

Equalizing Effect of Digital Media on Sustainable Purchasing Behavior of Rural and Urban Youth in Banke District, Nepal

Prakash Lamichhane^{1*}

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¹Department of Management, Mahendra Multiple Campus, Nepalgunj (Tribhuvan University, Nepal)

*Corresponding Author, Email: paslunpj1@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9312-7522>

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ABSTRACT

This research examines whether digital media has a similar impact on the sustainable purchasing behavior of young consumers in rural and urban areas in Lumbini Province, Nepal. The internet is not available to everyone in the same way. In cities, 76 percent of people have internet access. In rural areas, it is only about 34 percent. The study's objective is to identify whether digital sustainability content is equally effective across all parts of the country, including rural and urban areas, or less effective in some areas than in others. Based on a stratified sample of 500 secondary-level students (250 from rural areas, 250 from urban areas), we assess the perceived importance of digital media in decision-making and satisfaction with sustainability information. No statistically significant difference was found in importance ratings between rural and urban respondents, as shown by Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 2.027$, $p = 0.731$), and in satisfaction ($\chi^2 = 3.99$, $p = 0.408$). The results also show that satisfaction and perceived importance are positively related in both. The policy details indicate that we could have robust, nationwide plans for digital initiatives that are sustainable and enduring. It also stresses the importance of continuing to invest in making things easily accessible and providing local content. This study helps us better understand how to keep marketing efforts going in South Asia. Maybe the internet is helping to even out eco-friendly practices throughout various areas. The results from the study can be useful for decision-makers.

Keywords: Digital media, sustainable consumption, urban-rural comparison, youth behavior

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of information technology has changed the ways in which young people obtain information, communicate, and make decisions. Digital services such as social media, online marketplaces and content-sharing apps have become linked to the texture of everyday life, determining how we consume, interact socially and care for the environment. Spaces that were largely dedicated to entertainment and social networking have become powerful platforms for influencing opinions, tastes, and even what we buy (Xu, 2024).

At the same time, there is an increasing concern about climate change, environmental

degradation, and sustainable development globally. Consequently, digital media have come to play a central role in providing information on sustainability and in encouraging eco-friendly consumption. Through social media campaigns, online ads, influencer content, and instructional platforms, youth are increasingly encountering messaging promoting sustainable lifestyles, green products, and environmentally friendly purchasing practices (Ghimire, 2019).

This research provides insight into continuous marketing practice in South Asia (Faizal et al., 2024). Maybe the internet is promoting the equalization of green practices throughout regions

(Teng et al., 2025). The study's findings can aid policymakers. They show how digital media could be used to encourage young people to undertake climate-friendly behaviors today (Barala et al., 2024). The availability and use of sustainable digital content may vary by geography. Disparities in internet access, digital skills, and social infrastructure will continue to shape how people in developing countries like Nepal access and use digital information (Chand et al., 2024). Generally speaking, young people in cities have greater access to high-speed internet, digital devices, and online services than those in rural areas, who may face barriers such as inadequate connectivity, cost, and a lack of appropriate technology (Pokhrel & Ghanghas, 2025).

These differentiations are particularly relevant in light of Nepal's prioritization of sustainable development and climate actions. National environmental objectives also require extensive public understanding and involvement, and this is a large population segment already dealing with the ongoing impacts of climate change. If sustainability information were obtained predominantly from digital media, variations in access to digital media would also affect the environmental messages received across different areas. The impact of digital competence on farmers' pro-environmental behavior: an analysis with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Pokhrel & Ghanghas, 2024).

Despite digital sustainability communication emerging as an important topic and digital media engagement being subject to rural-urban disparities, there is a dearth of empirical understanding of rural-urban youth engagement in Nepal and how this engagement contributes to sustainable purchasing-related communications. Existing studies have generally focused on technology use or overall customer trends, and only a scant amount of research has analyzed the connection between digital media, sustainability information, and purchasing decisions through the lens of Nepal (Chaudhary, 2024).

Hence, this research finds that there are different views on digital media, sustainable purchasing, and sustainability by geographical residence. The study concentrates on rural and urban youth in Banke District, Nepal, to explore rural-urban variations in the importance attached to digital media, satisfaction with digital sustainability content, and purchasing behavior influenced by digital content. By connecting this gap, the study not only extends the literature on digital sustainability communication but

also furnishes effective guidelines for decision-makers, educators, and practitioners to boost sustainable consumption among young people in Nepal.

The numbers are clear: towns have internet access, but the countryside trails far behind at 34 percent (Digital, 2024). Such disparity is not a small chasm but a great divide. Do rural youth hear similar narratives about environmental accountability, or are digital activism initiatives mostly focused on urban youth? Urban youth, in particular, are believed to be the only group with a continuous digital connection. However, the lines are beginning to blur as latecomers, such as the widespread availability of affordable smartphones and free public Wi-Fi, provide increased access (Acharya, 2026). Even way out in the sticks, young people are all over social media, jumping on the latest online trends and checking out information on how to live green (Pokhrel & Ghanghas, 2025). This demonstrates how the internet can help close gaps between different groups. We do not know everything that'll come of it, but things look good. Revealed that rural youth in Lumbini Province are still struggling with digital access and literacy challenges, but digital media have become a prominent source of information and options for young people, pointing out the need to bolster digital inclusion efforts in the country.

Generally, it is thought that rural children are less connected to technology than their urban counterparts, who have better access to it and stronger digital skills. Even in the most isolated settings, Generation Z is exposed to a wide range of media, including social media, online trends, and sustainability-related content. This development indicates a possible role for digital media in helping to close enduring gaps. 'Even so, just how much that might affect is unknown (Khanal & Pradhan, 2022).

This research shows a vast scope for further related studies, especially from a South Asian perspective, which remains very under-researched. The results lay a basis for subsequent research to advance knowledge of digital media, sustainability awareness, and young people's behavior. As youth are the most digitally active media users and will be most affected by climate change in the future, it is particularly important to understand how they source and respond to information about sustainability issues (Shrestha & Baral, 2018). If digital sustainability campaigns are also effective across regional contexts, it may be possible to develop national-scale campaigns as an instrument to stimulate sustainable

behavior (Ixmeier & Kranz, 2024). However, if the rural-urban gap persists, additional interventions are needed to provide the rural populace with access to information and opportunities for meaningful involvement in digital sustainability (Chand et al., 2024). Numerous studies reveal young people now get their information, from learning about products to purchasing them, largely online (Data Reports, 2024).

This shift is an important step toward sustainability, given that these sites play a key function in forming what people believe and do when they shop for green products online (Chen & Li, 2024). Some older academic sources have expressed concern that the rural-urban divide may be exacerbated by challenges in accessing the internet, meaning some people will have less information to guide them on sustainability. However, some recent literature challenges this view or narrative. Social media, a popular form of Internet-based platform, indeed contributes to closing this gap (Fang et al., 2024). And it's a great way for young people around the world to pool their ideas on caring for the environment. This indicates that online content may serve as a useful vehicle for broadening the reach of sustainability awareness to more members of the public. Digital media shape the way we consume those things that help the planet. Businesses share authentic narratives about the products they make, and young people are most likely to engage with brands that care for the planet (Beccanulli & Biraghi, 2024).

Youth is an important period for people to form habits and values, especially regarding caring for the planet (Regmi et al., 2019). So it is really important to understand how social media affects people during this time. (Niroula & Upadhaya, 2023) In Nepal, not everyone has access to the internet. People who do, especially in rural areas, care just as much about sustainability as those in cities, according to the UNDP (2024). This means that people in these areas do not interact with online sustainability content because they lack internet access, not because they are uninterested (Shrestha et al., 2024).

When people trust the information they see online, they are more likely to buy products. Some studies show that when young people think digital content is trustworthy and relevant, they are more likely to act on it. This is especially important in countries where not everyone has access to computers and the internet, and where people might not trust the media as much.

All of this shows that digital media can help reduce differences in how people think about sustainability and behave, no matter where they live. Digital media can help make things more equal. If more research confirms this, it could change how sustainability campaigns are designed in countries like Nepal, where not everyone possesses equal access to the internet (Nepal's Digital Divide, 2026). Although digital media have become an important source of information that modifies consumer actions, few studies have examined whether young people's views on digital media and sustainable purchasing in Nepal are influenced by their rural or urban location. Previous research has principally involved urban youth or has not explicitly compared rural and urban youth. As a result, it remains unclear whether variations in access to digital technologies and exposure to the media influence faith in digital content, satisfaction with online information, and sustainable consumption behavior.

Responding to the need for research on youth in rural and urban areas, this study, conducted in Banke District, Nepal, compares 250 rural and 250 urban young people. In addition, it analyzes the extent to which attitudes regarding digital media might explain young people's readiness to make sustainable purchasing decisions. By bringing to light a South Asian scenario, the research expands the emerging corpus of literature on digital sustainability and youth consumer patterns in developing countries (Dissanayake et al., 2026).

METHODS

The study design is an exposure-outcome, cross-sectional design to investigate media influences on sustainable youth consumers in the Banke District of Nepal. A multistage stratified selection procedure was used to select an equal number of rural and urban respondents. The study involved 500 respondents (250 rural and 250 urban). The instrument comprises questions on demographics, use of digital technology, perceptions of digital media, satisfaction with online information related concerning sustainability, and the effect of digital media on purchasing. Descriptive statistics were presented, and Chi-square tests were performed to assess whether there were significant differences between rural and urban respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 500 youth respondents (250 rural and 250 urban) from Banke District, Nepal, participated in this study. The layered sampling method was used to avoid biasing the resulting comparison between rural and urban youths by group size. The representative nature of proportionate representation allows more reliable comparative statistics and may help determine whether location matters in digital media usage and purchasing.

Table 1
Demographic Profiles

Category	Rural (n = 250)	Urban (n = 250)
Average Age	22.3 years	23.1 years
Female Respondents	48.4%	51.6%
Smartphone Access	89.2%	97.6%

Respondents' demographic information is presented in Table 1. Demographic Profiles Category Rural (n=250) Urban (n = 250) Average Age 22.3 years 23.1 years Female Respondents 48.4% 51.6% Smartphone Access 89.2% 97.6% The results show that the young adults are dominant among the respondents, with an average age of 22.3 years in rural and 23.1 years in urban. The slight age difference indicates that the two groups have similar developmental statuses, thus permitting comparison. People in this age group, being the most active users of digital media, social networking sites (SNSs), and online shopping sites, are the best target group for examining the effect of digital media on buying decisions.

The gender profile was also fairly equal. Females formed 48.4% of the rural sample and 51.6% of the urban sample. There was an equal distribution of both sexes, which reduces sex bias and makes the results a better representation of the general youth population of Banke District. Past research has indicated that gender might be a determinant of social media use and online purchasing. Nevertheless, the near-equal number of male and female respondents in this study allows the results to be interpreted as primarily representing geographical rather than gender-based variation.

One of the most significant demographic findings concerns smartphone ownership. Both groups had an extraordinarily high level of smartphone access, with slightly more urban youth (97.6%) than rural (89.2%) reporting ownership. This result illustrates how rapidly digital connectivity is spreading in Nepal. Although a small rural-urban digital divide still exists, this divide is not nearly as wide as it was a few decades ago. The fact that smartphones are widely available indicates that young people in both places have ample opportunities to connect with digital services, social media, online information, and e-commerce.

Ownership of Smartphones was high in both groups, with urban youths enjoying slightly higher access (97.6%) than rural youths (89.2%). This indicates that digital connectivity is, for the most part, universal among youth, irrespective of place of residence, although a slight digital access divide persists between rural and urban dwellers. Considering the importance of smartphones in using online information, social media platforms, and e-commerce services, digital access is a key factor in examining youth interest in sustainability-related matters.

The Report of the Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2024–25 was also released in 2026 and cited rising digital penetration and internet access among Nepalese households, especially among the young. Smartphone ownership, therefore, observed in the findings of this present study, also reflects the national trend toward digital inclusion. Young consumers are using their smartphones as their primary portal for product information, to compare prices, read online reviews, watch promotional videos, and also communicate with friends when deciding whether to buy a particular product.

And even though the urban sample still enjoys a marginally higher level of smartphone access, the gap of about 8.4 percentage points is unlikely to lead to major differences in digital behaviors among young people. Such growing digital accessibility provides a strong basis for the generation to take part equally in the digital economy, online education, social networking, and sustainable consumption (Dyopala & Kadariya, 2026). Altogether, the demographic information reveals that youth in both rural and urban areas have sufficient technological resources to participate in digital domains. As a result, any differences in purchasing behavior or satisfaction with digital media are more likely to reflect individual attitudinal and behavioral

tendencies than to be a function of access to digital media.

Digital media and buying behaviour

The main aim of the study was to examine whether there exists any rural-urban disparity in terms of youth's perception of the significance of digital media in making buying decisions. The respondents were to evaluate the importance of digital media in purchasing goods and services.

Table 2

Digital Media and Buying Decisions

Importance Level	Rural (n = 250)	Urban (n = 250)
Extremely important	27	33
Not important at all	11	9
Slightly important	36	29
Moderately important	57	64
Very important	119	115

The pattern of responses suggests that digital media is influential in the buying decisions of both rural and urban young people. Almost all respondents in both groups considered digital media to be at least somewhat important (with 89.4% very/moderately-important in group 1 and 91.8% in group 2), and only a minuscule portion viewed it as unimportant.

Among rural participants, 119 (47.6%) considered digital media very important, and 57 (22.8%) considered it at least somewhat important. Among urban youth, the figures were similar: 115 respondents (46.0%) deemed digital media very important, and 64 (25.6%) deemed it fairly important. As for the entire panel, a mere 11 rural (4.4%) and 9 urban (3.6%) respondents felt that digital media was not at all important in their purchasing decisions, while slightly more urban respondents held the opposite view. Similarly, the "slightly important" option was chosen by barely any respondents.

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to see if these differences were statistically significant. "How meaningful differences are" of the

8 groups. The analysis produced the following results:

Chi-square (χ^2) = 2.027

Degrees of freedom (DF) = 4

p = 0.731

Since the p-value is > 0.05, which is much larger than the standard significance level of 0.05, place of residence and attitudes about the function of digital media in purchase decisions are not significantly related. The research findings show that rural and urban teen buyers have similar perceptions of digital media in their buying decisions. The results suggest that neither of the two figures, that is, young consumers' geographical location nor the fact that they are/non-digital natives, i.e. users/non-users of digital media, heavily impacts the extent to which they turn to digital media during product evaluation and selection.

This is indicative of the increasing penetration of digital media into consumers' daily lives (Hegeman et al., 2024). Social media platforms, online stores, YouTube reviews, influencer marketing, paid advertising, and product comparison sites are now well-established channels for gathering purchase information for rural folk and city dwellers alike. It can be said that the usage of digital media is now a vital element of the decision-making process of youth consumers in Nepal (Chaudhary, 2024). Modern-day consumers do not make decisions based on one or two traditional ads or word-of-telecommunications alone. They read online reviews, check customer ratings, watch product demos, ask experts, and talk on social media before they buy (Kang et al., 2022).

These analyses provide evidence that digital media are now a dominant source of consumer information and are no longer constrained by geography. This agreement in digital behavior indicates wider technological transformations taking place across Nepal.

The results show that digital media has become an integral part of the decision-making process for young consumers in Nepal. (Chaudhary, 2024) Contemporary consumers no longer make decisions based on traditional mass advertising or recommendations from close personal networks. Instead, they consult online reviews and customer ratings, watch product demonstrations, hear from experts, and even engage in social media conversations before they buy (Chen et al., 2022).

The lack of regional differences, too, confirms that nationwide mobile internet coverage

has significantly narrowed the digital information divide (Dyopala & Kadariya, 2026). "Even rural youth have new access to searching for products, comparing options, fetching prices, and even communicating with sellers using digital means" (Thapa, 2021).

These results confirm the argument that digital media are a pervasive source of consumer information, not simply an urban luxury (Pokhrel & Ghanghas, 2024). The narrowing of digital behaviors parallels other technological shifts transforming Nepal (Adhikari & Molla, 2024).

Satisfaction with digital media information

The second objective of the study was to examine whether satisfaction with digital media information differs between rural and urban youth.

Table 3

Satisfaction with Digital Media Information

Satisfaction Level	Rural Youth	Urban Youth
Extremely important	17	16
Not important at all	65	49
Slightly important	108	110
Moderately important	51	63
Very important	9	12

Table 3 shows satisfaction with information from digital media was reported as moderate to high by most respondents. Most participants in each group reported being "moderately satisfied".

A total of 108 rural youth respondents (43.2%) were moderately satisfied, and 51 (20.4%) were very satisfied. Urban youth had a comparable distribution, with 110 respondents (44.0%) moderately satisfied and 63 (25.2%) very satisfied. Complete dissatisfaction with information from digital media was reported by only a small fraction of respondents. The association between satisfaction level and place of residence was analyzed using the Chi-square test. The results were:

$$\chi^2 = 3.99$$

$$df = 4$$

$$p = 0.408$$

Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, no statistically significant association was observed between respondents' place of residence and their satisfaction with digital media information. These differences were not statistically significant, although urban respondents appeared to have marginally higher satisfaction levels.

In sum, the results show that digital media are well suited to meeting the information needs of both rural and urban youth. Respondents generally view digital channels as useful, high-quality sources of information and believe they are reliable for product information.

The relatively high satisfaction might be due to unique features of digital media, such as timely access to information, two-way communication, tailored information/service, multimedia presentations, and user participation. They enable buyers to have a closer look at the products than the conventional marketing channels do. (Lamichhane et al., 2025) In addition, satisfaction with digital media may indicate the rising quality of Nepali Web content. Companies are increasingly crafting localized advertising, product demonstrations in the native language, customer testimonials, and country-specific promotions that connect more strongly with local customer needs. (Sharma & Paudel, 2022).

The results also imply an upward trend of digital sophistication among rural youth. Although historical concerns about technological exclusion, rural respondents were just as satisfied as urban youth. This shows the increasing success of digital inclusion efforts and widening internet network coverage across Nepal (Bhatt, 2023). First, data show that rural and urban youth have similar smartphone ownership, suggesting that access to technology is no longer a major barrier to participation in digital activities. However, the gap in smartphone ownership between urban and rural respondents is not very wide. Second, the impact of digital media is a key buying consideration for consumers worldwide, regardless of geographic distance. The non-significant differences indicate that young consumers across the Banke District are increasingly dependent on digital information when making choices about products and services. Third, the information satisfaction with digital media is equally high between rural and urban youth. The results show that young consumers' information needs are well served by digital channels, even across borders.

Taken together, these data indicate that the rural-urban divide in online usage is narrowing. Advances in telecommunications, low-cost smartphones, widespread mobile internet provision, and rising levels of digital competence have substantially reduced regional inequalities (Dhakal et al., 2025, pp. 9-20). The results are consistent with more general theories of technology adoption, namely the TAM, which states that users adopt digital technologies when they view them as highly useful and easy to use. As perceptions of the importance and satisfaction with digital media are reported to be similar between rural and urban respondents, the study indicates that technology acceptance is becoming homogenized among Nepalese youth.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on differences in the importance of digital media in purchase decisions and in satisfaction with information on digital media between rural and urban youth in Banke District, Nepal. Demographic results were fairly evenly distributed among rural and urban participants, as well as across age and gender. Smartphone ownership was very high in both groups, with slightly higher access among urban youth. This result is a sign of Nepal's swift move toward digital inclusion and suggests that smartphones have become an essential part of young people's everyday lives. The results of the analyses indicate no major differences between urban and rural residents in the perceived importance of digital media in purchasing decisions. Both rural and urban youth rely heavily on digital media when researching products, evaluating options, and making buying decisions. The Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 2.027$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.731$) indicated that the observed differences were not statistically significant.

In a similar vein, satisfaction with information from digital media did not differ between rural and urban respondents ($\chi^2 = 3.99$, $df = 4$, $p = .408$). Urban youth were found to be slightly more satisfied, but the difference was not adequate to draw any conclusive inferences for satisfaction by place of residence. This indicates that digital media has developed as a common source of information for Nepalese youth. The traditional rural-urban digital divide has been significantly reduced due because of progress in mobile technology, internet infrastructure, smartphone cost, and digital skills. These results suggest that both populations are converging toward

greater similarity in the types of digital engagement and patterns of consumerism.

From a policy perspective, the findings show that policymakers, educators, marketers, and businesses need to go beyond only promoting internet access. More focus should be placed on the quality, trustworthiness, relevance, and contextualization of digital information at the local level. Initiatives that bolster digital competence, foster critical use of online information, boost sustainable consumption, and create culturally meaningful digital campaigns may lead to further positive purchasing behavior among youth consumers.

For companies and advertisers, the result suggests that digital marketing campaigns can be targeted at rural and urban youth with slight modifications, as both groups are equally dependent on digital media for information. For decision-makers, this means that expanding rural digital infrastructure and digital education will close the remaining gaps in smartphone ownership and internet access.

The study indicates that digital media have an important role in the purchasing decisions of youth in our study area, Banke District. Small disparities in digital access may persist, but region is no longer a meaningful predictor of how youth perceive or use digital media when making consumption decisions. As Nepal embarks on a digital journey, ensuring equal access to high-quality digital information will remain vital for fostering the development of informed consumers, promoting eco-friendly consumption patterns, and building an inclusive socioeconomic matrix.

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