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Digital Marketing as a catalyst for Circular Economy transition: A study on sustainable consumption practices in the Fast Fashion and Electronics Industries

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Abstract
This study focuses on how digital marketing can help two highly resource-intensive industries (the fast fashion and electronics sectors) transition to a circular economy. There is an increasing body of academic research on sustainable consumption, yet the precise contribution of digital marketing tools to the establishment of circular behaviour remains poorly understood, underscoring the need for further study in this area. This study aims to address this gap by introducing a conceptual model, the Digital Circular Marketing Model (DCMM), that links green content marketing and eco-influencer involvement with digital nudging to achieve circular consumption through reusable goods, resale, recycling, and appropriate product disposal. This study uses only secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed academic journals, corporate and industry reports, and brand case studies published between 2020 and 2025. Key findings suggest that specific digital green campaigns can dramatically increase awareness of circularity after successfully using interactive platforms to drive consumer behavioural change towards more sustainable options. Future research may include investigations into cultural differences and the permanence of these behavioural changes following digital marketing interventions.

Keywords: Digital marketing, circular economy, sustainable consumption, fast fashion industry, electronics industry

Introduction

The world economy is at a rambling junction. The overpowering linear Model of production and consumption, commonly known as take, make, dispose, has also created disastrous ecological outcomes, including rising carbon emissions, rapid resource depletion, textile pollution, and a terrifying increase in electronic waste. In response, the idea of a circular economy has become particularly popular among governments, enterprises, and the academic community in the past decade. The circular economy aims to prevent waste and pollution, ensure that products and materials are used as long as possible, and create new natural systems wherever possible (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021) [9]. Nevertheless, the shift to circularity demands not only a change in the form of goods production but also a radical shift in consumer thinking, decision-making, and daily life.

Digital marketing has become one of the most volatile aspects of consumer behaviour across all demographics. Digital tools allow brands to communicate environmental values and shift purchasing behaviour towards more sustainable decisions, whether by providing eco-labelled product listings and influencer campaigns on social media, gamified sustainability challenges, or personalised content on green. One of the most important questions remains: will digital marketing truly facilitate the scale of circular consumption, or will it become another tool for excessive consumption wrapped in green language? This question has grave theoretical and practical implications for the future of sustainable business.

The fashion industry accounts for about 10 per cent of annual carbon emissions and is the second-largest consumer of water (Notten, 2020) [1]. The textile industry, in particular, generates millions of tonnes of landfill waste each year, and synthetic fabrics also pollute water bodies with microplastics. Global e-waste has reached 53.6 million metric tonnes in 2020, and is expected to increase to 74 million metric tonnes in 2030 (Forti *et al*., 2020) [11]. The media and the government have heavily scrutinised these two sectors over the last several years, and both have had their brands run on sustainability campaigns, with H&M promoting its Conscious Collection through Instagram, Apple producing environmental web content, and Fairphone highlighting its transparency-first approach through social media. The authenticity, design, and effectiveness of these campaigns differ, and that is why a systematic analytical approach is even more essential.

Although there has been increased convergence between digital communication and sustainability strategy, academic studies have not yet incorporated digital marketing into a harmonious circular-economy perspective. Available research considers green marketing in general (Chang & Yoo, 2025) [6] or examines circular economy strategies separately (Geissdoerfer *et al*., 2020) [12], and does not discuss in detail the role of digital marketing in theory. The lack of comparative industry analysis is also evident, as the majority of studies are centred on a single industry and thus lack industry-specific analysis that can be valuable to both practitioners and policymakers.

The three gaps are policymakers' study. To begin with, it recognises and traces specific digital marketing processes into visible circular consumption patterns. Second, it compares their impact on the fast-fashion and electronic industries using secondary data. Third, it suggests the DCM Model as a brand-theoretical contribution to the field.

Review of Literature

1. Circular Economy: Conceptual Understandings

Levänen *et al*., (2022) examined how innovative Circular Economy (CE) value propositions were most effectively

implemented through consumer outreach initiatives that connect the CE strategy with marketing as part of a broader Communications strategy, thereby highlighting the fundamental role of marketing within the Circular Economy.

Bocken *et al*., (2021) examined Circular Business Model Innovations. They found that many brand-level initiatives, such as Take-Back Programs and Rental Programs, coupled with targeted consumer communication strategies, can significantly extend product lifespans across several sectors, including the Fashion and Electronics Industries.

Kirchherr *et al*., (2021) [13] conducted a systematic review of 221 studies on the Circular Economy. They found Consumer Participation to be an underdeveloped dimension of the field, noting that this remains a significant gap that later work has addressed to some extent.

Geissdoerfer *et al*., (2017) defined the circular economy as a regenerative system in which resource inputs and outputs, as well as waste outputs, are minimised through closed-loop systems. This study also highlighted the importance of innovations in business models and multi-stakeholder collaboration for successfully implementing the circular economy. However, this study did not evaluate the importance of digital marketing in enabling the adoption of circular economies or providing consumers with engagement opportunities.

2. Digital Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022) [5] examined how digital technologies can facilitate knowledge transfer and provide an updated framework for defining digital marketing to meet the needs of marketing in today's platform economy.

Chang and Yoo (2025) [6] described the correlation between greenwashing and brand trustworthiness. They found that false or misleading sustainability claims can negatively affect consumers' trust in brands that use greenwashing as a strategy and may also impede genuine behavioural changes towards circular consumption.

Tamilmani *et al*., (2021) conducted a systematic review of social media marketing. They found substantial evidence that when environmentally friendly content is posted on social media, it increases environmental awareness among consumers in both urban and suburban areas and increases their willingness to engage in environmentally friendly behaviour.

Tuten (2023) [26] explored how social media marketing creates an environment in which consumers can develop highly emotional relationships with brands and how these digital relationships may impact value and attitudes toward sustainability over time, particularly among Millennial and Generation Z consumers.

3. Sustainable Consumption and Behavioural Drivers

Landwehr *et al*., (2021) [3] examined how user interface design and algorithmic content curation can guide consumers' behaviour towards more sustainable choices, using online digital nudging to connect the fields of behavioural economics and digital retail platform design without restricting consumers' freedom of choice.

Ranta *et al*., (2021) [19] examined how institutional conditions across different regions may serve as either facilitators or barriers to implementing a circular economy. This has led to the hypothesis that the creation of a digital ecosystem linking consumers, manufacturers and recyclers will provide an entirely new and 'emerging' form of engagement for the circular economy framework. However, there is currently insufficient theoretical grounding in the general marketing literature to understand how this new form of engagement operates.

Saari *et al*., (2021) [21] examined how eco-scores and carbon footprint labels on products affected people's choices when shopping for sustainable products. Their findings supported the idea that using digital tools to guide consumer behaviour helped people make more environmentally friendly purchasing decisions.

Ajzen (2020) [1] studied the theory of planned behaviour and examined whether it still applied to studies of sustainable consumption. The study examined how attitudes, social norms, and personal sense of control influenced people's intention to buy sustainable products. The findings showed that online digital marketing strategies had a strong impact on all three of these factors.

4. Digital Marketing in Fast Fashion and Electronics Industry

Arrigo (2022) [2] studied how luxury fashion brands use digital storytelling to create a brand identity that promotes sustainability over time, and to create an aspirational relationship between the brand and its environmental values rather than a functional one, providing insights into the impact of digital storytelling as part of an overall fashion marketing strategy for all types of fashion brands.

Constantinescu and Muntean (2022) [7] conducted an extensive review of the literature in green marketing, revealing that although a considerable amount of green marketing literature exists, a significant gap exists between digital application and the existing green marketing literature's characteristics (i.e., interactive, algorithmic, and personalised) that define modern digital marketing platforms and traditional media.

Lou and Yuan (2021) [15] suggested that micro-influencers' trustworthiness in promoting sustainable fashion, compared with celebrity influencers, leads consumers to be more likely to adopt circular fashion alternatives (e.g., rental, resale, upcycling) when they receive recommendations from micro-influencers.

Forti *et al*., (2020) [11] analysed worldwide electronic waste data, indicating that while consumer awareness campaigns help raise general concerns about electronic waste, potential barriers to translating awareness into behaviour change (e.g., longer product replacement cycles, higher product switching costs) are greater than those faced by the fashion industry.

5. Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in influencing sustainable consumer behaviour.
2. To compare the role of sustainable digital campaigns in driving consumer awareness among the fast fashion and electronics industries.
3. To develop the Digital Circular Marketing Model as a practical framework linking digital marketing to the circular economy.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and real-world insights. The

quantitative data collected from industry reports, brand sustainability reports, and consumer surveys published between 2020 and 2025 [4, 20] by well-known organisations like McKinsey & Company, Statista, and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. For the qualitative side, the study draws on academic journal articles, real brand case studies, and policy documents, all carefully analysed to identify key patterns and themes. The Digital Circular Marketing Model is established by carefully studying repeated patterns found in digital marketing and circular economy research. To ensure its reliability, it was subsequently validated using real campaign data from fast-fashion and electronics brands.

Findings and Interpretation

1. Digital Marketing Mechanism and Circular Consumption

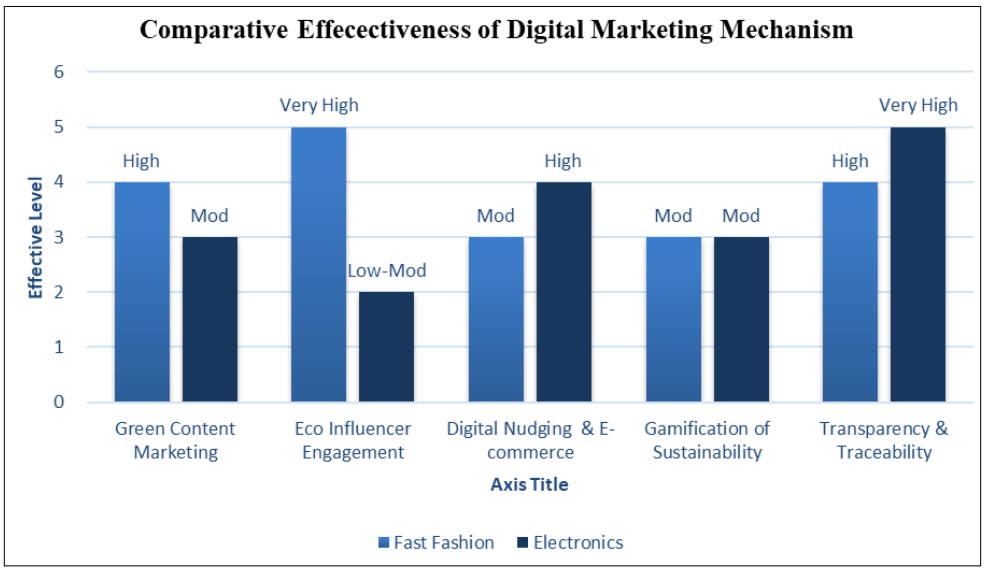
Using secondary data analysis, five distinct digital marketing techniques were identified as increasing circular consumption patterns across the sectors included in the study: Green Content Marketing, Eco-Influencer Engagement, and Digital Nudging via E-commerce platforms, the Gamification of Sustainable Behaviour, and Communication of Transparency and Traceability. Each technique supports a different consumer psychology pathway, leading to a distinct, measurable circular outcome that depends on the specific sector context. A structured summary of their effectiveness ratings and corresponding outcomes is included in Table 1.

Table 1: Digital Marketing Mechanisms and Their Effectiveness in Promoting Circular Consumption

Digital Marketing Mechanism	Fast Fashion	Electronics	Primary Circular Outcome
Green Content Marketing	High	Moderate	Awareness and attitude change
Eco-Influencer Engagement	Very High	Low to Moderate	Secondhand purchase intent
Digital Nudging (E-commerce)	Moderate	High	Eco-product selection
Gamification of Sustainability	Moderate	Moderate	Repeat circular behaviour
Transparency and Traceability	High	Very High	Brand trust and reuse intention

Source: Compiled by the Author

Table 1 shows significant differences across industries in how the various mechanisms are performed for their users. For example, green content marketing is widely used in the fast-fashion sector, with many brands such as Patagonia and Stella McCartney creating lifecycle stories on Instagram and YouTube that genuinely resonate with environmentally conscious millennial and Gen Z consumers. In the electronics sector, however, it was found that transparency, traceability tools (repairability score, material passport, carbon footprint disclosure on brand website, etc.) were the most effective tools used to connect with consumers because consumers who purchase electronics typically place greater emphasis upon technical credibility and reliable data Than on emotional stories. There was also a significant difference in the effectiveness of eco-influencer engagement between fast fashion and electronics. Quickly, the visual and aspirational nature of eco-influencer engagement was highly effective; however, in electronics, it was significantly less effective because consumers were more interested in product specifications and independent reviews from subject-matter experts. Similarly, gamification was consistently effective across both fashion and electronics. Therefore, gamification has the potential to be an effective cross-sector circular marketing mechanism if implemented with meaningful reward structures linked to real circular actions, such as returns, repairs, and resale.



Source: Compiled by the Author (based on research findings)

Fig 1: Graphical Representation of Comparative Effectiveness (Fast Fashion vs Electronics)

In Figure 1, the five effective marketing methods will be compared to show how well they perform for fast fashion and electronics. Eco influencer engagement was rated as a very high effective method for fast fashion, while transparency and traceability were the most effective for electronics, with very high. Digital nudging was rated as being more effective for electronics than fast fashion (high vs moderate). The gamification of sustainability has had a moderate impact on both fast fashion and electronics; however, green content marketing received a high rating for

fast fashion but only a moderate rating for electronics, showing that different strategies work best for each category.

2. Comparative Impact on Consumer Awareness and Circular Behaviour

Figure 2 compares the consumer adoption rates (number of consumers adopting these circular behaviours) for both industries across post-campaign consumer circular behaviour rates. This was measured using two separate datasets: McKinsey's 2022 [7].

Consumer sustainability survey and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's 2022 [10] circular consumer engagement report. Fast fashion brands' post-campaign scores are represented by the blue bars, while electronic brands' post-campaign scores are represented by the green bars (in Figure 2). The bar graph compared the effectiveness of campaigns across these two industries.

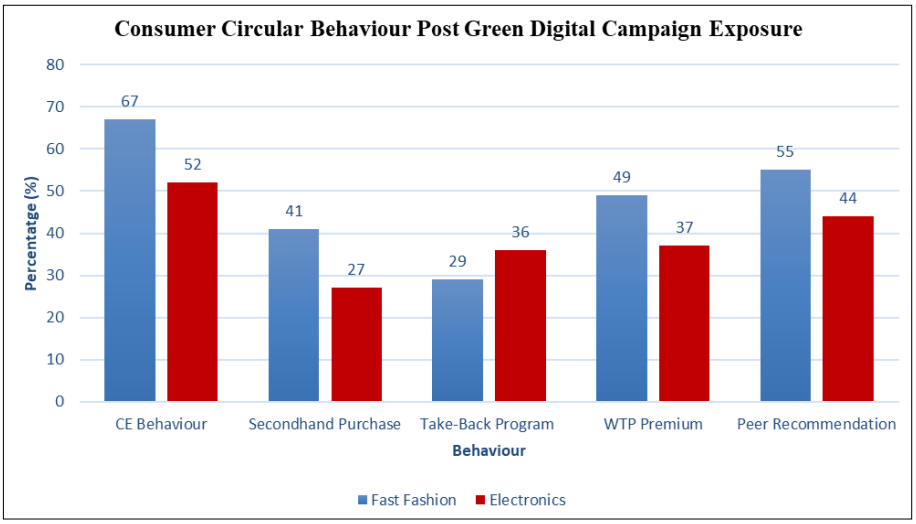


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Fig 2: Graphical Representation of Consumer Circular Behaviour Post Green Digital Campaign Exposure

Figure 2 shows that fast fashion had a higher average post-campaign score for consumer engagement (CE) in brand awareness (67% vs 52%), likely due to the visual, socially shareable digital content used in a high-frequency, emotional purchase category (fashion). Fast fashion also had a higher average post-campaign score for intent to purchase secondhand (41% vs 27%) and peer recommendations (55% vs 44%). Overall, consumers in fashion demonstrated a greater willingness to pay a CE premium (49% vs 39%); however, fashion had a slightly higher relative score for take-back program participation (29% for fashion and 38% for electronics).

The evidence suggests that digital campaigns that leverage well-publicised recycling infrastructure can motivate consumers to take action at the end of a product's life. The fact that consumers in these two product categories appear to be more willing to pay a CE premium suggests they increasingly value sustainable purchasing, as shown by similar purchasing behaviour across multiple product categories.

Table 2 provides a complete dataset of pre- and post-campaign behavioural data to permit direct comparison of all metrics across both industries and to enable evaluation not only of the final results but also of the extent of change resulting from digital green campaign exposure.

Table 2: Consumer Circular Behaviour Adoption Rate- Pre vs Post Digital Green Campaign Exposure

Metric	FF Pre	FF Post	FF Change	Elec Pre	Elec Post	Elec Change
Brand CE Awareness	34%	67%	+33pp	28%	52%	+24pp
Secondhand/ Refurbished Purchase	22%	41%	+19pp	15%	27%	+12pp
Take-Back/ Recycling Participation	11%	29%	+18pp	18%	38%	+20pp
Willingness to Pay CE Premium	31%	49%	+18pp	24%	39%	+15pp
Peer Recommendation of Sustainable Brand	28%	55%	+27pp	22%	44%	+22pp

Source: Compiled by the Author

Table 2 shows that the digital green marketing campaign has produced significant behavioural uplift across both industries and the five indicators measured. Brand CE awareness of fast fashion had the most significant absolute increase, rising 33 percentage points from 34% to 67%, suggesting robust information diffusion through social content and community-based digital campaigns. Take-back participation, as evidenced by electronic, experienced the most significant relative change, 20 percentage points, from an initial pre-campaign rate of 0 per cent to 20 per cent, indicating the power of digital calls-to-action in combination with concrete, convenient, and clearly communicated recycling infrastructure.

The readiness to pay a CE premium increased substantially in both industries, indicating that a long-term message on digital sustainability can shift price sensitivity over time. This fact has direct strategic implications for both sectors in their brand positioning decisions. The purchase intentions for secondhand and refurbished goods, although increasing across both sectors, are relatively low in the electronics segment (12 percentage points), which aligns with the longer product replacement lifespan and higher switching costs observed by Forti *et al.*, (2020) [11]. Comprehensively,

the data shows that fast fashion is more susceptible to the processes of awareness and social diffusion. In contrast, electronics is more vulnerable to the functional transparency and action-oriented digital communication approaches.

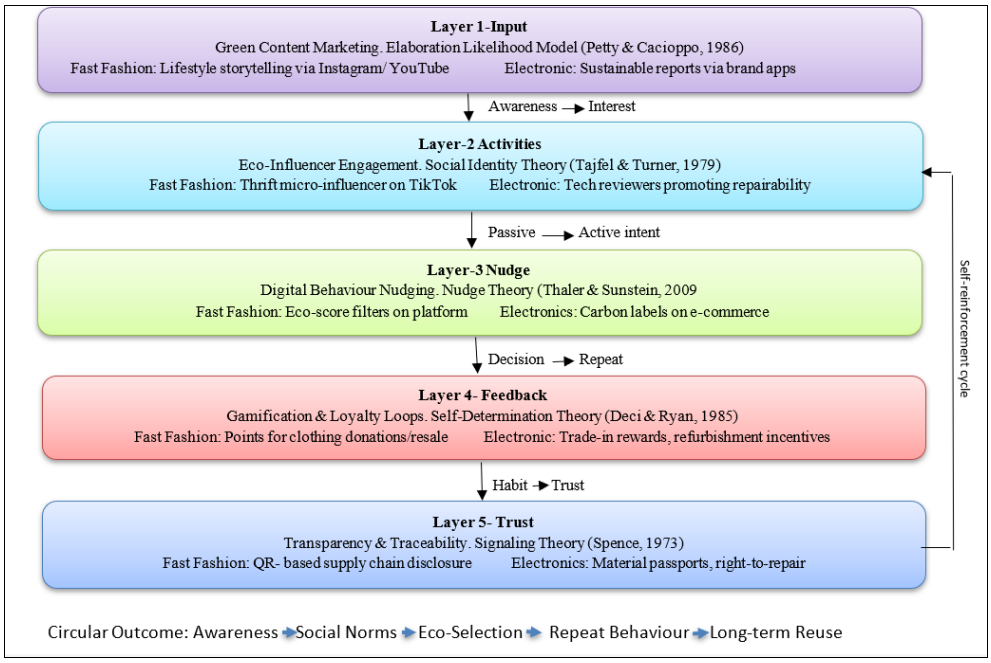
3. The Digital Circular Marketing (DCM) Model

Based on the trends highlighted in Objectives 1 and 2, the study proposes the Digital Circular Marketing (DCM) Model. This novel five-layer conceptual Model aligns digital marketing constructs with the pathways to transitioning to a circular economy. It is based on existing theoretical traditions in behavioural economics, communication theory, and organisational psychology, and is made industry-adaptable. The framework is detailed in Table 3 and Figure 3.

Table 3: Digital Circular Marketing Model- Framework Overview

Layer	Construct	Theoretical Basis	Fast Fashion Application	Electronics Application	Circular Outcome
Input	Green Content Marketing	Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)	Lifecycle storytelling via Instagram and YouTube	Sustainability reports via brand apps and websites	Awareness and attitude change
Activation	Eco-Influencer Engagement	Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)	Thrift micro-influencers on TikTok	Tech reviewers promoting repairability scores	Social norm shift and secondhand intent
Nudge	Digital Behavioural Nudging	Nudge Theory (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009)	Eco-score filters on fashion platforms	Carbon labels on electronics e-commerce	Eco-product selection at the point of decision
Feedback	Gamification and Loyalty Loops	Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)	Points for clothing donations and resale	Trade-in rewards and refurbishment incentives	Repeat circular behaviour reinforcement
Trust	Transparency and Traceability	Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973)	QR-based supply chain disclosure	Material passports and right-to-repair campaigns	Brand trust and long-term reuse intention

Source: Author's own conceptual development



Source: Compiled by the Author (based on Table 3)

Circular Outcome: Awareness Social Norms Eco-Selection Repeat BehaviourLong-term Reuse

Fig 3: Diagrammatic Representation of Digital Circular Marketing Model- Framework

The DCM Model operates on five interdependent, self-reinforcing layers that constitute a progressive consumer process towards circumambient behaviour. Properly designed green content establishes a basis for previous cognitive and emotional experiences that promote considering circular options through an input layer of environmental consciousness; without the presence of components that build awareness that qualify a consumer's first-time visit to see circular options, those components will not add value to the consumer's purchasing experience at all. The activation layer enhances the experience by building awareness of a consumer's identification with circular lifestyles in a social context through influencer networks and peer groups, and by converting passive awareness into active interest. The nudge Layer is responsible for taking a consumer's latent intention (e.g., recognition, interest, etc.) and assisting them in making their product purchases at the point of sale through highly visible product configurations (e.g. fulcrums), as well as using an Algorithm to create a consumer's purchase activity at the point of sale based on their recognition and interest in a product.

The use of a reward system, participation in community activities, and a loyalty program are how circularity is funded after the first purchase and will create an ongoing sense of reward and satisfaction with one's circular behaviour over time. The trust layer also provides consumers with a long-term commitment to the brand(s) they are buying from by giving consumers independently

verifiable information about the sustainability of the companies they are buying from; this is done through transparency. Examples of ways consumers can verify a product's sustainability independently include using material passports, third-party certification, and real-time carbon emissions reporting.

Digital marketing and circular economy strategies were once viewed as independent, non-overlapping areas; however, the DCM Model clearly shows that digital marketing serves as the connector and facilitator of circular consumer behaviour throughout the customer lifecycle. The DCM Model does not instruct organisations on how to apply it; instead, it provides a base framework for all organisations to execute from. For example, companies that participate in "fast fashion" will find that the Activation and Input layers of the Model are critical factors in their business model for the foreseeable future; Conversely, electronic product manufacturers will likely realise greater success and profitability with the Trust Layer and Nudge Layer, given that electronic product customers may rely on data to make purchase decisions.

In addition to providing a framework for individual companies to assess their marketing initiatives, the DCM Model allows policymakers to determine where government entities can implement regulation throughout the entire marketing sector in conjunction with the introduction of a new mandatory eco-labelling rating system or a standardised repairability rating on e-commerce sites to help support a population's circular behaviours. A key characteristic of the DCM Model is its broad applicability across multiple sectors and stakeholders, which strengthens both the DCM Model Theoretical Framework and Managerial Practice for advancing the Circular Economy.

4. Limitations

The research is based on secondary data sources, thus limiting the possibility of drawing direct causal conclusions and validating behavioural patterns among certain consumer groups. The evidence is based mainly on Western markets, including Europe and North America, which limits its generalizability to emerging and developing markets where digital infrastructure, consumer behaviour, and sustainability priorities may vary significantly. Also, the industry targeting fast fashion and electronics might not encompass pertinent dynamics found in other markets, including food systems, automotive, and building, where a circular economy transition is also urgent and digital marketing is becoming increasingly significant.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study revealed that digital marketing can serve as a scalable, authentic catalyst to support circular economy transformations in the fast-fashion and electronics sectors. Green content marketing, eco-influencer engagement, digital nudges, gamification and transparent communication tools each have distinct and complementary functions in aiding the acceptance of circular behaviours, and there is a clear link between the effectiveness of these tools across various industries and how those results can be translated into action. Finally, there is a DCM Model, which provides a structured and grounded framework for marketers and policymakers to formulate integrated campaigns that guide consumers along an incremental journey from initial awareness to an ongoing circular behaviour phase. For practitioners, the findings suggest significant priorities: the importance of visual storytelling and community building for fashion audiences via influencer-led efforts, and the need to invest in technical transparency tools, build communications around repairability, and implement a structured take-back digital initiative for electronics consumers. Policymakers are advised to consider this proposal seriously for implementation and to ensure compliance with mandatory eco-labelling and carbon footprint disclosure for significant digital retailers, as a regulatory driver that will accelerate the desired behavioural transformation currently underway in businesses. Future research could examine how cultures differ in how digital green campaigns will impact behaviours; extend digitally created cyclical behaviours through behaviour modification; and determine how artificial intelligence-driven personalisation and generated data will make circular marketing a more targeted, cost-effective, and practical method of reaching a larger global customer base.

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