fashion choices, while environmental attitudes showed their general attitude toward sustainable practices. Environmental concerns referred to the level of consumer concerns about environmental issues, and environmental responsibility indicated the personal responsibility related to how they felt toward the environmental damage that resulted from their purchases. The influence of social media was measured by consumers' social media usage, engagement, and its impact on their knowledge, attitudes, concerns, and responsibility regarding sustainable fashion. Finally, the dependent variable, consumer buying behavior, was examined through consumers' willingness to buy and their preference for sustainable fashion products. The questionnaire included 24 closed-ended Likert scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), ensuring consistency in responses and ease of data analysis. Data were collected through an online questionnaire created using Google Forms and distributed through social media platforms such as Facebook, Line, and Messenger.

The internal consistency of all variables was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.7 considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The overall Cronbach's Alpha for the study was 0.957, indicating excellent internal consistency, while reliability coefficients for individual variables ranged from 0.795 to 0.886, further confirming the robustness of the constructs.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent demographics. Linear regression analyzed the impact of social media on consumer behavior, while multiple linear regression examined the direct effects of environmental factors on buying behavior. Mediation regression analysis was conducted to assess whether



social media mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge, attitudes, concerns, responsibility, and consumer behavior.



4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The study surveyed a total of 408 respondents, providing a sufficient sample size for reliable statistical analysis. The gender distribution was nearly equal, with 204 male participants (50%), 202 female participants (49.51%), and 2 respondents (0.49%) who preferred not to disclose their gender, ensuring balanced representation. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were in the 21–23 age group (41.67%), followed by those aged 18–20 (32.1%) and those aged 24–25 (26.23%). These findings suggest that most participants were young adults, aligning with the study's focus on Gen Z consumers in Thailand.

The survey results revealed that 99.51% of Gen Z consumers in Thailand used social media, with Facebook (92%) being the most popular platform, followed by TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and X. Awareness of sustainable fashion was notably high, with 99.26% of respondents indicating familiarity with the term. However, engagement with sustainability-related content on social media was moderate, as only 43.38% frequently encountered such content, and 30.88% reported occasional exposure. These results suggest that, despite high awareness, active interaction with sustainable fashion content remains limited.

Correlation Analysis Results

This section examines the relationships between social media, environmental factors, and consumer buying behavior toward sustainable fashion using Pearson correlation analysis. By assessing the strength and direction of these associations, the analysis provides insights into the extent to which social media engagement influences environmental awareness and sustainable purchasing decisions among Thai Gen Z consumers.

Table 1 presents statistically significant positive correlations among the key variables ($p < 0.01$). Specifically, social media engagement exhibited strong associations with environmental knowledge ($r = 0.753$), environmental attitude ($r = 0.731$), environmental concerns ($r = 0.761$), and environmental responsibility ($r = 0.773$). These findings suggest that increased exposure to sustainability-related content on social media may enhance the environmental awareness and attitudes of individuals.

Consumer buying behavior toward sustainable fashion also showed positive correlations with environmental knowledge ($r = 0.731$), environmental attitude ($r = 0.665$), environmental concerns ($r = 0.648$), and environmental responsibility ($r = 0.676$). This indicates that individuals with greater environmental awareness and concern are more likely to make sustainable purchasing decisions. Notably, the direct correlation between social media and consumer buying behavior ($r = 0.681$) further highlights the role of social media in shaping eco-conscious consumption patterns.

Overall, these results support the hypothesis in this study, highlighting social media as a key driver of environmental awareness and sustainable purchasing decisions among Thai Gen Z consumers.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficient Results

Variable	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% lower Confidence Interval	95% Upper Confidence Interval
Environmental Knowledge-social media	0.753	<.001	0.708	0.792
Environmental Knowledge-Buying Behavior	0.731	<.001	0.682	0.773
Environmental Attitude-social media	0.731	<.001	0.682	0.773
Environmental Attitude-Buying Behavior	0.665	<.001	0.607	0.716
Environmental Concerns-social media	0.761	<.001	0.717	0.799

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Environmental Concerns-Buying Behavior	0.648	<.001	0.588	0.701
Environmental Responsibility-social media	0.773	<.001	0.731	0.81
Environmental Responsibility-Buying Behavior	0.676	<.001	0.62	0.726
Social Media- Buying Behavior	0.681	<.001	0.625	0.73

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Linear Regression

Table 2 illustrates the results of simple and multiple linear regression analysis to examine the impact of social media and environmental factors on Gen-Z consumers' buying behavior toward sustainable fashion. The simple linear regression analysis results indicated a strong positive correlation between social media and buying behavior, with an R-value of 0.681. The R-square value (0.461) indicated that social media engagement accounted for 46.1% of the variance in consumer buying behavior.

The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.691$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrated that buying behavior increased by 0.691 units for every one-unit increase in social media engagement. The model was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), underscoring the critical role of social media in shaping consumer behavior toward sustainable fashion. Based on these findings, H1 was accepted, confirming that social media has a significant positive impact on the buying behavior of Thai Gen Z consumers toward sustainable fashion.

The multiple linear regression analysis revealed a strong relationship between environmental factors and buying behavior, with an R-value of 0.787. The R-square value of 0.619 indicated that 61.9% of the variance in consumer buying behavior was explained by environmental knowledge, attitude, concerns, and responsibility. It illustrates that environmental knowledge, attitude, concerns, and responsibility significantly influence sustainable fashion purchasing behavior. Among these factors, environmental knowledge had the most substantial impact, followed by attitude. While concerns and responsibility had weaker but still significant effects, the findings suggest that increasing sustainability awareness and fostering positive attitudes are crucial drivers in promoting eco-friendly consumption.

Table 2. Simple Linear and Multiple Linear Regression Coefficients for the Impact of Social Media and Environmental factors on Buying Behavior

Model	R	R Square	Unstandardized Coefficient β	Std. error	Standardized Coefficient Beta	t	Sig
Simple Linear Regression							
(Constant)	0.681	0.461	1.155	0.146	-	7.931	<.001
Social media			0.691	0.037	0.681	18.739	<.001
Multiple Linear Regression							
(Constant)	0.787	0.619	0.515	0.135	-	3.811	<.001
Environmental Knowledge			0.313	0.048	0.34	6.561	<.001
Environmental Attitude			0.22	0.046	0.228	4.798	<.001
Environmental Concerns			0.151	0.053	0.149	2.823	0.005
Environmental Responsibility			0.17	0.052	0.168	3.271	<.001

a. Dependent Variable = Buying Behavior

b. Predictors (Simple Linear Regression): (Constant), Independent variable = social media

c. Predictors (Multiple Linear Regression): (Constant), Independent Variables= Environmental Knowledge, Environmental Attitude, Environmental Concerns, Environmental Responsibility



Mediation Regression

The mediation regression analysis confirmed that social media played a significant role in mediating the relationship between environmental factors (knowledge, attitude, concerns, and responsibility) and Gen Z consumers' buying behavior toward sustainable fashion. As summarized in the following sections, all four hypotheses (H2–H5) were accepted, with social media acting as a key mediator in each model.

As shown in Table 3, Model 1 demonstrated that social media enhanced sustainable buying behavior by increasing environmental knowledge. Both the direct effect ($\beta = 0.3887$, $p < 0.001$) and the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.2962$, BootSE = 0.0419, 95% CI [0.2179, 0.3808]) confirmed the significant mediating role of social media since the confidence interval did not contain zero. This highlights the importance of sustainability-related content in influencing consumer knowledge. Therefore, H2 was accepted, confirming that environmental knowledge significantly positively influenced Gen Z consumers' buying behavior toward sustainable fashion, mediated by social media.

Model 2 focused on the role of social media in shaping environmental attitudes, which in turn influenced sustainable fashion choices. For the direct effect ($\beta = 0.3528$, $p < 0.001$) and the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.3291$, BootSE = 0.0427, 95% CI [0.2489, 0.4160]), the mediating effect was confirmed as the confidence interval did not contain zero. This suggested that consumers with a positive attitude toward sustainability, formed through social media exposure, were more inclined to purchase sustainable fashion products. Thus, H3 was accepted, affirming that environmental attitude significantly and positively influenced Gen Z consumers' buying behavior, mediated by social media.

Model 3 indicated that social media also served as a significant mediator between environmental concerns and sustainable buying behavior. For the direct effect ($\beta = 0.3538$, $p < 0.001$) and the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.3357$, BootSE = 0.0520, 95% CI [0.2385, 0.4412]), the mediating effect was confirmed since the confidence interval did not contain zero. This demonstrated that increased concern for environmental issues, influenced by social media content, led to greater engagement in sustainable consumption. Hence, H4 was accepted, confirming that environmental concerns positively influenced Gen Z consumers' buying behavior, mediated by social media.

Model 4 showed that social media mediated the relationship between environmental responsibility and buying behavior. For the direct effect ($\beta = 0.3772$, $p < 0.001$) and the indirect effect ($\beta = 0.3078$, BootSE = 0.0401, 95% CI [0.2310, 0.3876]), the mediating effect was confirmed since the confidence interval did not contain zero. Thus, it can be shown that consumers who feel responsible for environmental protection due to social media exposure are more likely to adopt sustainable fashion choices. Therefore, H5 was accepted, affirming that environmental responsibility positively influenced Gen Z consumers' buying behavior, mediated by social media.

Table 3. Direct and Indirect Effect of X on Y

Effect Type	β	SE	95% Confidence Interval		t-value	p-value
			LLCI	ULCI		
Model 1						
Mediator (MVK): social media, X=Environmental Knowledge, Y= Buying Behavior						
Direct effect	0.3887	0.541	0.2823	0.4951	7.1805	0
Indirect effect	0.2962	0.0419	0.2179	0.3808	-	-
Standardized Indirect Effect (X-MVK-Y)	0.2925	0.0399	0.2169	0.3728	-	-
Model 2						
Mediator (MVA): social media, X=Environmental Attitude, Y= Buying Behavior						
Direct effect	0.3528	0.049	0.2565	0.4491	7.2018	0
Indirect effect	0.3291	0.0427	0.2489	0.416	-	-
Standardized Indirect Effect (X-MVA-Y)	0.3208	0.0403	0.2455	0.4021	-	-

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Model 3

Mediator (MVC): social media, X=Environmental Concerns, Y= Buying Behavior

Direct effect	0.3538	0.058	0.2397	0.4679	6.0946	0
Indirect effect	0.3357	0.052	0.2385	0.4412	-	-
Standardized Indirect Effect (X-MVC-Y)	0.3154	0.0454	0.2283	0.4059	-	-

Model 4

Mediator (MVR): social media, X=Environmental Responsibility, Y= Buying Behavior

Direct effect	0.3772	0.0485	0.2818	0.4726	7.7719	0
Indirect effect	0.3078	0.0401	0.231	0.3876	-	-
Standardized Indirect Effect (X-MVR-Y)	0.3039	0.0369	0.2317	0.3767	-	-

**Level of Confidence Interval = 95%

No. of Bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000

Indicators; $p < 0.001$

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that social media plays a crucial role in shaping the buying behavior of Thai Gen Z consumers toward sustainable fashion. The results support H1, confirming that social media significantly influences purchasing decisions. This aligns with previous study which highlight that social media plays an important role in shaping sustainable consumer behavior by encouraging positive attitudes and influencing buying decisions through engaging and eco-friendly content (Garg & Gupta, 2020). Moreover, digital platforms facilitate awareness, engagement, and purchase intention by exposing consumers to sustainability-related content and ethical brands (Kim & Ko, 2012; Kumar et al., 2021). Additionally, the study validates the mediating role of social media in the relationship between environmental factors and buying behavior. H2, H3, H4, and H5 are supported, demonstrating that environmental knowledge, attitude, concerns, and responsibility positively influence consumer behavior, with social media amplifying these effects. This suggests that Gen Z consumers who are more environmentally informed and conscious are more likely to be influenced by online content that reinforces their values and encourages sustainable fashion consumption.

The findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the impact of social media in driving sustainable consumption, particularly among younger demographics (Jain et al., 2022). Moreover, the significant mediation effects show that social media significantly mediates the relationships between environmental knowledge, attitude, concerns, and responsibility with sustainable fashion consumption. This suggests that exposure to sustainability content on digital platforms strengthens the link between consumers' environmental awareness and their actual purchasing decisions, supporting previous studies on the role of digital engagement in sustainability (Ghazali et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022). Furthermore, Thai Gen Z consumers rely on social media not only as a source of information but also as a platform that strengthens their environmental beliefs and motivates them to take action.

Among the environmental factors, environmental knowledge had the strongest influence, reinforcing the importance of consumer education in driving sustainable choices (Ghazali et al., 2019). However, the relatively weaker impact of environmental concerns suggests that awareness alone may not be enough to drive behavioral change. While these factors still have significant effects, the findings indicate that increasing sustainability awareness and fostering positive attitudes are crucial drivers in promoting eco-friendly consumption. This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991), which posits that behavioral change requires not only awareness but also favorable attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and social norms. Furthermore, previous studies indicate that fostering a sense of responsibility leads to more significant changes in consumer behavior than mere concern (Gleim et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2022).



Overall, the study achieves its objectives by demonstrating that social media significantly impacts the buying behavior of Thai Gen-Z consumers toward sustainable fashion. Additionally, the findings highlight how environmental knowledge, attitudes, concerns, and responsibility influence their buying decisions, with social media serving as a key mediator in shaping eco-conscious consumption.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of social media in shaping the buying behavior of Thai Gen Z consumers toward sustainable fashion. The findings confirm that social media is a key driver, directly influencing purchasing decisions while also mediating the effects of environmental knowledge, attitudes, concerns, and responsibility. Among these factors, environmental knowledge emerged as the most influential, reinforcing the idea that increased awareness, coupled with social media engagement, leads to more sustainable consumer choices. The relatively weaker impact of environmental concerns and responsibility suggests that awareness alone is insufficient to drive behavioral change.

This study also provides valuable insights into the relationship between social media influence and environmental factors in sustainable fashion consumption. It reveals that online engagement not only improves knowledge and attitudes but also enhances the connection between sustainability awareness and buying behavior.

Despite these valuable insights, the study has several limitations. The study employs a cross-sectional design, capturing consumers' attitudes and behaviors at a specific point in time. However, this approach does not account for potential changes in behavior over time, particularly given the evolving nature of social media trends and sustainability awareness. Additionally, the study does not differentiate between different social media platforms, potentially overlooking platform-specific influences.

In future research, a longitudinal approach is recommended to examine changes in consumer attitudes and behaviors over time. This would help to obtain the evolving impact of social media trends and sustainability awareness on purchasing decisions. Furthermore, exploring platform-specific effects, particularly the roles of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube in shaping sustainable fashion behavior would provide deeper insights into which social media platforms are the most effective in driving consumer engagement with sustainability.

Lastly, these findings contribute to both academic literature and practical applications, offering guidance for brands, marketers, and policymakers aiming to leverage social media to promote sustainability among Thai Gen Z consumers. Sustainable fashion brands can utilize social media more effectively by employing influencer marketing, interactive content, and messaging that emphasizes personal responsibility. Collaborating with sustainability-focused influencers and encouraging peer endorsements can increase credibility and consumer engagement. Interactive content, such as quizzes and challenges, can make sustainability more appealing and educational. Furthermore, campaigns that highlight the environmental impact of individual choices can foster a stronger sense of accountability, encouraging Gen Z consumers to adopt sustainable fashion habits. By employing these strategies, brands can maximize their influence on social media and drive meaningful changes in consumer behavior.

This study also underscores the importance of environmental education and awareness campaigns in promoting responsible consumption habits, contributing valuable insights for policymakers seeking to foster sustainable practices in the fashion industry.

6. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Nudee Nupairoj, for her invaluable guidance, insightful feedback, and constant encouragement throughout every stage of this research. I also extend my appreciation to all the professors of the Master of Science in International Digital Business Program at Rangsit International College for providing necessary resources and a conducive learning environment. Special thanks to all the respondents who participated in the survey and contributed essential data for this study. I am also deeply thankful to my family and friends for their unwavering support and



motivation. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the previous researchers whose work formed the foundation of this study. Without their valuable research and publications, this thesis would not have been possible. This journey has been both challenging and rewarding, and I am profoundly grateful to every person who has contributed to my academic and personal growth.

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