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FROM PERCEIVED SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGICAL AFFORDANCES TO SUSTAINABLE FASHION PURCHASE INTENTION: THE SEQUENTIAL MEDIATING ROLES OF BRAND IMAGE AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable fashion has received increasing attention, yet how social media platform conditions shape consumers' purchase intention remains insufficiently understood. This study develops and tests an integrated model linking perceived social media technological affordances to sustainable fashion purchase intention through brand image and customer engagement. Data were collected through an online survey, yielding 903 social media users residing in Jiangxi Province, China, who had prior exposure to sustainable fashion-related content and purchasing scenarios, and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The results show that perceived social media technological affordances (PSMTA) significantly and positively influence brand image, customer engagement, and sustainable fashion purchase intention. Brand image also has significant positive effects on customer engagement and purchase intention, while customer engagement significantly enhances purchase intention. Mediation analysis further confirms that brand image independently mediates the relationship between perceived social media technological affordances and sustainable fashion purchase intention, and that brand image and customer engagement form a significant sequential mediation pathway. These findings extend sustainable fashion and social commerce research by showing that digital platform affordances operate as a foundational driver of intention formation through credibility-based brand evaluation and engagement-based relational processes. Practically, the study suggests that sustainable fashion brands and social commerce platforms should strengthen platform interactivity, transparency, and decision-support features to foster sustainable purchase intention.

KEYWORDS Sustainable fashion; Purchase intention; Brand image; Customer engagement; Social media technology.

INTRODUCTION

Because of its heavy resource consumption, high pollution levels, and large-scale waste generation, the fashion and textile industry has attracted increasing attention in sustainability research (Shamsuzzaman et al., 2025). This sector accounts for approximately 2–8% of global greenhouse gas emissions, while annual textile waste is estimated at around 92 million tons worldwide (United Nations Environment Programme, 2025). These environmental consequences have pushed sustainable fashion from a niche concern to a central issue in debates on responsible production and consumption. However, the long-term viability of sustainable fashion depends not only on changes in production systems, but also on whether consumers develop sufficiently strong and stable purchase intentions to support more sustainable market demand.

Despite growing awareness of sustainability issues, consumers do not automatically translate pro-environmental concern into sustainable fashion purchases. Existing evidence suggests that intention formation remains constrained by substantial barriers, including price premiums, information ambiguity, limited accessibility, effort costs, and skepticism toward sustainability claims (Schiaroli et al., 2024). Sustainable fashion purchase intention should not be understood simply as a direct expression of environmental values. Rather, it is more appropriately conceptualized as the outcome of a decision-making process shaped by credibility judgments, perceived convenience, and confidence in evaluating sustainability-related information (Adnan et al., 2025). In other words, the key issue is not only whether consumers care about sustainability, but also whether the decision environment enables them to assess, trust, and act on sustainable fashion claims.

This issue becomes even more salient in the context of social media commerce. Social media platforms increasingly integrate product discovery, interactive consultation, peer influence, content sharing, and transaction completion within the same digital environment (Beyari & Bahaudeen, 2025). In sustainable fashion settings, prior studies have shown that social media information sharing can shape purchase intention through psychological and social routes, including planned behavior and social learning mechanisms (Subasinghe et al., 2025). Platform attributes can strengthen customer engagement and that engagement, in turn, predicts downstream behavioral intention (Herzallah et al., 2025). These findings imply that digital platform conditions matter for consumer decision-making.

However, current research still tends to treat social media either as a general communication context or as a broad platform feature, rather than specifying how consumers' perceived technological affordances of social media platforms contribute to sustainable fashion purchase intention.

This gap is theoretically important because sustainable fashion decisions are often made under conditions of uncertainty. Consumers may find it difficult to verify whether a brand's sustainability claims are credible, and concerns about greenwashing may further weaken trust and discourage purchase. In such contexts, brand image and customer engagement become especially relevant. Green brand image positively affects green purchase intention, both directly and indirectly through social transmission processes such as green word-of-mouth (Achiraqui et al., 2025). Similarly, research on fashion live commerce shows that digitally mediated engagement is closely associated with purchase intention through experiential and satisfaction-related mechanisms (Han & Jo, 2025). While these studies confirm the importance of brand-related and engagement-based processes, they rarely explain how such processes are activated within a technologically enabled social media environment. More specifically, existing research has not sufficiently clarified whether consumers' perceptions of social media platforms as interactive, visible, responsive, and decision-supportive can shape sustainable fashion purchase intention directly, or whether such effects operate indirectly through brand image and customer engagement.

Accordingly, the present study argues that perceived social media technological affordances should be treated as a foundational explanatory construct in sustainable fashion research. Rather than conceptualizing technology as a passive background condition, this study views consumers' perceived platform affordances as a key upstream driver that can shape how sustainable fashion brands are interpreted, how consumers engage with them, and how purchase intention is ultimately formed. This perspective allows for a more mechanism-based understanding of intention formation in digital sustainability contexts.

Three major contributions are made in this study. First, it extends sustainable fashion research by shifting attention from value-based explanations alone to a more platform-sensitive account of intention formation. Second, it contributes to social commerce literature by specifying perceived social media technological affordances as a distinct explanatory mechanism rather than a generic

feature of digital media use. Third, it integrates brand image and customer engagement into a unified framework and tests both their independent and sequential mediating roles, thereby offering a more fine-grained explanation of how sustainable fashion purchase intention is formed. Empirically, the study focuses on Jiangxi Province, China, a relevant provincial context for examining sustainable fashion consumption in an emerging digital market beyond first-tier metropolitan settings.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are threefold:

- (1) to examine the direct effects of perceived social media technological affordances on brand image, customer engagement, and sustainable fashion purchase intention;
- (2) to investigate the effects of brand image on customer engagement and sustainable fashion purchase intention, as well as the effect of customer engagement on sustainable fashion purchase intention;
- (3) to test the mediating roles of brand image and customer engagement, including their sequential mediation effect, in the relationship between perceived social media technological affordances and sustainable fashion purchase intention..

2.Literature Review

2.1 Theories

This study is primarily grounded in affordance theory and the stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) framework to explain how sustainable fashion purchase intention is formed in a social media commerce environment. These theories are particularly appropriate because the present model does not treat social media as a neutral communication channel, but as a technologically structured environment in which consumers perceive specific action possibilities that shape their brand evaluations, engagement processes, and purchase intention.

2.1.1 Affordance Theory

Affordance theory suggests that technologies influence human behavior not simply through their objective features, but through the action possibilities users perceive in relation to those features(Fang & Liu, 2024). In digital platform settings, these affordances commonly include visibility, interactivity, responsiveness, information accessibility, and transaction support(Zhao et al., 2024). What matters theoretically, therefore, is not only whether a platform possesses certain technical

functions, but whether consumers perceive those functions as useful and enabling in a particular decision context. In social media commerce, such perceived affordances can shape how consumers search for information, evaluate brand claims, interact with others, and complete purchase-related decisions(Mikalef et al., 2017).

This perspective is especially relevant to sustainable fashion because consumers often make decisions under conditions of uncertainty. Sustainability claims are frequently difficult to verify directly, and consumers may face skepticism related to greenwashing, inconsistent information, and unclear product evidence(Kovač et al., 2025). In such cases, perceived social media technological affordances can reduce informational ambiguity by making brand-related cues more visible, searchable, interactive, and easier to assess(Fang et al., 2021). Thus, affordance theory provides the conceptual basis for positioning Perceived Social Media Technological Affordances (PSMTA) as an upstream explanatory construct in this study(Zhao et al., 2013). Rather than viewing technology as a background condition, this research conceptualizes PSMTA as a perceived enabling structure that supports brand interpretation, interaction, and intention formation in sustainable fashion consumption.

2.1.2 Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Theory

Stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) framework posits that external environmental stimuli influence individuals not directly and mechanically, but through internal cognitive and affective processes, which then lead to behavioral responses(Dashti et al., 2019). In consumer research, the S-O-R framework has been extensively applied to explain how technological, informational, and environmental stimuli influence internal evaluations and emotional responses, which in turn affect purchase-related outcomes(Peng & Kim, 2014).

In this study, PSMTA is conceptualized as the stimulus (S) because it reflects consumers' perception of the platform environment as interactive, visible, responsive, and decision-supportive. Brand image (BI) and customer engagement (CE) represent the organism (O), but at two distinct levels. Brand image captures consumers' cognitive and credibility-based interpretation of the sustainable fashion brand, including perceived authenticity, trustworthiness, and value congruence. Customer engagement reflects a deeper relational state involving cognitive attention, emotional connection, and behavioral

participation in brand-related interactions. Finally, sustainable fashion purchase intention (SFPI) represents the response (R), as it reflects the consumer's willingness and readiness to purchase sustainable fashion products. By separating organismic processing into brand image and customer engagement, this study extends the S-O-R framework in a more fine-grained way and allows the model to capture both evaluative and participatory pathways leading to purchase intention.

2.1.3 Theoretical Relevance to Sustainable Fashion Social Commerce

The integration of affordance theory and the S-O-R framework is particularly suitable for sustainable fashion research in social media commerce. Sustainable fashion consumption is not only a matter of environmental values, but also a matter of whether consumers can confidently interpret claims, assess credibility, and act on sustainability-related information in a digitally mediated environment (Phau & Ong, 2007). Affordance theory explains why consumers' perceptions of platform capabilities matter (Kozinets et al., 2021), while S-O-R theory explains how these perceptions are transformed into intention through internal psychological mechanisms (Zhang et al., 2021). Together, these two theories justify the present model in which perceived social media technological affordances shape brand image, customer engagement, and ultimately sustainable fashion purchase intention. More importantly, they support the argument that intention formation in sustainable fashion is not driven by technology, branding, or engagement in isolation, but by a structured process in which technological affordances first create the conditions for evaluation, brand image provides credibility-based interpretation, customer engagement strengthens relational activation, and these mechanisms jointly increase purchase intention. This combined theoretical lens therefore provides a coherent foundation for examining sustainable fashion consumption in a platform-based environment.

2.2 Hypothesis development

Perceived social media technological affordances refer to consumers' perceptions of the action possibilities enabled by social media platforms, such as interactivity, visibility, responsiveness, and information accessibility (Cabiddu et al., 2014). In sustainable fashion contexts, these affordances are particularly important because consumers often face difficulty verifying sustainability claims at the point of purchase and therefore rely heavily on digitally

mediated cues. Prior research suggests that interactive affordances, creator demonstrations, and review visibility can enhance consumers' confidence in brand claims by making sustainability-related information more salient and easier to evaluate (Ahmadian et al., 2023). Similarly, platform functionality and technological usefulness have been shown to strengthen how consumers interpret brand-related information and assess its credibility (Wang et al., 2023). Technology-enabled visibility and information sharing can also amplify the perceived trustworthiness and value congruence of brands, both of which are central components of brand image (Zahran & Aljuhmani, 2025). In this sense, when consumers perceive stronger social media technological affordances, they are more likely to develop a favorable image of sustainable fashion brands. Therefore, this study proposes:

H1: Perceived social media technological affordances positively influence brand image.

Customer engagement represents consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement in interactions related to a brand, including attention, immersion, participation, and advocacy (Brodie et al., 2011). Social media technological affordances can facilitate such engagement by making content more interactive, accessible, and socially visible. Research in social commerce indicates that platform features such as responsiveness, multimedia content, and interactive functions can intensify user involvement by increasing perceived usefulness and lowering uncertainty during the decision process (Yang, 2021). In fashion-related digital retail, algorithmically curated exposure and short-video commerce formats further improve product discovery and relevance, which can increase consumers' willingness to interact with brand content (Slaton & Lee, 2025). Evidence also suggests that technology-enabled engagement features, such as real-time interaction, creator demonstration, and community feedback, strengthen immersive experience and trust in fashion-related social commerce settings (Han & Jo, 2025). When consumers perceive that social media platforms offer rich affordances for interaction and exploration, they are more likely to devote attention, emotional energy, and participatory effort to the brand. Hence, perceived social media technological affordances are expected to positively influence customer engagement.

H2: Perceived social media technological affordances positively influence customer engagement.

Sustainable fashion purchase intention refers to consumers' willingness and intention to purchase

fashion products that are environmentally and socially responsible (Kumar et al., 2021). In digital consumption settings, such intention is often shaped by how effectively platforms support information acquisition, comparison, evaluation, and transaction completion (Sun et al., 2019). Existing studies show that when social media technologies deliver sustainability content effectively and enable interaction with brands and peer consumers, purchase intention toward sustainable products becomes stronger because consumers receive clearer product cues and stronger social proof (Zhao et al., 2022). Research in social commerce further demonstrates that informativeness, responsiveness, and interactivity enhance purchase intention by increasing perceived usefulness and reducing uncertainty (Yang, 2021). In digital fashion retail, algorithmic exposure and short-video commerce formats have also been found to raise purchase intention by improving product discovery efficiency and perceived relevance (Slaton & Lee, 2025). Moreover, technology-enabled transparency cues such as traceability information, reviews, and demonstrations can reduce greenwashing suspicion and strengthen intention formation (Fella & Bausa, 2024). Accordingly, we posit:

H3: Consumers' perception of social media technological affordances has a positive impact on their intention to purchase sustainable fashion products.

Brand image represents the set of associations consumers hold in memory about a brand, including its meaning, credibility, distinctiveness, and overall value (Keller, 1993). In sustainable fashion markets, a favorable brand image is especially influential because consumers often use brand-level cues to evaluate whether the brand genuinely aligns with environmental and ethical values (Deng et al., 2024). When a sustainable fashion brand is perceived as credible, trustworthy, and value-congruent, consumers are more likely to form stronger emotional and relational bonds with it. Prior studies indicate that brand credibility and trust-building functions contribute to downstream relational evaluations, which are closely associated with stronger involvement and connection (Monfort et al., 2025). Research on sustainability communication also shows that when consumers perceive authenticity and alignment in brand messaging, they become more willing to interact with, follow, and support the brand. Because engagement reflects active cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment, a stronger positive brand image should encourage greater customer engagement. Therefore, this study proposes:

H4: Brand image positively influences customer engagement.

Brand image has long been regarded as a critical predictor of consumer intention because it shapes how a brand is evaluated in terms of meaning, credibility, and value (Keller, 1993). This role becomes even more important in sustainable fashion, where consumers cannot always directly verify product claims and therefore rely on brand-level signals to reduce uncertainty (Deng et al., 2024). Environmentally friendly brand image significantly predicts purchase intention for sustainable fashion products (Neumann et al., 2021). Green brand image positively affects green purchase intention among young consumers in sustainable fashion settings (Achiraqui et al., 2025). Greenwashing experiences influence purchase intention through their negative impact on green brand image, highlighting brand image as a central psychological pathway linking credibility to intention (Tu et al., 2024). When consumers perceive a sustainable fashion brand as authentic, responsible, and trustworthy, they are more likely to translate such positive evaluations into purchase intention. Therefore, this research assumes:

H5: Brand image positively influences sustainable fashion purchase intention.

Customer engagement captures consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement in interactions with a brand (Brodie et al., 2011). In sustainable fashion contexts, this construct is especially relevant because sustainable purchases usually require greater information processing, stronger value alignment, and more deliberate decision making than routine apparel purchases. Recent studies consistently show that stronger customer engagement is associated with higher purchase intention in digital retail and social commerce because engaged consumers process information more deeply and develop stronger relational attachment (Han & Jo, 2025; Wijayanto et al., 2025). In sustainable fashion settings specifically, engagement with brand communication has been found to increase purchase intention by strengthening perceived authenticity and value congruence while reducing uncertainty (Londoño-Bedoya et al., 2025). Platform-based research also suggests that participation in brand communities enhances green purchase intention through stronger social identification and supportive norms (Song et al., 2026). Consumers who are more engaged tend to be more psychologically committed to the brand and its sustainability narrative, which increases the likelihood of stronger purchase intentions.

H6: Customer engagement positively influences consumers' intention to buy sustainable fashion.

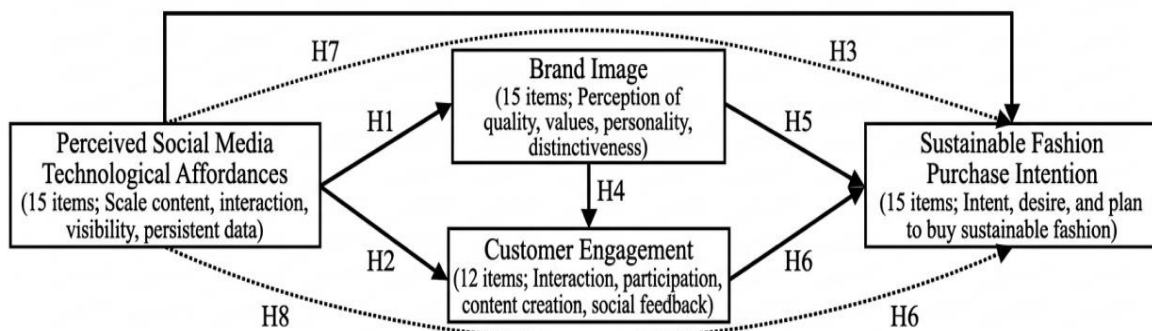
Technological affordances such as interactivity, visibility, traceability cues, and convenient information access can make sustainability-related brand claims more observable, credible, and easier to interpret (Ahmadian et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). As a result, consumers may form a more favorable brand image, especially regarding trustworthiness, responsibility, and value congruence. Prior research suggests that brand image is a key mechanism through which consumers convert brand-related evaluations into purchase intention in sustainable fashion settings (Neumann et al., 2021; Tu et al., 2024). This implies that digital platform affordances not only affect purchase intention directly, but also influence the brand perceptions that shape such intention. Specifically, when consumers perceive stronger technological affordances on social media, they are more likely to develop a positive brand image, which in turn strengthens their intention to purchase sustainable fashion. Therefore, brand image is expected to mediate the relationship between perceived social media technological affordances and consumers' sustainable fashion purchase intention. Accordingly, this study proposes:

H7: Brand image mediates the relationship between perceived social media technological affordances and consumers' sustainable fashion purchase intention.

Social media affordances enhance the salience, visibility, and credibility of sustainability-related brand information, thereby improving consumers' brand image perceptions (Ahmadian et al., 2023; Zahran & Aljuhmani, 2025). A favorable brand image can strengthen consumers' emotional connection, identification, and willingness to interact with the brand, leading to higher customer engagement (Monfort et al., 2025). Engaged consumers are more likely to convert their deeper involvement, immersion, and relational attachment into concrete purchase intention in sustainable fashion settings (Londoño-Bedoya et al., 2025; Song et al., 2026). This chain is theoretically plausible because social media technologies first shape how consumers perceive the brand, then influence how actively they engage with it, and finally affect whether they intend to purchase from it. The sequential pathway also reflects the idea that digital affordances influence intention not only through immediate cognitive evaluations but also through subsequent relational and participatory processes. Therefore, this study develops:

H8: Brand image and customer engagement sequentially mediate the relationship between perceived social media technological affordances and sustainable fashion purchase intention.

Figure 1. Full Conceptual Framework and Mediation Hypotheses



Note: H1-H6 are direct effects. H7 is a simple mediation. H8 is a sequential mediation. These mediations are indicated by the dotted overall pathway relationships. For visibility, detailed data from preliminary testing (e.g., specific CR, CR, AVE values from <IMAGE 1>) is not embedded, but rather, item counts are included in construct descriptions to show construct scope and depth.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Target population, sampling method, and sample size

The target population comprised social media users residing in Jiangxi Province, China, who had prior exposure to sustainable fashion-related content and purchasing scenarios. Jiangxi was selected as the

empirical setting for three reasons (Xiaoping et al., 2007). First, as a populous inland province, Jiangxi had a resident population of 45.02 million at the end of 2024, with an urbanization rate of 63.77%, indicating a sufficiently large and socioeconomically diverse consumer base for examining digital consumption behavior (Guo & Lyu, 2024). Second, the province shows an active consumption and

digital retail environment: total retail sales of consumer goods reached RMB 1,282.17 billion in 2024, while online retail continued to expand and apparel, footwear, hats, and knitwear sales among above-scale retail units recorded notable growth (Cai & Jiang, 2008). Third, Jiangxi provides a meaningful context beyond China's first-tier coastal cities. Its position as an inland province connecting central, eastern, and southern China, together with its ongoing digital-economy and industrial upgrading efforts, makes it a relevant setting for studying how social media-related mechanisms shape emerging sustainable fashion purchase intention in a broad provincial market rather than an exceptionally mature metropolitan niche (Chen, 2021). These features make Jiangxi an appropriate and reasonably representative context for examining sustainable fashion consumption in the Chinese provincial social media environment.

Data were collected using a convenience sampling approach with multi-channel recruitment to increase coverage across participants with different demographic and consumption backgrounds (Golzar et al., 2022). The survey was administered online via Questionnaire Star, and the questionnaire link was distributed through major social media platforms, university email lists, and community groups to enhance sample heterogeneity within the province (Zhang et al., 2022). Data collection lasted 31 days, from 15 May to 15 June 2025. A total of 950 responses were returned, and 903 valid questionnaires were retained after screening for completeness, duplication, and low-quality response patterns, providing adequate statistical power for SEM with a multidimensional measurement model.

3.2 Measurement scales and adaptation

This study employed established multi-item scales and adapted them to the Jiangxi context through wording refinement and scenario alignment, while preserving the original conceptual meaning of each construct. The final instrument included 57 measurement items across four constructs (Appendix A).

Brand image was measured using 15 items across five dimensions – authenticity, credibility, emotional resonance, consistency, and transparency – adapted from green and sustainable branding measures that conceptualize brand image as a set of credibility- and trust-related associations in pro-environmental consumption contexts (Chen, 2010). These items were reworded to reflect consumers' perceptions of sustainable fashion brands encountered in social media environments.

Customer engagement was measured using 12 items reflecting co-creation, emotional engagement, behavioral engagement, and active advocacy, adapted from the consumer brand engagement scale stream developed and validated in social media settings (Hollebeek & Brodie, 2014). The items were contextualized to capture consumers' cognitive, emotional, and participatory involvement with sustainable fashion brands on digital and social platforms.

Perceived social media technological affordances was measured using 15 items capturing consumers' perceptions of platform-enabled action possibilities related to information visibility, interactivity, responsiveness, content accessibility, and transaction support. These items were adapted from social commerce constructs and affordance-based measurement approaches that assess how platform features facilitate information exposure, interaction, and conversion-related processes in online consumption environments (Dong & Wang, 2018; Hajli, 2015). To align with the present study, the wording emphasized consumers' perceived affordances of social media platforms in the context of sustainable fashion communication and purchasing scenarios.

Sustainable fashion purchase intention was measured using 15 items assessing intention strength across time horizon and evaluative bases, adapted from widely used purchase intention measures and contextualized to sustainable apparel decisions (Spears & Singh, 2004). The items were modified to reflect respondents' likelihood, willingness, and future consideration of purchasing sustainable fashion products.

A five-point Likert scale was used to measure all items, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Before the main survey, the questionnaire was reviewed in terms of clarity, contextual relevance, and wording suitability to ensure that the adapted items were appropriate for respondents in Jiangxi Province.

3.3 Data analysis procedure and pilot test

A two stage data analysis procedure was followed. First, data quality screening was conducted to remove incomplete questionnaires, detect duplicate submissions, and identify responses with implausibly short completion times or invariant response patterns. Missing values were handled using a rule based approach depending on the proportion of missingness to reduce bias while preserving statistical power (Kang, 2013). Outliers were assessed using standardised scores and distribution diagnostics to evaluate whether extreme values represented errors or valid but rare

consumer profiles (Bhandari et al., 2024). Second, SEM was used to evaluate the measurement model and structural model. Reliability and validity were assessed using internal consistency indices and confirmatory factor analysis prior to hypothesis testing, following commonly accepted SEM guidelines (Cheung et al., 2024). Structural paths were estimated to test directly and indirect effects by bootstrap method to see if there was a relationship (Leth-Steensen & Gallitto, 2016).

3.4 Pilot test

Before launching the formal survey, the questionnaire was subjected to two pilot studies to examine the clarity, comprehensibility, and contextual appropriateness of the items. In the first stage, five consumers from Jiangxi Province were asked to evaluate the questionnaire and comment on the clarity of wording, the relevance of the items, and the burden of responding. Drawing on their suggestions, several minor adjustments were introduced to simplify the wording and enhance the contextual appropriateness of items concerning sustainable fashion consumption and social media use. In the second stage, another 30 consumers took part in a subsequent pilot study to evaluate the revised instrument. The findings indicated that the questionnaire was generally straightforward to understand and could be completed with little difficulty. Initial assessments of reliability and validity also confirmed that the instrument was suitable for large-scale data collection. Cronbach's alpha coefficients fell between 0.816 and 0.914, all of which were above the commonly accepted cutoff of 0.70. The composite reliability (CR) scores varied from 0.842 to 0.926, suggesting adequate internal consistency. Likewise, the average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.518 to 0.676, with every value exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.50, thereby indicating acceptable convergent validity. Factor loadings were also within an acceptable range, varying from 0.701 to 0.864. Overall, the pilot test results showed that the revised questionnaire possessed acceptable reliability and preliminary construct validity, making it appropriate for use in the main survey (Hussey et al., 2025).

4. Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics and Descriptive Overview

Table 1 Demographic information of 903 valid respondents. The sample was a bit female dominated with 518 females(57.4%) and 385 males(42.6%). By age, the distribution was

concentrated in the working-age group, with the largest number of people aged 31-40 (n=247, 27.4%) and 41-50 (n=246, 27.2%), followed by 51-60 (n=191, 21.2%) and 18-30 (n=185, 20.5%). Respondents under 18 years old made up 0.8% (n=7), and those over 60 years old accounted for 3.0% (n=27). Regarding residence, most of the participants were living in the cities (n=692,76.6%), and there were smaller shares of people from the countryside (n=124,13.7%) and suburbs (n=87,9.6%). Monthly income was mostly distributed between 3,001 and 10,000, with 33.3% (n=301) being 3,001-5,000 and 36.1% (n=326) being 5,001-10,000. The lower income respondents (less than 3,000) made up 17.3% (n=156), and respondents with income above 10,000 made up 13.3% (n=120). In general, the demographic characteristics suggest that the sample included consumers of different ages, places of residence and incomes, laying a foundation for the subsequent model fitting to be carried out.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency	Valid Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	385	42.6
	Female	518	57.4
Age	Below 18 years old	7	0.8
	18 ~ 30 years old	185	20.5
	31 ~ 40 years old	247	27.4
	41 ~ 50 year old	246	27.2
	51 ~ 60 years old	191	21.2
	Above 60 years old	27	3
Living Area	City	692	76.6
	Suburb	87	9.6
	Rural	124	13.7
Monthly Income	below 3,000	156	17.3
	3,001~ 5,000	301	33.3
	5,001~10,000	326	36.1
	Above 10,000	120	13.3

Table 2 reports the descriptive results for the four latent variables assessed with a five-point Likert scale. In general, all mean values exceeded 4.000, ranging from 4.013 to 4.166, which indicates that respondents tended to hold favorable views and showed a relatively high level of agreement with statements concerning brand image, perceived technological affordances of social media, customer engagement, and intention to purchase sustainable fashion. Among the four variables, brand image had the highest mean value (M = 4.166, SD = 0.772), followed by intention to purchase sustainable fashion (M = 4.161, SD = 0.739), suggesting that positive perceptions of the brand were accompanied by a relatively strong willingness to buy sustainable fashion products. Perceived social media technological affordances also obtained a relatively

high mean score ($M = 4.078, SD = 0.777$), indicating that participants generally viewed social media platforms as providing useful technological support for acquiring sustainable fashion information and engaging in shopping-related activities. Customer engagement showed the lowest mean among the four variables ($M = 4.013, SD = 0.832$), although it remained above the midpoint of the scale, reflecting an overall positive degree of consumer involvement. The standard deviation values fell between 0.739 and 0.832, indicating a moderate spread in responses and an acceptable level of variability for subsequent SEM analysis.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the variables

Variables	M	SD
BI (Brand Image)	4.166	0.772
PSMTA (Perceived Social Media Technological Affordances)	4.078	0.777
CE (Customer Engagement)	4.013	0.832
SFPI (Sustainable Fashion Purchase Intention)	4.161	0.739

4.2 Measurement Model and Overall Model Fit

Table 3 shows the overall model fit indices for the structural equation model. The ratio of chi square to degrees of freedom have achieved the expected values are $\chi^2/df=2.9913$ which means there would be a certain degree of suitable models relative to observed covariance structure. The absolute fit indices also show us that because the RMSEA = 0.047 and RMR = 0.014 are less than the upper bound of 0.08, this suggests there is not a big difference between the difference in the model-implied and observed matrices so the fit is good. The incremental and comparative indices also exceed traditional standards, GFI = 0.9505, CFI = 0.9851, TLI = 0.9784, and the proposed model is shown to offer a great improvement over the null model. In addition, AGFI = 0.9215 surpasses the minimum acceptable threshold, reinforcing the adequacy of model fit after adjusting for model complexity. Overall, these indices collectively indicate that the measurement and structural specifications fit the data well and provide a sound basis for subsequent hypothesis testing.

Table 3. Fit Indices of the Model

Fit Indices	χ^2/df	RMS EA	RM R	GFI	CFI	TLI	AG FI
	< 3	< 0.08	< 0.08	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.80
	2.9913	0.047	0.014	0.9505	0.9851	0.9784	0.9215

4.3 Structural Effects and Explained Variance

Taken together, Tables 4 and 5 indicate that the measurement model performed well in terms of both reliability and validity. According to Table 4, the standardized factor loadings for all observed items were higher than 0.70, with values ranging from 0.701 to 0.815, reflecting acceptable item reliability. In addition, the composite reliability (CR) coefficients for the four latent constructs varied between 0.928 and 0.946, all of which were above the recommended reference value of 0.70, pointing to good internal consistency. The AVE values ranged from 0.516 to 0.540, supporting convergent validity. As shown in Table 5, discriminant validity was further verified using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Specifically, the square root of the AVE for each construct ($BI = 0.718, PSMTA = 0.727, CE = 0.720, SFPI = 0.735$) was higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlations, suggesting that each construct was more strongly associated with its own indicators than with other variables in the model. Overall, the results confirm that the measurement model met the required standards for reliability as well as convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 4. Convergence validity

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
Brand Image (BI)	BI1	0.781	0.941	0.516
	BI2	0.736		
	BI3	0.748		
	BI4	0.712		
	BI5	0.759		
	BI6	0.721		
	BI7	0.774		
	BI8	0.733		
	BI9	0.706		
	BI10	0.752		
	BI11	0.729		
	BI12	0.767		
	BI13	0.741		
	BI14	0.718		
	BI15	0.756		
Customer Engagement (CE)	CE1	0.792	0.928	0.519
	CE2	0.744		
	CE3	0.718		
	CE4	0.773		
	CE5	0.701		
	CE6	0.756		
	CE7	0.735		
	CE8	0.747		
	CE9	0.726		
	CE10	0.781		
	CE11	0.752		
	CE12	0.719		
Perceived Social Media Technological Affordances (PSMTA)	PSMTA1	0.804	0.944	0.529
	PSMTA2	0.751		
	PSMTA3	0.728		
	PSMTA4	0.786		
	PSMTA5	0.709		
	PSMTA6	0.772		
	PSMTA7	0.741		
	PSMTA8	0.759		
	PSMTA9	0.723		
	PSMTA10	0.781		
	PSMTA11	0.744		

	PSMTA12	0.767		
	PSMTA13	0.731		
	PSMTA14	0.758		
	PSMTA15	0.713		
Sustainable Fashion Purchase Intention (SFPI)	SFPI1	0.815	0.946	0.54
	SFPI2	0.768		
	SFPI3	0.741		
	SFPI4	0.792		
	SFPI5	0.724		
	SFPI6	0.783		
	SFPI7	0.756		
	SFPI8	0.775		
	SFPI9	0.731		
	SFPI10	0.798		
	SFPI11	0.747		
	SFPI12	0.784		
	SFPI13	0.739		
	SFPI14	0.772		
	SFPI15	0.726		

Table 5. Discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion

Construct	BI	PSMTA	CE	SFPI
BI	0.718			
PSMTA	0.594	0.727		
CE	0.661	0.612	0.72	
SFPI	0.647	0.589	0.684	0.735

4.4 Structural Path Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Table 6 summarizes the findings of the structural model assessment for the revised framework. Overall, all six direct hypotheses received empirical support, with each structural relationship showing a positive and statistically meaningful effect at the 0.001 level. Perceived Social Media Technological Affordances (PSMTA) showed a substantial positive association with Brand Image (BI) ($\beta = 0.742$), suggesting that when consumers view social media platforms as more interactive, visible, responsive, and functionally supportive, they are more likely to develop favorable perceptions of sustainable fashion brands. PSMTA was also positively related to Customer Engagement (CE) ($\beta = 0.318$) and Sustainable Fashion Purchase Intention (SFPI) ($\beta = 0.221$), indicating that technology-enabled platform

features not only strengthen consumer engagement with brands but also directly encourage purchase intention. In addition, BI had a significant positive influence on CE ($\beta = 0.529$), implying that a favorable brand image can reinforce consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Both BI ($\beta = 0.347$) and CE ($\beta = 0.384$) were positively associated with SFPI, indicating that consumers' purchase intention is shaped by both brand-related evaluations and interaction-based relational factors. Overall, these results lend solid support to the proposed structural framework and suggest that PSMTA, BI, and CE each play important roles in explaining sustainable fashion purchase intention. Table 7 further indicates that the impact of PSMTA on SFPI is not confined to a direct relationship, but also works through several meaningful indirect paths. First, the pathway from PSMTA to SFPI through BI was statistically supported ($\beta = 0.258$, 95% CI [0.181, 0.341]), suggesting that brand image plays an intervening role in this relationship. This means that social media technological affordances can help consumers form more favorable views of sustainable fashion brands, which then increase their intention to buy. Second, the indirect pathway through CE was likewise supported ($\beta = 0.122$, 95% CI [0.068, 0.186]), showing that platform affordances may strengthen purchase intention by promoting higher levels of consumer interaction and involvement. More importantly, the chained mediation path through BI and CE was also confirmed ($\beta = 0.151$, 95% CI [0.102, 0.209]), supporting the proposed sequential mediation mechanism. In other words, PSMTA first shapes brand perceptions, then enhances customer engagement, and eventually contributes to stronger sustainable fashion purchase intention. The significant total indirect effect ($\beta = 0.531$, 95% CI [0.428, 0.648]) further indicates that a substantial part of the influence of PSMTA on SFPI is conveyed through these mediating mechanisms.

Table 6. Direct effect analysis

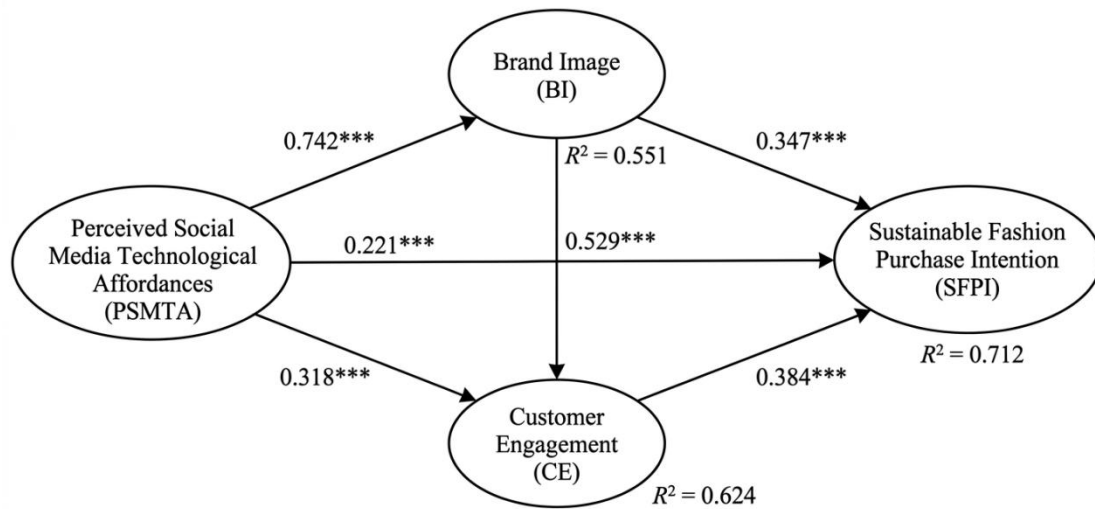
Hypothesis	Structural Path	β (Standardized)	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Decision
H1	PSMTA \rightarrow BI	0.742	0.051	14.549	< 0.001	Supported
H2	PSMTA \rightarrow CE	0.318	0.067	4.746	< 0.001	Supported
H3	PSMTA \rightarrow SFPI	0.221	0.058	3.81	< 0.001	Supported
H4	BI \rightarrow CE	0.529	0.064	8.266	< 0.001	Supported
H5	BI \rightarrow SFPI	0.347	0.061	5.689	< 0.001	Supported
H6	CE \rightarrow SFPI	0.384	0.056	6.857	< 0.001	Supported

Table 7. Indirect effects analysis results

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	Indirect Effect (β)	Boot S.E.	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	p-value	Decision
H7	PSMTA \rightarrow BI \rightarrow SFPI	0.258	0.041	0.181	0.341	< 0.001	Supported

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	Indirect Effect (β)	Boot S.E.	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	p-value	Decision
–	PSMTA \rightarrow CE \rightarrow SFPI	0.122	0.03	0.068	0.186	< 0.001	Supported
H8	PSMTA \rightarrow BI \rightarrow CE \rightarrow SFPI	0.151	0.027	0.102	0.209	< 0.001	Supported
	Total indirect effect of PSMTA on SFPI	0.531	0.056	0.428	0.648	< 0.001	Supported

Figure 2 visualises the structural model after estimating the direct effects among the latent constructs.



Note:
 Indirect effects: PSMTA \rightarrow BI \rightarrow SFPI = 0.258***; PSMTA \rightarrow CE \rightarrow SFPI = 0.122***; PSMTA \rightarrow BI \rightarrow CE \rightarrow SFPI = 0.151***.
 *** p < 0.001.

Figure 2. Empirical mode for sustainable fashion purchase intention.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The results suggest that PSMTA positively and significantly affects brand image, customer engagement, and sustainable fashion purchase intention, indicating that social media platforms go beyond simply delivering information and instead play an active role in shaping consumer cognition, relational involvement, and purchase intention formation. This finding extends prior sustainable fashion research, which has largely emphasized credibility barriers, information ambiguity, and effort costs as key inhibitors of sustainable purchase decisions, by showing that technology-enabled affordances can reduce decision friction and support confidence formation under digital shopping conditions (Schiaroli et al., 2024). It also deepens social commerce scholarship by demonstrating that platform affordances such as visibility, interactivity, responsiveness, and transaction support are not only associated with perceived usefulness, but can also function as foundational drivers of sustainability-oriented purchase intention in their own right (Herzallah et al., 2025). In this sense, the study advances the literature from a general “social media matters” proposition to a more precise mechanism-

based explanation in which consumers’ perceived technological affordances become a theoretically central construct in sustainable fashion decision-making.

A second theoretical contribution lies in explaining how digital platform conditions are translated into sustainable fashion purchase intention through two interrelated psychological mechanisms: brand image and customer engagement. Consistent with prior work, the findings reaffirm that brand image remains a crucial credibility-based resource in sustainable fashion consumption, especially because sustainability attributes are often difficult to verify directly and consumers therefore rely on brand-level cues to reduce uncertainty (Deng et al., 2024; Neumann et al., 2021; Achiraqui et al., 2025). At the same time, the study shows that brand image is not the endpoint of evaluation, but a mechanism that further stimulates customer engagement and, through this relational process, strengthens purchase intention. This finding resonates with engagement scholarship that conceptualizes engagement as a cognitive–affective–behavioral investment that increases commitment and conversion in digital retail environments (Brodie et al., 2011; Han & Jo, 2025), while also aligning with sustainable fashion evidence that engagement

enhances intention by deepening value congruence, authenticity perception, and social identification (Londoño-Bedoya et al., 2025; Song et al., 2026). Theoretically, what this study adds is a more integrated explanation: favorable platform affordances first improve brand-level interpretations, then intensify consumer engagement, and finally convert these cognitive and relational resources into stronger purchase intention. This chain mediation result generates new knowledge by showing that sustainable fashion intention is not formed through isolated effects of technology, branding, or engagement, but through a sequential digital conversion process linking platform conditions, brand meaning, relational participation, and downstream consumption intention.

Third, the findings contribute to intention theory in sustainable consumption by moving beyond approaches that explain sustainable fashion purchase intention primarily through values, attitudes, or static brand perceptions. The present results indicate that intention formation in social media commerce is better understood as a multi-stage mechanism in which technological affordances shape consumers' evaluative confidence, brand image strengthens interpretive credibility, and customer engagement converts these assessments into actionable purchase intention. This reframing is theoretically important because it suggests that sustainable consumption is not purely deliberative or value-driven; rather, it depends on whether consumers encounter a digital environment that enables information assessment, relational validation, and low-friction decision support under conditions of uncertainty (Schiaroli et al., 2024). By demonstrating both independent and sequential mediating roles of BI and CE, the study extends social commerce and social learning arguments into the sustainable fashion domain and shows that platform affordances can serve as a conversion architecture that links upstream technological perceptions with downstream pro-sustainability behavioral intention (Herzallah et al., 2025; Subasinghe et al., 2025). The relatively strong explained variance of the endogenous constructs further supports the coherence of this theorization and suggests that the combination of platform affordances, brand image, and engagement offers a robust framework for understanding sustainable fashion purchase intention in a provincial Chinese social media commerce setting.

Overall, the study makes a substantive theoretical contribution by generating a more fine-grained account of sustainable fashion intention formation in digital contexts. Rather than treating social media as

a neutral communication space or reducing sustainable fashion intention to a function of consumer attitudes alone, the findings demonstrate that technology-enabled affordances, credibility-based brand meaning, and engagement-based relational processes jointly form the core explanatory pathway. This offers a meaningful extension of prior sustainable fashion and social commerce literature and produces new knowledge about how consumers move from platform perception to brand evaluation, from engagement to commitment, and from commitment to purchase intention in sustainability-oriented fashion markets.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings provide several practical implications for sustainable fashion brands, social commerce platforms, and digital content sellers. Sustainable fashion firms should not treat social media merely as a promotional channel; rather, they should view it as a decision-support environment in which platform features, brand credibility, and consumer interaction jointly shape purchase intention. In practical terms, brands should invest in strengthening brand image through consistent sustainability narratives, transparent product information, clearly bounded environmental claims, and visible evidence of responsibility. At the same time, these credibility cues should be embedded into digitally enabled consumer journeys through searchable sustainability attributes, traceability information, third-party verification signals, creator demonstrations, and review systems that make sustainability claims easier to understand and assess. Because brand image significantly predicts both customer engagement and purchase intention, firms should recognize that credibility is not simply an image outcome but a functional resource that enhances both relational connection and purchase conversion.

The findings also suggest that customer engagement should be managed as a strategic conversion mechanism rather than a superficial visibility metric. Since engagement significantly influences sustainable fashion purchase intention and also forms part of the sequential pathway through which technological affordances operate, platforms and brand managers should design interaction formats that move consumers from passive exposure to active participation. This includes real-time live sessions, interactive Q&A, co-creation activities, user-generated content campaigns, community feedback loops, and social proof systems that connect engagement directly with evidence presentation and purchase support. For social commerce platforms, the implication is that

technology design should reduce consumer uncertainty and effort by offering structured sustainability tags, transparent comparison tools, reviewer credibility markers, service assurance cues, and seamless checkout processes. For policymakers and industry associations, the results indicate that improving the digital assurance environment is an effective lever for expanding sustainable fashion uptake. This can be promoted through standardized sustainability labeling, support for interoperable third-party verification tools, and consumer literacy initiatives that help users interpret sustainability claims and platform-provided evidence more critically. Overall, the study suggests that sustainable fashion purchase intention is strengthened most effectively when platform affordances, brand credibility, and engagement mechanisms are aligned into a coherent digital conversion pathway.

6. Conclusion

This study develops and examines an integrated model of sustainable fashion purchase intention in Jiangxi Province, China, by identifying perceived social media technological affordances as a key antecedent of intention formation in a platform-based consumption context. The findings show that perceived social media technological affordances

positively and significantly affect brand image, customer engagement, and consumers' intention to buy sustainable fashion, confirming that technology-enabled platform conditions directly influence consumer evaluations, relational participation, and subsequent behavioral intentions. In addition, brand image positively contributes to both customer engagement and purchase intention, while customer engagement also has a notable positive impact on consumers' intention to purchase sustainable fashion. The mediation analysis further reveals that brand image and customer engagement function as both separate and sequential mechanisms through which perceived social media technological affordances are converted into stronger purchase intention. Overall, the model exhibits solid explanatory capability for the endogenous constructs and highlights the theoretical importance of viewing social media platform affordances as an active explanatory factor rather than merely a background feature of digital commerce. The findings also suggest that sustainable fashion purchase intention is more likely to be strengthened when supportive technological affordances enhance brand credibility, stimulate customer engagement, and jointly create a more confident and actionable decision-making environment.

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Appendix A. Measurement items

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	Statement
Brand Image (BI)	BI1	The sustainable fashion brand appears to be authentic in its sustainability communication.
	BI2	I believe the sustainable fashion brand is honest about its environmental claims.
	BI3	The sustainable fashion brand gives me a trustworthy impression.
	BI4	The sustainable fashion brand seems credible to me.
	BI5	The sustainability values promoted by this brand seem genuine.
	BI6	The sustainable fashion brand presents a consistent sustainability image across different social media platforms.
	BI7	The sustainability-related messages of this brand appear clear and coherent.
	BI8	I think the sustainable fashion brand is transparent about its sustainable practices.
	BI9	This sustainable fashion brand provides sufficient information to support its claims.
	BI10	I feel emotionally connected to the sustainability image of the sustainable fashion brand.
	BI11	This brand creates a positive impression regarding environmental responsibility.
	BI12	I perceive the sustainable fashion brand as socially responsible.
	BI13	This sustainable fashion brand has a favorable overall image in my mind.
	BI14	Compared with other fashion brands, the sustainable fashion brand seems more reliable in sustainability matters.
	BI15	Overall, I have a positive perception of sustainable fashion brand.
Customer Engagement (CE)	CE1	I pay close attention to the social media content shared by sustainable fashion brands.
	CE2	I am interested in following updates from sustainable fashion brands on social media.
	CE3	I often spend time viewing or reading posts from sustainable fashion brands.
	CE4	I feel involved when interacting with sustainable fashion brands online.
	CE5	I feel emotionally connected to sustainable fashion brands that I follow on social media.
	CE6	I enjoy engaging with content created by sustainable fashion brands.
	CE7	I am willing to comment on or react to posts made by sustainable fashion brands.
	CE8	I am willing to share sustainable fashion brand content with others.
	CE9	I like to participate in discussions about sustainable fashion brands on social media.
	CE10	I am willing to recommend sustainable fashion brands to others through social media.
	CE11	I feel motivated to interact with sustainable fashion brands when I see their posts online.
	CE12	Overall, I actively engage with sustainable fashion brands on social media.
Perceived Social Media Technological Affordances (PSMTA)	PSMTA1	Social media platforms make it easy for me to find information about sustainable fashion products.
	PSMTA2	Social media platforms allow me to access sustainability-related product information conveniently.
	PSMTA3	Social media platforms make sustainable fashion information highly visible.
	PSMTA4	Social media platforms help me compare sustainable fashion products efficiently.

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	Statement	
	PSMTA5	Social media platforms make it easy to search for specific sustainability attributes of fashion products.	
	PSMTA6	Social media platforms provide interactive features that help me evaluate sustainable fashion brands.	
	PSMTA7	I can easily communicate with brands or sellers about sustainable fashion products on social media.	
	PSMTA8	Social media platforms allow me to interact with other users about sustainable fashion products.	
	PSMTA9	Social media platforms provide timely feedback that helps me make purchase decisions.	
	PSMTA10	Reviews, comments, and demonstrations on social media help me judge whether sustainable fashion claims are credible.	
	PSMTA11	Social media platforms make sustainability-related information easier to verify.	
	PSMTA12	Social media platforms give me useful tools to evaluate sustainable fashion products before purchasing.	
	PSMTA13	Social media platforms make the purchasing process for sustainable fashion products more convenient.	
	PSMTA14	Social media platforms provide functions that reduce my effort in making sustainable fashion purchase decisions.	
	PSMTA15	Overall, social media platforms offer strong technological support for sustainable fashion shopping.	
	Sustainable Fashion Purchase Intention (SFPI)	SFPI1	I intend to purchase sustainable fashion products in the future.
		SFPI2	I am likely to choose sustainable fashion products when buying clothing or accessories.
		SFPI3	I will consider sustainable fashion products as a purchase option in the near future.
		SFPI4	I am willing to spend time searching for sustainable fashion products before purchasing.
SFPI5		I would prefer sustainable fashion products over conventional fashion products when possible.	
SFPI6		I plan to buy sustainable fashion products more frequently in the future.	
SFPI7		I am willing to purchase sustainable fashion products even if they require more careful evaluation.	
SFPI8		I would consider paying for sustainable fashion products if I believed their sustainability claims were credible.	
SFPI9		I am willing to try sustainable fashion brands that I encounter on social media.	
SFPI10		I expect to purchase sustainable fashion products when I need clothing or fashion items.	
SFPI11		I am interested in making sustainable fashion purchases in the long term.	
SFPI12		I would recommend sustainable fashion products that I intend to buy to others.	
SFPI13		I am willing to prioritize sustainable fashion in my future clothing purchases.	
SFPI14		I have a strong intention to support sustainable fashion through my purchasing decisions.	
SFPI15		Overall, I am willing to purchase sustainable fashion products.	