Do green women influencers spur sustainable consumption patterns? Descriptive evidences from social media influencers

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Abstract

Purpose – The adoption of digitalization and sustainability is key phenomenon that has changed perception and behaviors of people recently. As there is a rising power of digital communication by social media platforms, there is higher interaction between people globally. In addition, consumers can influence each other to adopt new consumption pattern. At this point, this paper aims to examine the role of green women influencers on promoting sustainable consumption patterns via social media platforms.

Design/methodology/approach – This study employed qualitative research method. The study included four top-lists for green/sustainable social media influencers as a sample case. Then, the data were analyzed by descriptive content analysis. To determine the role of green women influencers in sustainable consumption, this study used classification and categorization technique through descriptive content analysis.

Findings – The study indicates that green women are seen as a primary social media influencer because of promoting sustainable consumption patterns in general. Especially, green women have more power to change consumption patterns via digital platforms. Green women social media influencers, who are micro-celebrities, share primary contents such as sustainable fashion, green foods, sustainable travel, sustainable lifestyle, conscious choices, green cosmetics and zero waste life to promote sustainable consumption patterns. Women social media influencers are much more effective than men influencers to transform society's consumption behaviors into sustainable consumption patterns.

Research limitations/implications – The study provides some qualitative findings based on the selected four top-listed green social media influencers by different social media platforms. Future studies can find out different results based on different sample cases and employ quantitative research methodology.

Practical implications – The study suggests policymakers to cooperate with green women social media influencers to achieve sub-targets of 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Especially, it is suggested to cooperate with micro-celebrities or Internet celebrities to promote sustainable consumption patterns.

Originality/value – The study proves that women social media influencers have the essential role in promoting green/sustainable consumption patterns via digital platforms. In addition, green women influencers can guide their followers to adopt sustainable consumption patterns.

Keywords Social media influencer, Green influencer, Influencer marketing, Women influencers, Sustainable consumption patterns

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Influencer marketing is a rising concept since decades. Online marketing tools encourage the development of influencer marketing implications that businesses mostly invest in bloggers, vloggers, YouTubers, phenomenons, etc. to promote their brands. Today, social media platforms provide many types of contents for users. Users can follow specific phenomenon or social media accounts according to their area of interest. Social media influencers are accepted as an alternative party to attract consumers recently (Freberg *et al.*, 2011). Due to social media influencers' impact on consumers, brands and businesses welcome social media influencers to promote their products or brands via social media platforms (Lim *et al.*, 2017). When observing influencers on the social media platforms, it is seen that there are three main groups. As seen in Table 1, the biggest market share belongs to celebrities; then, professionals or experts are important influencers from social media platforms, and lastly, there are social media influencers who have 500–10.000 followers in general (Talkwalker, 2018).

In addition to Table 1, it can be said that an alternative group is called as "micro-celebrity" for social media influencers. Micro-celebrity represents social media influencers who are performing on social media platforms with higher number of followers. Micro-celebrities can attract people to buy new brands, adopt new lifestyles, etc. by showing their own behavior via social media platforms (Chae, 2018). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the digitalization has been accelerated rapidly. When physical mobility or physical connection was reduced, the digital communication and digital mobility were both increased (Yıldırım *et al.*, 2021). At this point, it can be determined the power of social media influencers will be higher at the near future (Khamis *et al.*, 2017). Social media influencers who are micro-celebrity are new opinion leaders as attracting others (Pang *et al.*, 2016). Some scholars also called new type of social media influencers as "Internet celebrities" (Xu and Pratt, 2018) and micro-"celebrities" (Kay *et al.*, 2020). In fact, Kay *et al.* (2020) revealed that micro-celebrities or micro-influencers can be more powerful group to as attracting consumers or followers via social media platforms. Enke and Borchers (2019) determined seven categories for social media influencers as explaining how organizations can work with them as follows:

(1) *Content production competences:* Social media influencers have the higher ability of monitoring contents and keeping trendy patterns via social media platforms;

(2) *Content distribution competences*: Social media influencers can manage every kind of digital channels to connect with their followers or others as sharing their contents;

Types*	Who are they?*	The power*
The Celeb	Celebrities	Celebrities are main players in influencer marketing. As having the highest number of followers, they have the biggest share in the market
The Execs	Experts and professionals	Experts and professionals are important social media influencers with having higher numbers of followers
The Everyday	Social media users	Social media users can be used for social influencers as they have followers with 500–10.000

Note: *The info is adapted from Talkwalker (2018)
Source: Created by author

Table 1.
The types of social
media influencers

(3) *Interaction competences:* The most important advantage of social media influencers is having higher interaction communication with consumers/followers;

(4) *Public persona*: Social media influencers have their own specific brand that attracts others;

(5) *Significant number of relevant relationships:* Social media influencers can manage various relationships via social media platforms;

(6) *Relationships quality:* The management of relationship by social media influencers seems to be more efficient; and

(7) *Ability to influence:* The power of social media influencers is based on influencing others.

On the other side, this study claims that social media influencers can be a new endorser for policymakers while creating sustainable policies and promoting sustainable consumption patterns. In other words, the rise of green or sustainable influencers can be accepted as remarkable point for policymakers to achieve 2030 SDGs. 2030 SDGs help countries to achieve the sustainable balance between environmental, economic and social issues with 17 main goals. Countries need every kinds of collaboration to achieve 17 main goals of 2030 SDGs in the long term, especially SDG-12 that includes sustainable consumption and production needs consumers' awareness and responsibility (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development, n.d.). The adoption of sustainable consumption patterns mostly challenges governments as achieving sustainable development, because transforming usual consumption behavior into sustainable consumption behavior is difficult to achieve in a short period globally. Although people are found to be more sensitive for environmental problems and the future of the world, the current consumption behavior of consumers do not match with their environmental awareness. At this point, there are arguments and discussions on the lack of sustainable consumption in practical way (Schrader and Thøgersen, 2011; Thøgersen and Schrader, 2012; Terlau and Hirsch, 2015; Yildirim, 2020). People have realized that everybody should take a responsibility to save the earth. As a result of human activities, many biodiversity has been challenged with extinction and global warming has increased since industrial revolution (Abdallah, 2017). When consumers are looking for information about sustainable products or sustainable lifestyle, they can face problems such as confusing information, conflict between product price and its function or fake-green-products in the marketplace (OECD, 2001; Yıldırım and Candan, 2015). In addition, the term of sustainable consumption is still a problematic issue due to its natural concept with consumption (Peattie and Collins, 2009). Accordingly, the conflict between marketing perspective and ecological perspective affects the perception of sustainable products or sustainable consumption. Fortunately, the recent progress in 2030 SDGs and reports on environmental issues have all showed that reduce-reuse-recycle (3 R) principle in consumption patterns can achieve sustainability in practice (Slawinska *et al.*, 2014; Yildirim, 2021). It can be said that they are not only promoting sustainable products, but also promoting sustainable consumption patterns is a main issue in the near future. To help confused consumers or encourage them to adopt sustainable lifestyle, social media influencers can be more helpful. As digital communication in the world is increasing, digital influencers will be probably more efficient endorsers to expand sustainable lifestyle or consumption patterns globally. Some studies have showed that social media influencers can guide people for healthier and greener lifestyle. For example, Byrne *et al.* (2017) studied on the role of influencers in public health. They determined that influencers had a great impact on followers to adapt healthy food choices.

Chwialkowska (2019) claimed that social media influencers could contribute consumers to be green consumers by giving information on eco-friendly products and harmful products. Kaulbars-Staudinger (2019) gave some empirical evidence for the link between sustainable fashion and social influencers. According to her study, young people are more open to be influenced by social influencer in sustainable fashion industry and she also determined that social influencers had a power on their followers. Yalcin *et al.* (2020) argues the impact of sustainable influencers on consumers. However, there are limited studies on the role of green influencers for promoting sustainable lifestyle in the literature. In this context, this study aims to explore how green women influencers can contribute to promote sustainable consumption patterns. At this point, the following question should be investigated.

(1) Do green women social media influencers encourage consumers to adopt sustainable consumption patterns?

The study consists four main parts as follows: introduction, data and design, findings and conclusion. In reviewing the prior literature, it is seen that studies investigating the impact of green influencers in promoting sustainable consumption patterns are not enough. In addition, the current literature is limited when providing evidences for the link between women green/sustainable social media influencers and sustainable consumption patterns. The main contribution of this study is expected to provide an original model showing the link between green women influencers and sustainable consumption via social media platforms.

2. Data and research design

The paper investigates how sustainable/green women influencers perform on the digital platforms and explains the contribution of green women social media influencers for promoting sustainable consumption. In this context, the paper aims to give descriptive findings for green women social media influencers. This study selected top-listed green influencers based on accessible data. However, there are many lists for green influencers according to different sources. The selected list of green influencers can be showed in Table 2.

As seen in Table 2, this study includes four top-lists for green social media influencers to be investigated. Most of lists provide same names as a green influencer that this result shows a significant value for sample list for the study. The study investigates the role of women influencers in promoting sustainable consumption patterns according to listed influencers by Table 2. The sources of these lists can are examined as follows:

(1) The list[a] is based on Pilania *et al.* (2020)'s study that listed top-100 green influencers;

(2) The list[b] is based on Team thredUP (2019)'s study that listed top 21 eco-bloggers and influencers;

(3) The list[c] is based on Mediakix (2017)'s study that listed top-10 sustainable blogs and green influencers; and

(4) The list[d] is based on Greenboss (2020)'s study that listed top-20 environmental influencers.

To analyze data, the paper used descriptive content analysis. Descriptive content analysis aims to explain a specific issue or case by giving tables, classifications or models (Öncü *et al.*, 2021; Yıldırım *et al.*, 2021; Yıldırım and Bostancı, 2021). As it is purposed, the study focused on main descriptive characteristics of green women social media influencers and how they can help promoting sustainable consumption pattern.

Table 2.
Top listed green/
sustainable social
media influencers

The list[a]		The list[b]	The list[c]	The list[d]
Emma Slade Edmondson	Aditi Mayer	Sustainable Daisy	VEGIE HEAD- Adele McConnell	Zero Waste Home
Brian Linton	Natalie Kay	Old World New	GREEN GLOBAL TRAVEL- Bret Love and Mary Gabbett	Trash is for tossers
Kristi Soomer	Marina Testino	Sustainably Chic	Elana's Pantry- Elana Amsterdam	Treading My Own Path
Dominique Drakeford	Mary-Alice Duff	Eco Warrior Princess	COOKIE AND KATE- Kathryne Taylor	Sustainable Dish
Christina Dean	Jonathan Levy	Reading My Tea Leaves	CHICANOL- Laura Termini	Shelburne Farms
Adele McConnell	Kathryn Kellogg	Trash is For Tossers	TRASH IS FOR TOSSERS- Lauren Singer	Plant Based Blonde
Elana Amsterdam	Lori Popkewitz Alper	Zero Waste Collective	SUSTAINABLY CHIC- Natalie Kay	The Girl Gone Green
Kathryne Taylor	Mikaela Loach	Alyssa Beltempo	SARAH WILSON-	Going Zero Waste
Wendy Polisi	Kristina Carrillo-Bucaram	ADIMAY	HELLO GLOW- Stephanie Gerber	Sustainability in style
Blue Ollis	Claire Buchanan	SUTTON + GROVE	WENDY POLISI	Little Green Dot
Brett Love and Mary Gabbet	Jennifer Nini	Shae necessities		Glam organic Goddess
Linda McCormick	Immy Lucas	Green Dreamer		Sustainable Daisy
Valeria Hinojosa	Tashina Combs	Anita Vandyke		Plastic-Free Tuesday
Charlie Marchant	Kari Byers	Plant Based Blonde		Mindful Momma
Alex Schmidt	Mahima Gujral	Meg Haywood Sullivan		Kate Nelson
Renata Esteves	Bea Johnson	The Girl Gone Green		The Van Effect
Jess Rigg	Leah Thomas	Going Zero Waste		Zero Waste Nerd
Diane Hoffmaster	Diandra Marizet	Shannon Buckley		The Joyful Vegan
Wendy Graham	Teresa Baker	The Constant Closet		Mama eats plants
Lindsay Miles	Kevin J Patel	Clothed in Abundance		Melanin and sustainable style
Jasmine Tuan	Addie Fisher	Conscious Chatter		
Kathleen Elie	Elizabeth Teo			
Ellie Bullen	Hannamari Rahkonen			
Anthea Cheng	Katja Kokko			
Lucy Watson	Verena Erin			

The list[a]	The list[b]	The list[c]	The list[d]
Jasmine Briones	Tess Waltenburg		
RG Enriquez-Diez	Malin Sigefjord		
Francesca Willow	Marie Nasemann		
Karen Maurice	Amruta Kshemkalyani		
Jessica Cresswell	Isaias Hernandez		
Emma Ross	Alex and Tyler Mifflin		
Letizia Palmisano	Madeleine Olivia		
Helly Tong	Tim Silverwood		
Kate Nelson	Jen Brownlie		
Lauren Singer	Caroline Ginolfi		
Tara McKenna	Arti Jalan		
Céline Semaan-Vernon	Vivien and Aaron		
Clare Press	Abbie Synan		
Kat Eves	Alexandra Baackes		
Militza	Wanda Malhotra		
Megean Weldon	Nayana Premnath		
Inch Chua	Ripu Daman Bevli		
Charlotte Mei de Drouas	Maja Brekalo		
Zoë Morrison	Melissa Tan		
Rebecca Prince-Ruiz	Alba Sueiro		
Aja Barber	Lisa Casali		
Carmen Jenny	James Whitlowdelano		
Jasmine Hemsley	Monika Poppy		
Daria Andronescu	Livia van Heerde		
Venetia La Manma	Lizzie Carr		

Notes: The list[a] is adapted from Pilania *et al.* (2020); The list[b] is adapted from Team thredUP (2019); The list[c] is adapted from Mediakix (2017); The list[d] is adapted from Greenboss (2020)

Table 2.

3. Descriptive findings

Table 3 presents the number of women and men of the lists. The list[a] includes 100 green influencers, 11 of them are men and 90 of them are women. Lists include couples as one influencer that the paper calculated couples separately. For example, a couple of Brett Love and Mary Gabbet are calculated separately in the list[a]. The list[b] includes green women influencers. The number of women is higher both in the list[c] and list[d]. When investigating green/sustainable/environmental influencers, it is obviously observed that the number of women influencers is greatly higher than men influencers.

Table 4 shows main characteristics of green women social media influencers. When considering the type of green women social media influencers, it is proper to call them as micro-celebrities with higher number of followers. Green women social media influencers are Internet celebrities due to full-time working position on social media platform. They volunteer for teaching sustainable lifestyle and sustainable consumption patterns. Accordingly, green women social media influencers interest in sustainable lifestyle and sustainable consumption patterns such as sustainable fashion, sustainable travel, etc.

The list[a]		The list[b]		The list[c]		The list[d]	
Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
90	11	21	–	10	1	20	1
100 (N)		21 (N)		10 (N)		20 (N)	

Table 3.
Gender factor in green influencers

Notes: Couples are calculated separately The list[a] is based on Pilania *et al.* (2020)'s study; The list[b] is based on Team thredUP (2019)'s study; The list[c] is based on Mediakix (2017)'s study; The list[d] is based on Greenboss (2020)'s study

Characteristics	Category	Definition
Type of Social Media Influencer	Micro-celebrity	Green women influencers can be called as micro-celebrity in general
Motive	Volunteer	Green women influencers volunteer for sharing sustainable consumption patterns
Type of content	Green/sustainable contents	Green and sustainable lifestyles and consumption patterns are main contents
Content management	Specific and original content sharing	Green women influencers create their own content and update their content frequently
Followers	Usually higher than 10.000 for per social media tools	Green women influencers usually having higher number of followers in every kind of social media platforms
Social media tools	Using several social media tools	Green women influencers use many social media tools to communicate with others. Especially, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, blogs and Pinterest are mostly used by green women influencers
Communication	Interactive communication	Green women influencers keep interactive communication
Specific brand management	Self-branding	Green women influencers mostly create their own brand name or social media as a self-branding

Table 4.
Main characteristics of green social media influencers

Keeping interactive communication is important as having up-to-date and original contents. Self-branding is an important part of being a micro-celebrity that green women social media influencers have their own content with brand-name.

Main contents and topics are so important for getting higher number of followers via social media tools. In this context, green influencers use different contents for their followers. Every list gives top-lists for green/sustainable influencers and every influencer focus on specific topics or issues that are sub-segments of sustainable consumption patterns. According to observation of four lists, the paper categorized main green contents as "Sustainable fashion, Green foods/recipes, Sustainable travel, Sustainable lifestyle, Green/vegan cosmetics/beauty and Zero waste/less waste." The paper counted primary topics of green influencers based on their listed social media accounts. Table 5 presents the number of primary contents of green influencers.

As seen in Table 5, the most used content is sustainable lifestyle. In other words, most of green women influencers guide their followers for adapting sustainable lifestyle. Second, sustainable fashion and zero waste are both primary topics for green women influencers. Then, green influencers mostly included topics of green food, sustainable travel and green cosmetics. Some of green topics include specific issues in the context of sustainable consumption patterns. Table 5 shows specific issues of primary contents as follows:

It can be said that green influencers generally promote environmentally friendly products to reduce waste and pollution (see Table 6). All of the primary contents or topics include conscious consumption patterns.

Table 7 shows the key elements for promoting sustainable development. When considering green women influencers, it is observed that some key elements help them to reach large mass. First, having more than one social media tools is so helpful for green women influencers. It is seen that top green women influencers have various social media accounts and tools to reach higher numbers of followers. In addition, most of them have their own web site and foundations or brands. Second, using an open-access account will help green influencers to get potential followers. If social media accounts are limited or close, influencers cannot find new and potential followers as soon as possible. Green influencers aim to guide and teach other people for sustainable lifestyle in general. In this context, open-access information should be given to them. Followers want to transform their life into sustainable lifestyle or they want adapt healthier lifestyle, so accessible information will be critical to be followed. Green skills and green information are expected to be owned by green women influencers. Current followers and potential followers want to learn the most appropriate sustainable consumption patterns. Another key element is volunteering factor. Green women influencers are different from other influencers in general. Green influencers

Contents	The list[a]	The list[b]	The list[c]	The list[d]	Total
Sustainable fashion	25	6	1	2	34
Green foods/recipes	19	2	5	2	28
Sustainable travel	18	3	1	1	23
Sustainable lifestyle	40	9	2	9	60
Green/vegan cosmetics/beauty	8	2	2	3	15
Zero waste/less waste	17	8	1	9	35

Notes: The list[a] is based on Pilania *et al.* (2020)'s study; The list[b] is based on Team thredUP (2019)'s study; The list[c] is based on Mediakix (2017)'s study; The list[d] is based on Greenboss (2020)'s study

Table 5.
The number of
primary contents

Contents	Specific issues
Sustainable fashion	Ethical fashion, vintage, second hand, ethical clothing and reducing waste
Green foods/recipes	Plants-based food/recipes, vegan recipes, vegetarian diets, gluten-free, dairy-free, egg-free recipes and healthier food/recipes
Sustainable travel	Conscious choices in travel, reduce carbon emission and respect different cultures during travel
Sustainable lifestyle	Conscious choices, conscious consumption, using public transportation, reducing carbon emission, fight against pollution, reducing plastics, reducing waste, adapting healthier life and using eco-friendly products
Green/vegan cosmetics/beauty	Using Plant-based/botanical beauty products, homemade recipes of skin care and makeup products and healthier cosmetics
Zero waste/less waste	Using Eco-friendly products, reduce plastics and waste and stop over-consumption

Key elements	How they work?
Social media tools	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn and YouTube are mostly preferred social media tool by women influencers
Open access account	Open access account is important to get higher numbers of followers. Limited accounts may discourage new and potential followers
Open access information	Open access information is needed to explain and teach how people can adapt sustainable lifestyle. Green women influencers share their knowledge, skills and experiences with their followers
Green skills and information	Green women influencers share their knowledge, skills and experiences with their followers. Accordingly, green women influencers should know sustainability principles in their consumption patterns
Volunteering	Being green influencer is not based on economic motives. Green influencers guides their followers mostly based on their emotional motives
Followers	The number of followers can be a great indicator to determine the effect of green influencers. Green women influencers with higher numbers of followers will have an ability to promote sustainable lifestyle

keep doing their activities based on their emotional motives rather than economic motives. Finally, the numbers of followers is important to promote sustainable lifestyle. With the help of higher numbers of followers, green women influencers will reach new mass and influence those followers.

As presenting by Table 8, green women social media influencers mostly give ecological perspective for sustainable lifestyle and sustainable consumption. When observing them, it is seen that 3 R principles for sustainable lifestyle, zero waste, less consumption, using natural-content food or products and home-made products are all main motives and these influencers guide or show others (followers) how to adopt sustainable consumption patterns. It can be determined that social media contents as sustainable fashion and sustainable travel can include both marketing and ecological perspective. But, social media contents such as green foods/recipes, sustainable lifestyle, green/vegan cosmetics and beauty and zero waste are more close to ecological perspective in general.

4. Conclusion
The power of social media influencers has been expanded recently. Social media influencers are accepted as the primary promotional tool in social media platforms. Although influencer marketing is mostly thought to be used for marketing promotion (Hugh *et al.*, 2019), it can be used for better purposes such as promoting sustainable consumption patterns. When considering the impact of influencers on followers (target segment), influencers can guide people for sustainable lifestyle. Influencers are known as an opinion leaders of social media platforms and they can share own experiences, lifestyle and consumption patterns (Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro, 2020; Wielki, 2020) daily via social media accounts. In addition, consumers or followers react positively toward brands, products or ideas that are suggested by social media influencers (Jin *et al.*, 2019).

This study explores whether green women social media influencers (social media) can promote sustainable consumption patterns. The literature gives limited evidences when explaining the impact of green influencers on promoting sustainable consumption. In this context, it is thought to contribute the related literature by giving descriptive evidences. When it was observed in this study, it was seen that women influencers had the highest share in sustainable social media content. In other words, some of top-listed green and sustainable influencers in social media platforms were mostly women and also some of them were all women. Green women influencers share several sustainable contents. This study employed qualitative descriptive findings. Based on findings, this paper suggests Figure 1 as an alternative model to explain how green women influencers promote sustainable consumption patterns.

Figure 1 is based on the descriptive findings of the current study and the below model includes selected top-lists of green influencers in this study. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and Linkedln, having green skills and information, providing open access information and having real higher numbers of followers are main tools that help to guide people for sustainable consumption patterns. Green women influencers share primary contents as sustainable fashion, green foods, sustainable travel, sustainable lifestyle, conscious choices, green cosmetics and zero waste life to promote sustainable consumption patterns. The most important finding can be given as determining green women social media influencers keeps ecological perspective for sustainable consumption. By volunteer-sharing sustainable and green digital contents, green women social media influencers can be efficient endorsers to achieve sustainable development. As a result, it can be determined that green women social media influencers have power to promote sustainable consumption patterns. Although there are some limitations such as sample case and methodology in the study, it is thought to guide future researchers by giving new perspective. In addition, this study provides a brief framework for green women influencers who are promoting green/sustainable lifestyle as a part of sustainable

Sustainable consumption patterns	The perspective Marketing perspective	Environmental perspective
Sustainable fashion	X	X
Green foods/recipes		X
Sustainable travel	X	X
Sustainable lifestyle		X
Green/vegan cosmetics/beauty		X
Zero waste/less waste		X

Table 8.
The perspective on sustainable consumption patterns by green women social media influencers
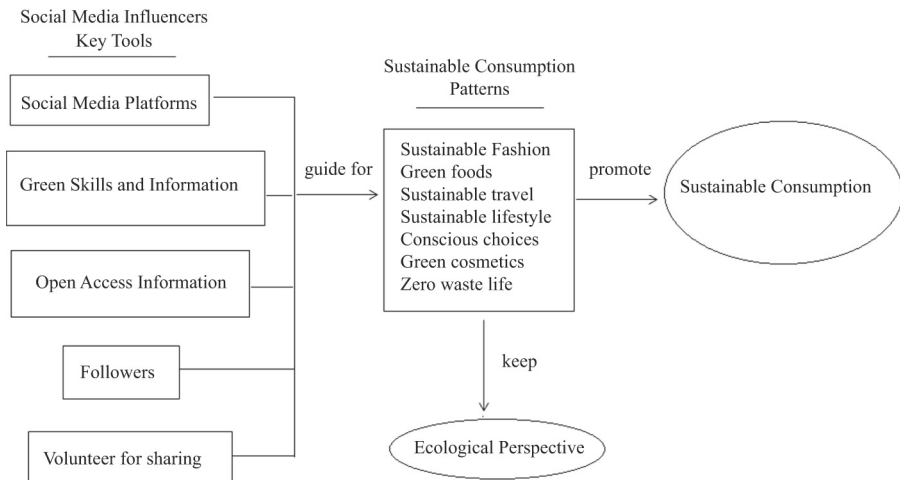
Source: Created by author

consumption pattern via digital platforms. Based on descriptive findings, this study can suggest policymakers to launch new sustainable projects or implication with having a collaboration of green women social media influencers.

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