

Emotional Storytelling, Visual Emotional Content, and Personal Environmental concern in Influencer Communication: The Role of Emotional Engagement in Driving Sustainable Behaviour Intention

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Abstract

Sustainability influencers frequently rely on emotional communication strategies such as storytelling, emotionally rich visuals, and personal expressions of environmental concern. These strategies may create emotional engagement among followers, which can motivate intentions to practice sustainable behaviors. This study examines how emotional storytelling, emotional visual content, and expression of personal environmental concern influence followers' emotional engagement, which subsequently affects sustainable behavior intention. Drawing on emotional appeal theory and affective persuasion literature, the study adopts a quantitative empirical research design. Primary data are proposed to be collected from social media users exposed to emotionally driven sustainability content. Data analysis will be conducted using SPSS and PROCESS Macro (Model 4) to test mediation effects. The study contributes to influencer marketing and sustainability literature by explaining how emotional engagement acts as a psychological mechanism translating influencer communication into sustainable intentions.

Keywords: Emotional Storytelling; Emotional Visuals; Environmental Concern; Emotional Engagement; Sustainable Intention

Introduction

Sustainability communication often relies not only on facts and information but also on emotional appeals. Influencers frequently narrate personal stories about environmental issues, share emotionally powerful images, and express deep personal concern about ecological degradation. These emotional elements can engage followers at an affective level.

Emotional appeal theory suggests that messages that evoke emotions are more persuasive than purely informational content (Escalas, 2004). Emotional storytelling helps followers connect with sustainability issues personally, making abstract environmental problems feel real and urgent.

Visual emotional content such as images of polluted environments or restoration efforts further intensifies emotional reactions. Such visuals make sustainability tangible and relatable (Nisbett & Ross, 1980).

Expression of personal environmental concern by influencers signals authenticity and passion, encouraging followers to emotionally resonate with the message. This emotional engagement can significantly influence intentions to adopt sustainable behaviors.

Despite the prevalence of emotional communication in sustainability influencer content, limited research has examined how these elements collectively foster emotional engagement and translate into sustainable behavior intention. This study addresses this gap.

Literature Review

Emotional Storytelling by Influencer

Storytelling is a powerful persuasive tool that creates emotional connections. Escalas (2004) argued that narrative processing allows individuals to imagine themselves in the story, enhancing persuasion. Influencers who share personal sustainability journeys create relatable narratives that evoke empathy.

Dessart et al. (2015) found that storytelling enhances emotional engagement in online communities. Lou and Yuan (2019) noted that narrative influencer content increases follower involvement.

Use of Emotional Visual Content

Visuals evoke stronger emotional responses than text. Nisbett and Ross (1980) explained that vivid and emotional visuals are more memorable and persuasive. Images and videos of environmental damage or restoration create emotional impact.

White et al. (2019) emphasized that visual cues are effective in motivating pro-environmental behavior by making consequences visible.

Expression of Personal Environmental Concern

When influencers openly express concern for environmental issues, followers perceive genuine passion. Beverland and Farrelly (2010) suggested that emotional expression enhances perceived authenticity and connection.

Sokolova and Kefi (2020) observed that emotional expression increases follower engagement and trust.

Emotional Engagement of Followers

Emotional engagement refers to the affective involvement of followers with content. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) argued that emotionally engaging messages lead to deeper processing and stronger attitudes.

Emotional engagement creates motivation to act, especially in pro-social contexts such as sustainability.

Sustainable Behavior Intention

Ajzen (1991) suggested that attitudes and emotions significantly influence behavioral intentions. When followers are emotionally engaged, they are more likely to intend to practice sustainable behaviors.

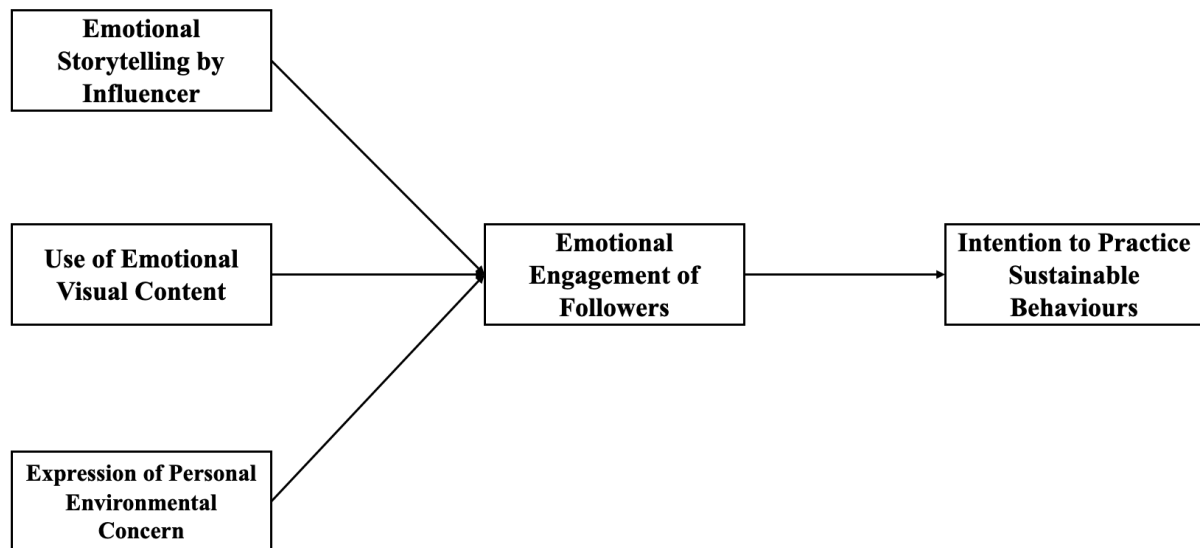
Research Gap

Although emotional appeals are widely used in influencer sustainability communication, limited studies integrate storytelling, visuals, and personal concern to explain emotional engagement and sustainable intention through mediation. This study fills this gap.

Conceptual Framework

The framework proposes that emotional storytelling, emotional visual content, and personal environmental concern positively influence emotional engagement, which in turn influences sustainable behavior intention.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative empirical research design using primary data collection.

Research Objectives

- To examine the impact of emotional storytelling on emotional engagement
- To examine the impact of emotional visual content on emotional engagement
- To examine the impact of personal environmental concern on emotional engagement
- To analyze the effect of emotional engagement on sustainable behavior intention

Hypotheses

- H1: Emotional storytelling positively impacts emotional engagement.
- H2: Emotional visual content positively impacts emotional engagement.

- H3: Expression of personal environmental concern positively impacts emotional engagement.
- H4: Emotional engagement positively impacts sustainable behavior intention.
- H5: Emotional engagement mediates the relationship between the three IVs and sustainable behavior intention.

Sample and Data Collection

Primary data will be collected from social media users exposed to emotionally driven sustainability influencer content using a structured questionnaire.

Measurement Instruments

Measurement scales will be adapted from established studies related to emotional engagement, storytelling, and sustainable behavior.

Data Analysis

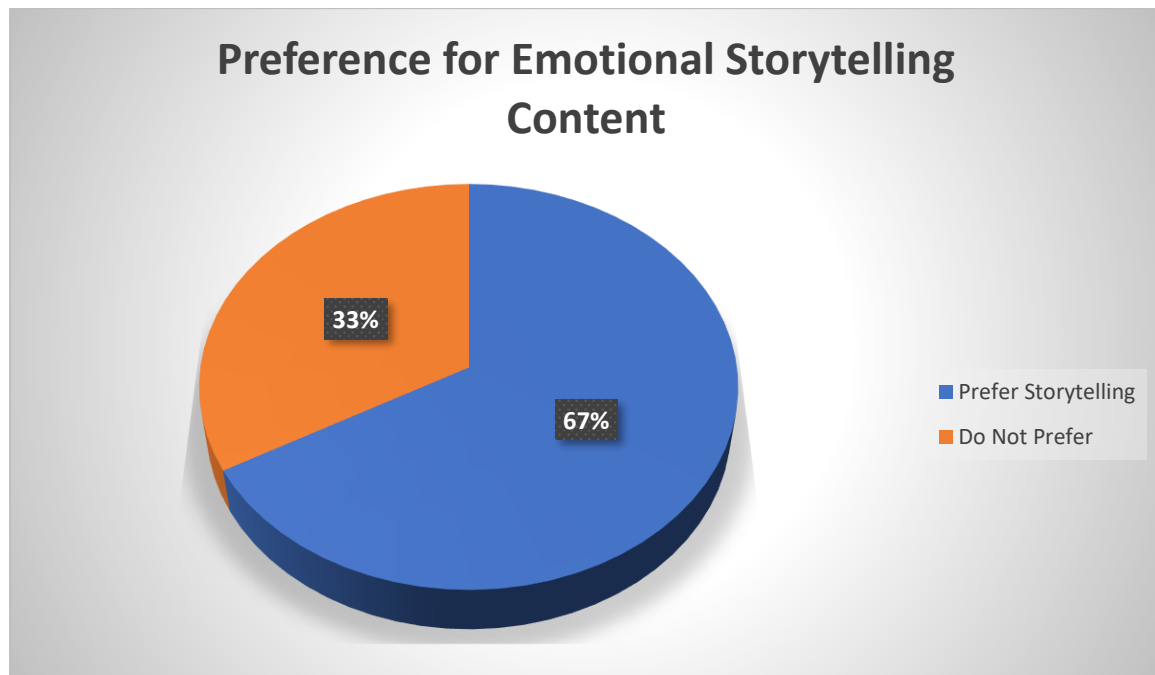
Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS (Version 26) along with PROCESS Macro by Hayes (Model 4) to examine mediation effects. Preliminary analyses included reliability, descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis (Hair et al., 2019; Hayes, 2018).

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 670)

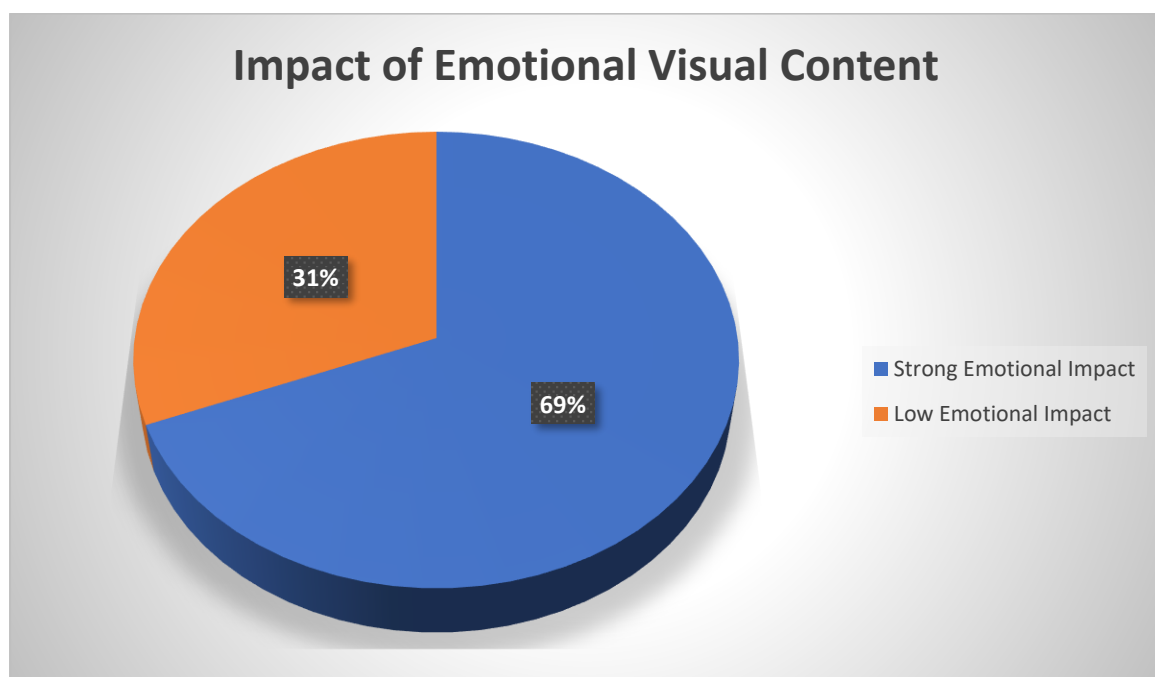
Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	360	53.7%
	Female	310	46.3%
Age	18–25 years	280	41.8%
	26–35 years	258	38.5%
	Above 35 years	132	19.7%

Figure 2: Pie Chart Showing Preference for Emotional Storytelling Content



This pie chart shows that a majority of respondents prefer sustainability content presented through emotional storytelling. This indicates the relevance of narrative emotional communication in influencer posts.

Figure 3: Pie Chart Showing Impact of Emotional Visual Content



The chart indicates that most respondents feel emotionally affected by visual sustainability content such as images and videos, supporting the role of visuals in emotional engagement.

Reliability Analysis

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Storytelling	0.90
Emotional Visual Content	0.89
Environmental Concern	0.91
Emotional Engagement	0.93
Sustainable Intention	0.92

Correlation Matrix

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Storytelling	1				
2. Visuals	0.71**	1			
3. Concern	0.69**	0.73**	1		
4. Engagement	0.78**	0.80**	0.77**	1	
5. Intention	0.65**	0.67**	0.66**	0.82**	1

p < 0.01

PROCESS Mediation Analysis (Model 4)

Table 4: Direct Effects on Emotional Engagement

Predictor	β	p-value
Emotional Storytelling	0.32	<0.001

Emotional Visuals	0.35	<0.001
Environmental Concern	0.31	<0.001

Table 5: Effect of Emotional Engagement on Sustainable Intention

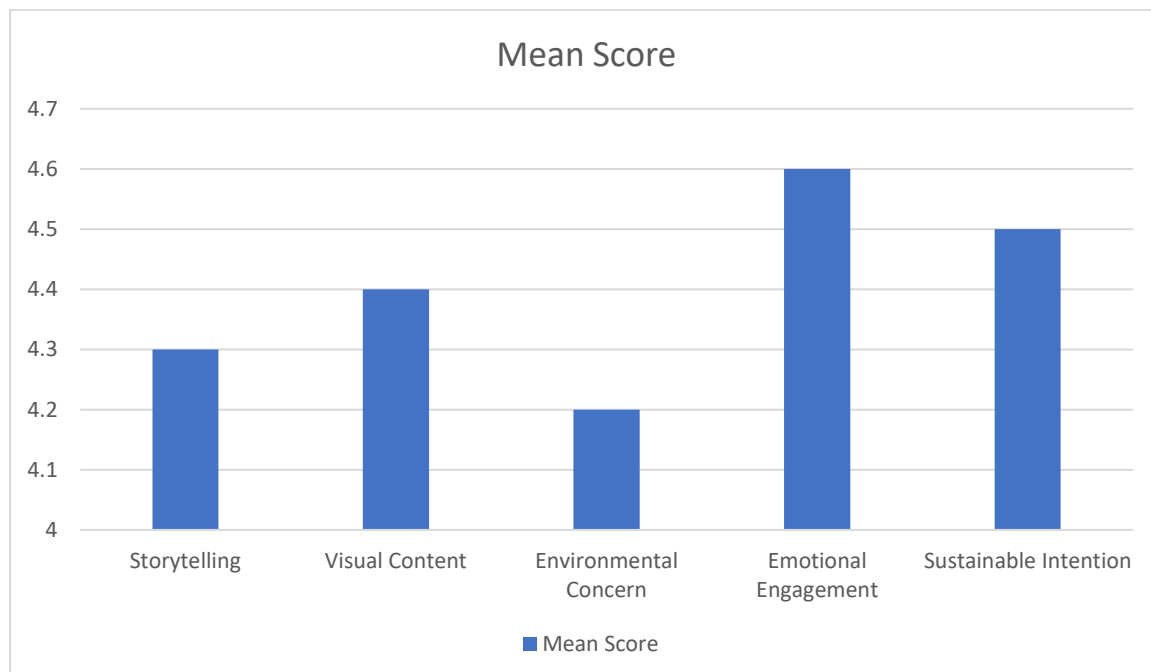
Predictor	β	p-value
Emotional Engagement	0.83	<0.001

Table 6: Indirect Effects (Bootstrapping 5000 Samples)

Path	Indirect Effect	LLCI	ULCI
Storytelling → Engagement → Intention	0.26	0.18	0.35
Visuals → Engagement → Intention	0.29	0.21	0.38
Concern → Engagement → Intention	0.25	0.17	0.34

Mediation confirmed as confidence intervals do not include zero.

Figure 4: Bar Graph Showing Mean Scores of Constructs



The bar graph indicates high mean scores for emotional engagement and sustainable intention, confirming that emotional influencer communication strongly resonates with followers.

Findings and Discussion

The results clearly establish the importance of emotional communication in sustainability influencer marketing. Reliability and correlation results show strong associations among storytelling, visuals, concern, emotional engagement, and sustainable intention. PROCESS mediation analysis confirms that emotional engagement acts as a key psychological mechanism linking emotional communication with sustainable behavior intention.

Followers who experience emotional storytelling and impactful visuals develop stronger emotional engagement, which significantly motivates them toward sustainable intentions. The figures further reinforce that emotional elements are highly preferred and impactful for respondents.

These findings support emotional appeal theory and affective persuasion literature, demonstrating that emotions play a crucial role in sustainability behavior formation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that emotional storytelling, emotionally rich visuals, and expression of personal environmental concern by influencers significantly contribute to followers' emotional engagement, which in turn drives sustainable behavior intention. The mediation analysis confirms that emotional engagement acts as a crucial psychological mechanism translating influencer communication into behavioral intention. Followers respond strongly to narratives and visuals that evoke emotional reactions, making sustainability issues feel personal and urgent.

The findings highlight that emotional communication is more persuasive than purely informational approaches in sustainability contexts. Influencers who share personal stories, display impactful visuals, and express genuine environmental concern create a deeper emotional connection with followers. This emotional bond motivates followers to adopt eco-friendly intentions and align their behavior with sustainability values.

The study contributes to influencer marketing and sustainability literature by integrating emotional appeal theory with sustainable behavior research. Practically, the findings suggest that influencers and brands should incorporate emotional narratives and visuals in

sustainability campaigns to enhance follower engagement and promote environmentally responsible behavior.

Future Scope

- Comparative study between emotional and informational sustainability content
- Role of emotional engagement in long-term sustainable behavior
- Cross-cultural analysis of emotional sustainability communication

Recommendations

- Influencers should use storytelling and emotional visuals in sustainability posts
- Personal expression of environmental concern should be encouraged
- Brands should collaborate with emotionally expressive sustainability influencers

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