THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

- In the last few decades, social media has become an integral part of daily life for millions of people, significantly influencing social, economic, and ecological aspects of society.

- **Social media influencers are key agents of change** in promoting sustainable development by encouraging eco-responsible practices and shaping new consumption norms.

- **Despite their popularity, the actual impact of influencers on followers' sustainable behavior is still unclear and understudied**, especially regarding real behavioral change.

- **There is a research gap** in understanding the specific factors that lead followers of sustainability-focused influencers to adopt sustainable practices, which this study aims to address.

- **This study aims to address the research gap** by exploring how influencers shape followers' attitudes toward sustainability and what factors drive the adoption of sustainable behaviors

Aim of the research ⭕

The **aim** of this article is *to analyze the role of social media influencers in shaping followers' attitudes toward sustainable development and in making their behavior more eco-friendly*.

The research **objectives** were as follows:
1. To explore the influence of influencer credibility on followers' attitudes toward sustainability.
2. To assess the impact of influencer credibility on the actual sustainable behaviors of followers.
3. To evaluate how perceived behavioral control influences both attitudes toward sustainability and sustainable behaviors.
4. To investigate the role of attitudes toward sustainability in shaping sustainable behavior and identify barriers to the attitude–behavior gap in the context of sustainability.
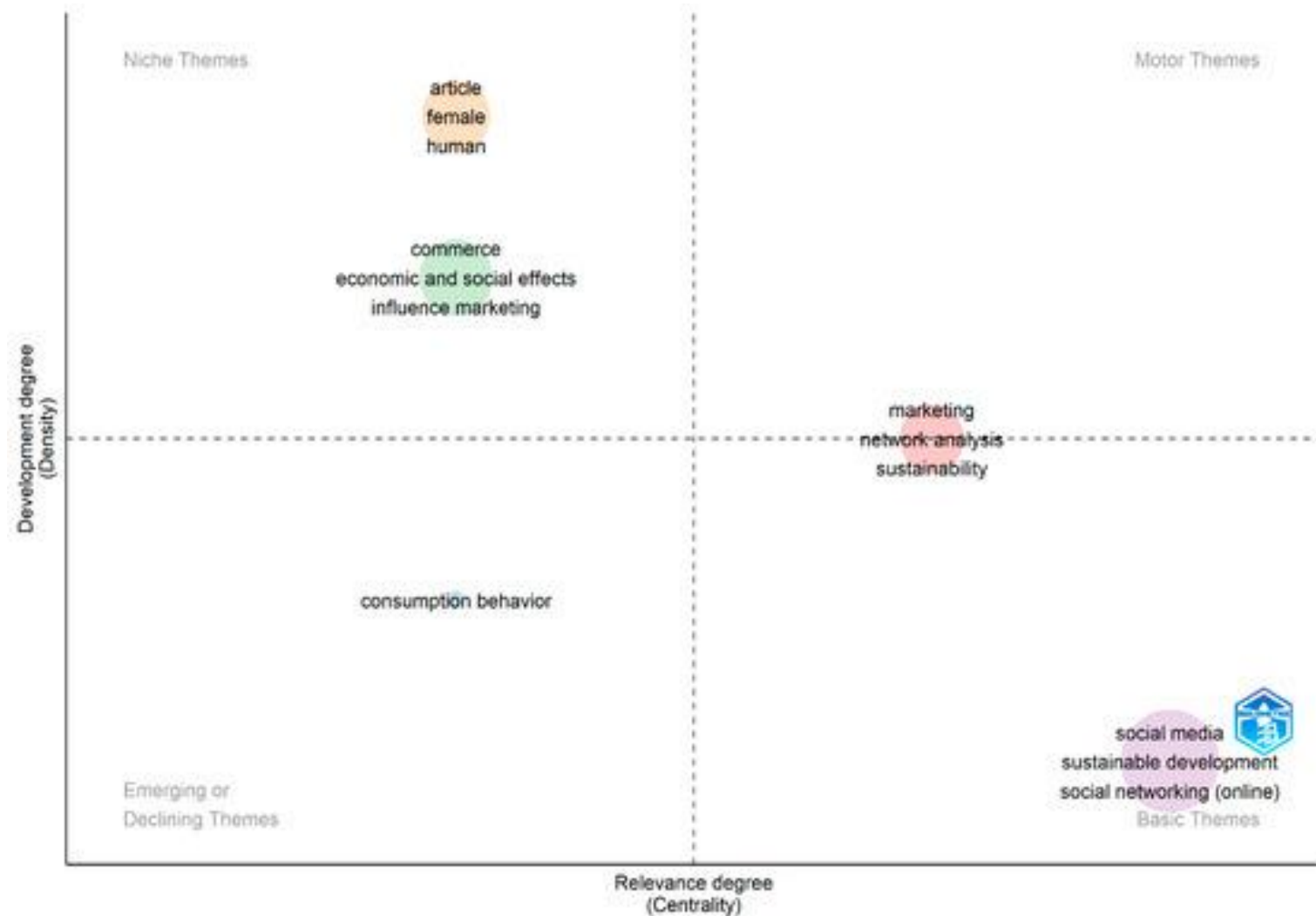
Bibliometric analysis in **Scopus** in **English.**
keywords "**Social media influencers**" AND "**sustainability**".
56 documents published with this combination of keywords.

The thematic map demonstrates that despite growing interest in the role of influencers in sustainability, many aspects of the topic remain under-researched, particularly in the context of **long-term impact on consumer behavior**.

The research is focused on **three key factors**:

- influencer credibility (IC),
- perceived behavioral control (PBC), and
- attitudes toward sustainability (AS) and their impact on actual changes in sustainable behavior (ASB) among followers.

To determine the relationship between these variables, structural equation modeling was used.

The survey used in the analyses was conducted online among sustainability-promoting influencers' followers.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN SHAPING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

- **Influencer Trust and Perceived Expertise**
  Social media influencers shape consumer behavior through the trust followers place in them and the perception that influencers are either experts or share similar values and interests.
- **Promotion of Sustainable Practices**
  Influencers who advocate for sustainable lifestyles (e.g., zero-waste, plant-based diets) can inspire followers to adopt these behaviors and switch to sustainable products.
- **Credibility and Authenticity Matter**
  The effectiveness of influencers depends on their authenticity. If followers perceive them as insincere or profit-driven, their influence diminishes.
- **Trust ≠ Behavior Change**
  While trust in influencers can lead to positive attitudes toward sustainability, actual behavior change also depends on followers' confidence in their ability to implement sustainable practices and afford eco-friendly products.

# Perceived Behavioral Control and Its Role in Sustainable Development

- **Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) is crucial in sustainable behavior**
  According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), PBC reflects a person's confidence in their ability to act sustainably and access the necessary resources. Higher PBC leads to stronger intentions to engage in eco-friendly practices.
- **Confidence and resources drive action**
  Individuals who feel capable and informed are more likely to adopt sustainable habits, such as reducing energy use or recycling. Lack of infrastructure, financial means, or knowledge can hinder this.
- **Influencer credibility supports PBC and attitudes**
  Trustworthy influencers can enhance consumer confidence and attitudes toward sustainability, increasing the likelihood of green purchasing and lifestyle changes.

Proposed Hypotheses

H1. Influencer credibility positively impacts attitudes toward sustainability.

H2. Influencer credibility has a direct effect on actual sustainable behavior.

H3. Attitudes toward sustainability positively influence actual sustainable behavior.

H4. Perceived behavioral control has a direct effect on actual sustainable behavior.

H5. Perceived behavioral control positively influences attitudes toward sustainability.

Methodology

Survey

Demographic information
- gender
- age
- frequency of social media use

The impact of social media influencers on sustainable behavior
- influencer credibility
- perceived behavioral control
- attitudes toward sustainability
- and actual sustainable behavior

5-point Likert scale

Strongly agree

Agree ✓

Disagree
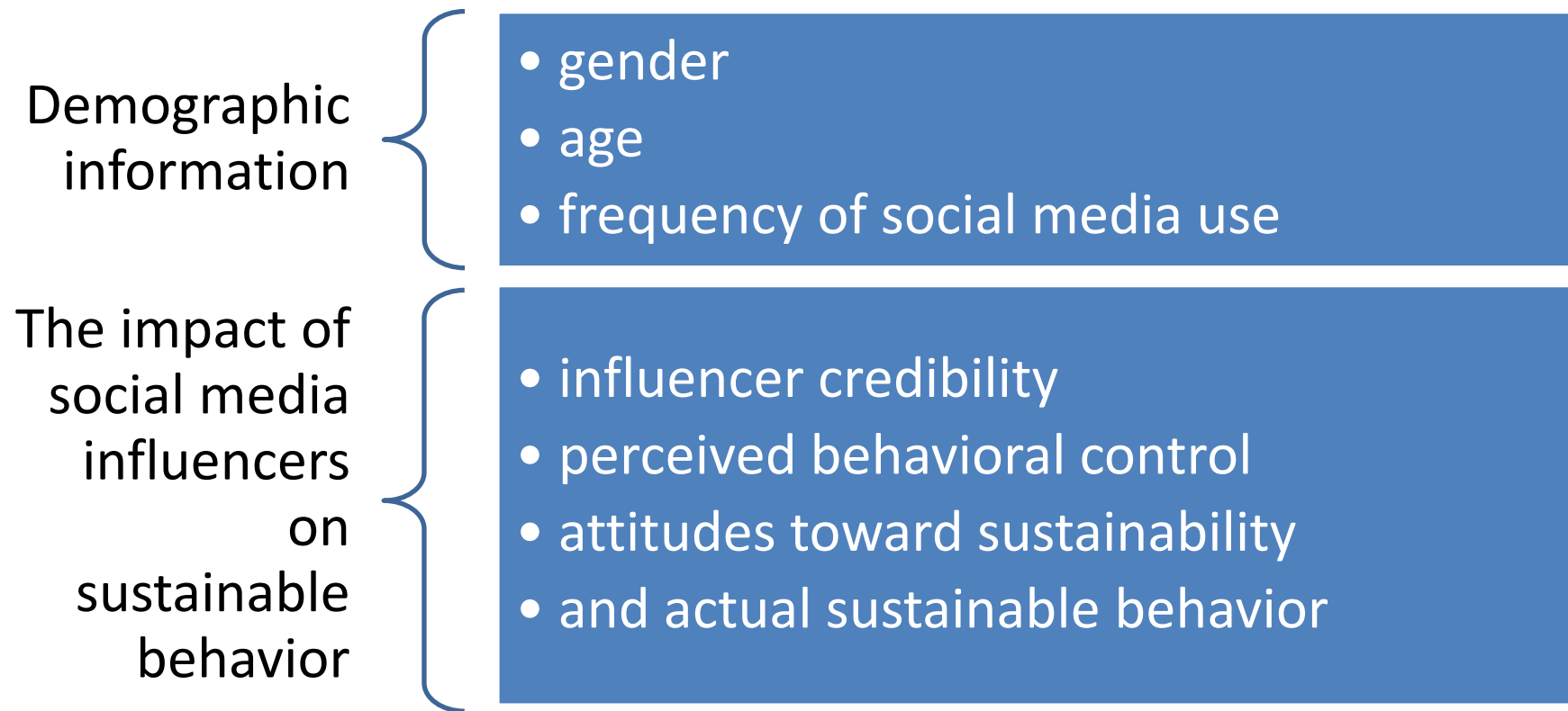
ly disagree

distributed through **various social media platforms, including *Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok***

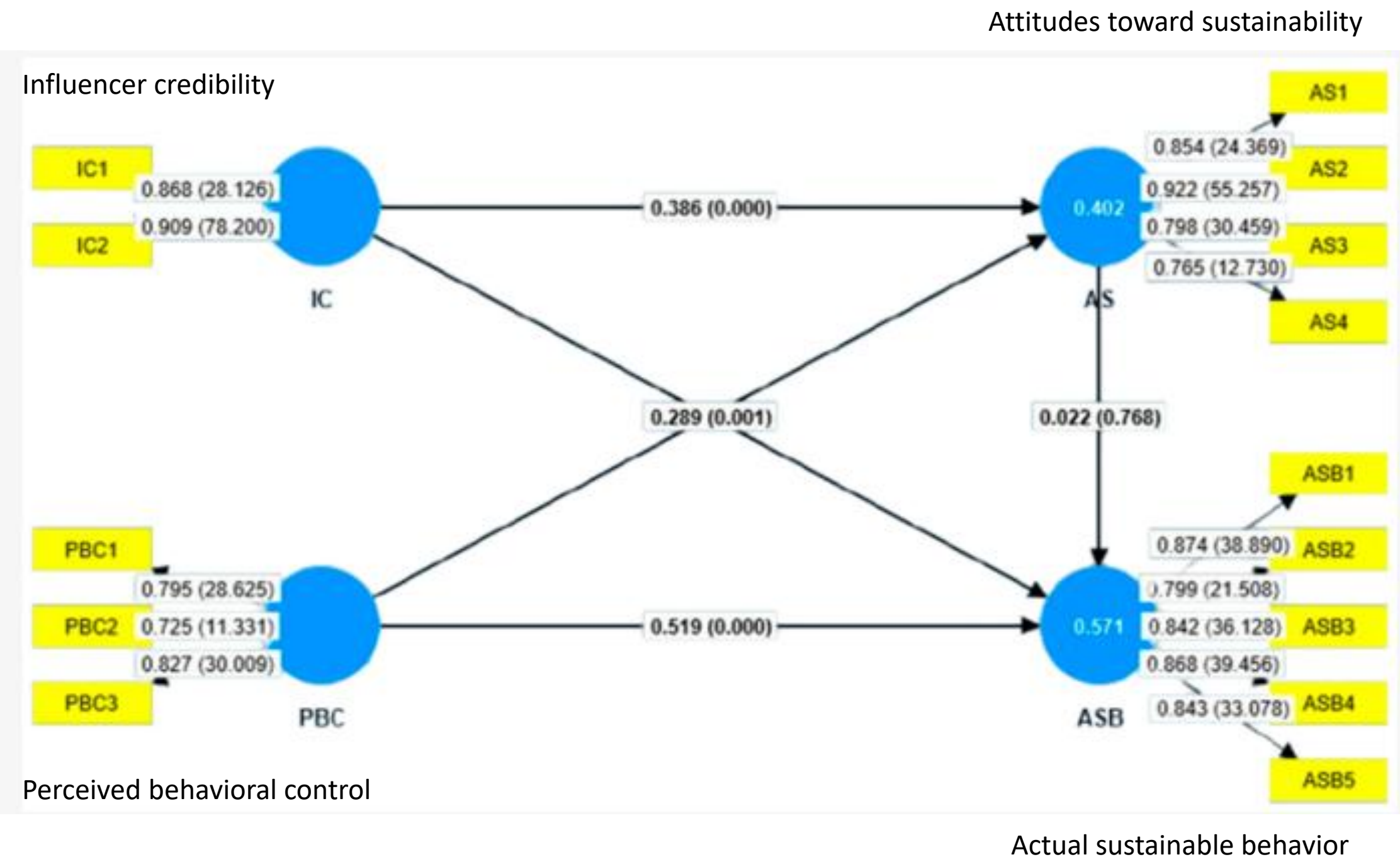**434 responses** → **296** were included in the **PLS-SEM analysis**

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables		Number	%
Gender	Male	216	50%
	Female	210	49%
	Other	6	1%
Age	>18	6	1%
	18–24	192	45%
	25–34	174	40%
	35–44	48	11%
	>45	12	3%
Social Media Use	Once a day	54	13%
	Multiple times a day	372	86%
	Once a week	3	1%
	Multiple times a week	3	1%
Following sustainability influencers	Follow	296	69
	Don't follow	136	31

- As it is seen, half of the respondents in our sample are male (50%), slightly under half are female (49%), and 1% identify as another gender.
- A significant portion of participants (45%) are between 18 and 24 years old, followed by those aged 25–34 (40%).
- Only 1% are under 18, and 11% are between 35 and 44, while those who are older than 45 constitute 3% of the sample.
- The majority of participants (86%) report using social media multiple times a day, with an additional 13% using it once a day, indicating a high overall level of engagement.
- Only a small fraction (1% each) use social media once a week or multiple times a week.

Measurement Model

Attitudes toward sustainability
Influencer credibility
Perceived behavioral control
Actual sustainable behavior

- Internal consistency was assessed via **Cronbach's alpha** and composite reliability, with **all values exceeding the threshold of 0.7**, indicating high reliability.
- All the indicators for each construct had factor loadings above 0.7, which indicates the **high reliability** of the model.
- The IC factor loadings were 0.868 and 0.909, which shows a strong relation between indicators and a latent variable. Likewise, the AS factor loadings equaled 0.765 and 0.922, which also confirms the reliability of the measurements.
- To assess convergent validity, the **average variance estimate** (AVE) was calculated, which exceeded the threshold of 0.5 for all constructs.
- For example, the AVE for influencer credibility was 0.886, confirming that the single construct accounts for more than 88% of the variance of its indicators.
- In addition, the **Fornell–Larcker test** was used to assess discriminant validity, which showed that the square root of the AVE for each construct corresponds to the relationship between the indicated construct and other constructs. This confirms that each research construct has a unique aspect of the model.

Hypotheses Testing

- The structural model was evaluated by examining the path coefficients and their significance (p-values). The results of the path analysis show that **influencer credibility has a positive effect on attitudes toward sustainable development** (path coefficient = 0.386, $p < 0.001$). This confirms hypothesis H1, which states that influencer credibility is necessary to create positive attitudes toward sustainable practices.

- Furthermore, **influencer credibility affects actual sustainable behavior** (path coefficient = 0.243, $p < 0.001$), which confirms hypothesis H2. This not only means that influencers who are perceived as trustworthy can shape attitudes but also that they can motivate their followers to take real actions, for example, to switch to more eco-friendly products or reduce their waste.

- **Perceived behavioral control** was also found to be a **significant predictor** of both **attitudes toward** (path coefficient = 0.289, $p = 0.001$) and **actual sustainable behavior** (path coefficient = 0.519, $p < 0.001$). This supports hypotheses H4 and H5 and indicates that when a person is confident in their ability to change as well as having the necessary resources available, they have a higher likelihood of changing their behavior.

- However, the **relationship between attitudes toward sustainability and actual sustainable behavior was not significant** (path coefficient = 0.022, $p = 0.768$). This suggests that **positive attitudes toward sustainability <u>do not always translate</u> into real behavioral changes** if people do not have sufficient control over their actions or if they do not perceive influencers' recommendations as credible enough.

- To assess the explanatory power of the model, the R^2 was calculated. For AS, the R^2 value was 0.45, meaning that 45% of the variance in this construct is influenced by IC and PBC. For the ASB construct, the R^2 value was 0.38, indicating moderate explanatory power of the model.

- To assess the overall quality of the models, **goodness of fit (GoF)** values were calculated, which determine the explanatory power (R^2) and convergent validity (AVE). The GoF value was **0.52**, which exceeds the threshold of 0.36 for models with moderate resolution. This confirms that **the model fits the data well**.

Conclusions

- **Influencer credibility** and **perceived behavioral control** play an important role in shaping both positive attitudes toward sustainability and actual actions in this area. Influencer credibility was found to be a key factor influencing both attitudes toward sustainability and actual sustainable behavior.
- **Perceived behavioral control** was also found to be **a significant predictor of attitudes toward sustainability and actual sustainable behavior**. Meanwhile, attitudes toward sustainability do not have a significant effect on actual sustainable behavior, indicating the existence of an "attitude–behavior gap". This highlights the need to not only build positive attitudes but also address practical barriers, such as the high cost of sustainable products or the lack of infrastructure. These findings represent the practical implications of this research, as they can be used to influence people's lifestyle changes to maintain more sustainable habits.

- One of the limitations of this research is that the majority of survey participants were young people (45% 18–24 years old; 40% 25–34 years old), which may have affected the results, as the younger generation may be more susceptible to influencers while having fewer resources (i.e., financial).

- **Future studies** could consider more diverse samples, including **representatives of different age groups and cultural contexts**. Additionally, this research is based on self-reported data, which is susceptible to social desirability bias and may not fully reflect actual behaviors.

● THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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