Exploring Sustainable Branding in Indonesia's Coffee Shop Culture

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Abstrak

Studi ini mengeksplorasi persepsi konsumen terhadap branding berkelanjutan di kedai kopi lokal di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipatif terhadap konsumen di beberapa kedai kopi perkotaan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kesadaran konsumen terhadap keberlanjutan masih dangkal, terutama berfokus pada simbol visual seperti sedotan kertas dan kemasan ramah lingkungan. Keaslian muncul sebagai isu krusial, karena konsumen mampu membedakan antara praktik asli dan potensi greenwashing. Branding berkelanjutan berfungsi sebagai faktor sekunder dalam keputusan pembelian, tetapi dapat bertindak sebagai pembeda ketika atribut fungsional seperti rasa dan harga relatif setara. Studi ini berkontribusi pada literatur pemasaran berkelanjutan di sektor makanan dan minuman (F&B) dengan menggarisbawahi pentingnya praktik autentik, pengalaman konsumen, dan transparansi dalam membentuk persepsi merek.

Kata Kunci: Branding Berkelanjutan, Kedai Kopi, Persepsi Konsumen

Abstract

This study explores consumer perceptions of sustainable branding in local coffee shops in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation of consumers in several urban coffee shops. The findings indicate that consumer awareness of sustainability remains superficial, primarily focusing on visual symbols such as paper straws and eco-friendly packaging. Authenticity emerges as a crucial issue, as consumers are able to distinguish between genuine practices and potential greenwashing. Sustainable branding serves as a secondary factor in purchasing decisions but may act as a differentiator when functional attributes such as taste and price are relatively equal. This study contributes to the sustainable marketing literature in the food and beverage (F&B) sector by underscoring the importance of authentic practices, consumer experience, and transparency in shaping brand perception.

Keywords: Coffee Shop, Consumer Perception, Sustainable Branding

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability issues have increasingly attracted widespread attention across various sectors, including the food and beverage industry (Adams et al., 2023; Gallego-Álvarez et al., 2025; Legrand et al., 2022; Long et al., 2018). The concept of sustainable branding emerges as a crucial strategy that not only emphasizes the creation of economic value but also highlights social and environmental responsibility. In this context, local coffee shops face unique challenges, as they are required to integrate environmentally friendly, ethical, and transparent practices into their brand strategies, despite having limited resources.

Previous studies have shown that sustainability plays a significant role in enhancing brand image and performance (Amores-Salvadó et al., 2014; Bowo, 2023; Flores-Hernández et al., 2020; Fosu et al., 2024; Kinnunen et al., 2022; Le, 2023; Le et al., 2024). However, most of these studies have concentrated on large corporations or global brands with greater capacity to adopt sustainable branding practices. This leaves a research gap in the context of local coffee shops, which, in fact, play

a vital role in shaping community identity and supporting the creative economy. Hence, understanding how local coffee shops implement sustainable branding strategies remains limited and requires further exploration.

In addition, much of the existing literature tends to emphasize aspects of marketing communication, such as the use of social media or green advertising campaigns (Amores-Salvadó et al., 2014; Bowo, 2024; Bowo et al., 2024; Braga et al., 2024; Kyu Kim et al., 2021; Leonidou et al., 2011; Li et al., 2023; Lyon & Montgomery, 2013; Minton et al., 2012; Rathee & Milfeld, 2024; Twum & Yalley, 2021; Valos et al., 2016). Studies that examine actual practices at the operational level remain scarce. In reality, the implementation of sustainability in local coffee shops is often related to the use of eco-friendly materials, waste management, and partnerships with local coffee farmers. The gap between the normative theory of sustainable branding and on-the-ground practices constitutes an area that requires deeper scholarly inquiry.

From the consumer's perspective, previous research has largely focused on loyalty or purchase intentions toward large brands (Ayesh & Al-Zyoud, 2021; Budiono et al., 2021; Chang, 2020; Farida & Ardyan, 2015; Polat & Cetinsoz, 2021; Tu et al., 2012; Wu, 2017). In the context of local coffee shops, consumer preferences are more complex, as they are influenced by cultural values, emotional attachment, and community engagement. To date, there has been little research that specifically highlights how consumers' perceptions of sustainability aspects such as the use of organic materials or ethical business practices shape the brand image of local coffee shops.

Furthermore, the sustainability of local coffee shops is closely tied to the role of public policy. Regulatory support, access to green financing, and government programs that encourage small businesses are decisive factors in the successful implementation of sustainable branding. Unfortunately, the interrelation between sustainable branding strategies, consumer behavior, and public policy has received limited attention in the literature. The absence of an integrated study of these three aspects underscores a significant research gap.

Based on the foregoing, this research is deemed important to fill the void in the literature by providing a more comprehensive analysis of sustainable branding practices in local coffee shops. It is expected that this study will contribute theoretically by expanding the discourse on sustainable branding, while also offering practical implications for coffee shop owners, consumers, and policymakers in formulating more effective and contextually relevant strategies.

This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how consumers perceive and evaluate the implementation of sustainable branding in local coffee shops in Indonesia. Given that sustainability issues are increasingly becoming a central concern in modern marketing practices, this research seeks to explore the extent to which the sustainability narratives constructed by local coffee shops are accepted, understood, and appreciated by consumers. Accordingly, the study does not only aim to identify consumers' general perceptions but also to reveal the dimensions of their experiences and interpretations of sustainability claims presented in branding practices.

Furthermore, this research seeks to address the gap in the literature, which has predominantly focused on global corporations with quantitative approaches. By adopting a qualitative perspective, this study offers an alternative, more contextual, and deeper understanding of consumer behavior, particularly within small and medium enterprises such as local coffee shops. This is important because sustainable branding strategies at smaller business scales often face resource limitations, making consumer perception a critical foundation for entrepreneurs to formulate more targeted branding approaches.

Practically, this research intends to contribute to the development of marketing strategies for local coffee shops in Indonesia so that they may be more aligned with consumer values and expectations. The findings of this study are expected to provide a foundation for business owners to strengthen competitiveness through branding practices that emphasize not only commercial image but also sustainability aspects. Thus, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of sustainable marketing studies, while simultaneously offering practical implications for the continuity of local coffee shop businesses amid increasingly dynamic competition.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore consumer perceptions regarding the implementation of sustainable branding in local coffee shops in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of consumers' meanings and experiences, which are often not adequately captured through quantitative methods (Hardani et al., 2020; Somantri, 2005; Sulistiyo, 2023). The research focuses on consumers' interpretations of sustainability messages conveyed by coffee shops, as well as how such messages influence their experiences and perceptions of the brand.

The research design applied is a case study, involving several local coffee shops that explicitly adopt sustainability elements, such as the use of eco-friendly materials or promotions about sustainably sourced coffee. Research participants were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: consumers aged 18–35 years, active visitors of coffee shops, and those with an interest in environmental issues. The number of participants was set between six and eight, considering that qualitative research emphasizes data depth rather than participant numbers. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and non-participant observations at coffee shop locations to capture the context of consumers' interactions with branding elements offered.

The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis as formulated by Braun and Clarke (Byrne, 2022). The analysis process involved systematic data coding, theme categorization, and interpretation of meanings emerging from consumer narratives (Braun et al., 2016, 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2014, 2019, 2021c, 2021a, 2021b, 2023; Terry et al., 2017). Data validity was maintained by comparing findings across participants and utilizing observation notes as a form of triangulation. Through this methodology, the study is expected to provide a more contextual and reflective understanding of how Indonesian consumers respond to sustainable branding within the local coffee shop culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of data from in-depth interviews and participant observations identified five key themes that reflect consumer perceptions of sustainable branding in local coffee shops in Indonesia, namely: awareness and understanding, perceptions of authenticity, consumer behavior and decision-making, experiences with sustainable practices, and expectations for the future. Each theme provides important insights into how consumers interpret sustainability practices, assess authenticity, and form their decisions and loyalty toward the brand.

1. **Awareness and Understanding**

   Most informants demonstrated awareness of sustainability practices in local coffee shops, although their understanding tended to be limited to visual and surface-level aspects. The majority recognized sustainability symbols, such as the use of paper straws, biodegradable packaging, and posters on environmentally friendly practices. For example, a 20-year-old student stated, *"Eco-*

friendly packaging, like paper straws and paper bags," while a 25-year-old creative worker added, *"The use of local ingredients, processed coffee waste, and recyclable packaging."*

Nevertheless, a deeper understanding of sustainability principles—such as supply chain impacts or tangible environmental effects—remains limited. Another informant admitted, *"Yes, but not many really apply it comprehensively"* (Young entrepreneur, 28). These findings show that while consumers recognize visual signs of sustainability, they do not fully grasp the broader context and implications of such practices. Awareness thus serves as a foundation influencing further perceptions of authenticity and brand value.

2. **Perceptions of Authenticity**

Authenticity emerged as a critical dimension in shaping consumer perceptions of sustainability practices. Some informants considered coffee shop initiatives to be genuinely committed, such as discount programs for customers who bring their own tumblers. A 26-year-old freelancer noted, *"Create clear programs. For example, every purchase includes a donation for the environment."* Conversely, others doubted the sincerity of such practices, regarding them as mere marketing strategies or greenwashing. A 30-year-old private employee expressed, *"Mostly just a marketing strategy, to look good."*

These perceptions of authenticity strongly influence consumer attitudes toward brands. Consumers tend to grant greater trust and support to coffee shops whose sustainability practices are consistent and transparent. Authenticity thus serves as a bridge between consumer awareness of sustainability and their willingness to engage with or purchase from a brand. This theme underscores that sustainable branding must extend beyond visual symbols to demonstrate genuine commitment across the entire value chain.

3. **Influence on Consumer Behavior**

Findings indicate that sustainability practices do influence consumer behavior, although often not as the primary determinant. Consumers consider sustainability an added value when product quality, price, and location are relatively equal. For example, a student remarked, *"Pretty much, I would rather go there than the one that uses lots of plastic,"* while a creative worker added, *"Yes, very much. It becomes a plus point and makes me more loyal."*

The study also shows variations depending on individual preferences and prior experiences. Some respondents emphasized that sustainability is important but cannot replace fundamental factors such as coffee taste or store comfort. This reinforces that sustainable branding can function as an additional differentiator, encouraging positive purchase behavior particularly among consumers already environmentally aware or brand-loyal. These findings align with existing literature indicating a positive relationship between eco-friendly practices and purchase intention in the F&B industry.

4. **Consumer Experiences with Sustainable Practices**

Direct consumer experiences play a central role in shaping their perceptions. Interaction with eco-friendly practices, such as tumbler incentives or paper straws, generated positive responses when these practices were convenient and easy to follow. A 29-year-old barista stated, *"Often. Most coffee shops focusing on specialty coffee have already adopted sustainability practices."* However, inconvenient experiences, such as paper straws that quickly become soggy, led to negative evaluations. A private employee noted, *"Good, but sometimes less practical. For example, paper straws easily soften."*

These findings highlight the importance of design and execution that take consumer comfort into account. The implementation of sustainability practices should be holistic rather than symbolic so that consumers can feel tangible value from these initiatives. Consumer experience also serves as

a crucial indicator in building long-term loyalty, as positive experiences strengthen emotional attachment and brand advocacy.

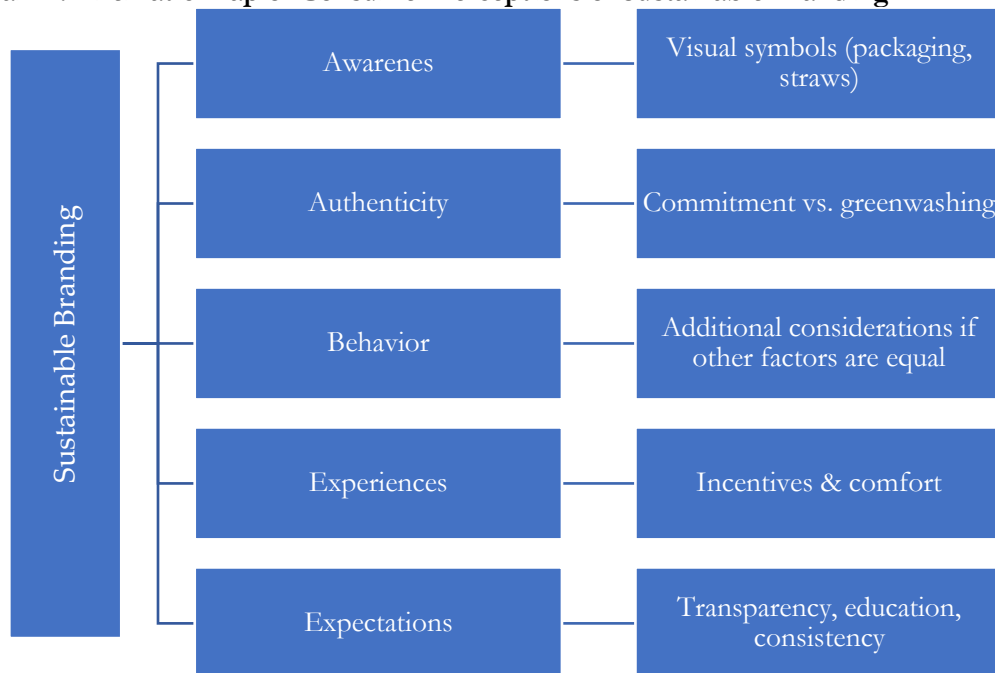5. **Consumer Expectations for the Future**

Consumers expect sustainability practices in local coffee shops to be more transparent, consistent, and comprehensive. Several informants emphasized the need for greater education on coffee origins, farmer involvement, and the social impacts of sustainability. For example, a creative worker stated, *"Be more transparent about sustainability practices and continue to educate consumers,"* while a young entrepreneur added, *"The program should be more comprehensive, not only packaging but also waste management."*

These expectations demonstrate that consumers demand more than symbolic initiatives; they want to understand and experience real contributions from coffee shops' sustainability actions. Transparency and effective communication will strengthen perceptions of authenticity and encourage sustainable brand loyalty, ensuring that sustainability practices function not merely as a marketing element but as part of the brand's values and philosophy.

Table 1. Thematic Interview Results

Theme	Example Respondent Quote	Summary of Perceptions
Awareness and understanding	*"Eco-friendly packaging, like paper straws and paper bags."* (Student, 20)	Respondents recognize visual signs of sustainability, but deeper understanding is limited.
Perceptions of Authenticity	*"Create clear programs. For example, every purchase includes a donation for the environment."* (Freelancer, 26)	Consumers assess authenticity, distinguishing genuine commitment from marketing strategies.
Influence on Consumer Behavior	*"Pretty much, I would rather go there than the one that uses lots of plastic."* (Student, 20)	Sustainability is seen as an additional factor in purchasing decisions.
Consumer Experiences	*"Often. Most coffee shops focusing on specialty coffee have already adopted sustainability practices."* (Barista, 29)	Real-life experiences shape positive or negative perceptions depending on convenience.
Future Expectations	*"Be more transparent about sustainability practices and continue to educate consumers."* (Creative worker, 25)	Consumers expect sustainability to be more transparent, consistent, and comprehensive.

Diagram 1. Thematic Map of Consumer Perceptions of Sustainable Branding

The thematic map in Diagram 1 illustrates that consumers perceive sustainable branding in local Indonesian coffee shops through five main dimensions: awareness, authenticity, behavior, experience, and future expectations. Awareness arises from recognizable sustainability symbols, such as eco-friendly packaging. However, consumers then test the authenticity of these claims by considering the consistency of real practices to avoid indications of greenwashing.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that sustainability factors only significantly influence consumer behavior when balanced with product quality, price, and consumption experience. Consumer loyalty is strengthened through positive experiences and transparent information, while future expectations call for more consistent and integrated sustainability practices. These findings confirm that sustainable branding is understood in a multidimensional way and cannot be separated from the context of everyday consumption experiences.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that sustainable branding in local coffee shops in Indonesia is perceived multidimensionally by consumers. The main aspects identified include awareness and understanding, perceptions of authenticity, consumer experience, consumption behavior, as well as brand loyalty and advocacy. These five aspects form an interrelated ecosystem, in which sustainability practices function not only as visual symbols but also as strategic instruments that influence consumer behavior in the long term (see Table 1. Thematic Results of In-depth Interviews and Diagram 1. Thematic Map of Consumer Perceptions of Sustainable Branding).

First, consumer awareness and understanding evidently play a fundamental role as the entry point for the formation of sustainability perceptions. Consumers recognize simple symbols such as paper straws, eco-friendly packaging, or discount programs for customers bringing their own tumblers. This practice aligns with brand signaling theory, where visual elements serve as initial signals

in shaping consumer interpretation of brand values (Clement et al., 2013; Creusen et al., 2010; Crilly et al., 2004; Karjalainen & Snelders, 2010; Liu et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2014; Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2011). However, the findings also reveal that such awareness tends to remain superficial. Consumers are relatively quick to identify environmentally friendly symbols, but few relate sustainability to deeper dimensions such as supply chain transparency or fair-trade practices.

Second, perceptions of authenticity emerge as a crucial factor connecting awareness to the formation of consumer trust. Indonesian consumers are increasingly critical of potential greenwashing practices and assess consistency between claims and actual practices as the primary indicator of brand credibility. This reinforces (Delmas & Burbano, 2011)argument that authenticity is an absolute prerequisite for sustainability strategies to be positively received. Thus, local coffee shops cannot rely solely on portraying an eco-friendly image, but must also provide tangible evidence of their sustainable practices.

Third, consumer experience is shown to contribute significantly to behavior and loyalty. Environmentally friendly practices that deliver positive experiences—such as the comfort of green spaces, service digitalization, or economic incentives in the form of discounts for sustainable behavior successfully strengthen emotional bonds with the brand. Conversely, experiences that reduce convenience, such as paper straws that deteriorate quickly, generate resistance. These findings are consistent with experiential marketing theory (Carmo et al., 2022; Mandasari et al., 2024; Schmitt, 1999; Zhu & Wang, 2022), which emphasizes the importance of integrating multisensory experiences in shaping consumer-brand relationships.

Fourth, consumer behavior demonstrates the dynamic interplay between rational and emotional considerations. Sustainable branding proves to be an additional factor reinforcing consumption decisions but is not the main determinant. Consumers still prioritize product quality, price, and comfort as dominant considerations (Grimmer & Woolley, 2014). However, when functional factors among brands are relatively equal, sustainability can become the tie-breaker factor determining consumer preference. In other words, sustainability functions as a competitive advantage enhancer.

Fifth, the findings also indicate that sustainability holds long-term potential in building brand loyalty and consumer advocacy. Consumers who perceive sustainable practices as authentic not only demonstrate repeat purchasing behavior but also become active advocates who recommend the coffee shop to others. These findings support the literature on sustainable brand loyalty, where loyalty is not only based on transactional satisfaction but also on value attachment and trust in the brand's vision (Jannah & Wirastomo, 2024). Thus, sustainable loyalty reflects the highest form of consumer attachment, transcending mere product preference toward a commitment to the philosophy of sustainability.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that consumer perceptions of sustainable branding in local Indonesian coffee shops are shaped through layered processes: beginning with visual awareness, evaluated through authenticity, reinforced by consumption experience, and subsequently manifested in consumer behavior and long-term loyalty. These findings highlight the importance of consistency and integration among communication strategies, tangible proof of practices, and the experiences offered to consumers. Coffee shops that successfully integrate these three aspects stand to not only strengthen their market position but also foster consumer advocacy that supports sustainability more broadly within the food and beverage industry.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that consumer perceptions of sustainable branding in local coffee shops in Indonesia remain partial. Consumers tend to recognize visual symbols of sustainability; however, their understanding of more substantive aspects such as supply chain transparency, fair-trade practices, and consistency of sustainability commitments remains limited. Authenticity emerges as a crucial issue, as consumers are able to distinguish authentic initiatives from rhetorical sustainability claims or mere marketing strategies. Sustainable branding is not yet the primary factor in purchasing decisions but functions as an additional determinant that strengthens preferences when functional quality across brands is relatively equal. This underscores the need for a balance between symbolic representation, consumer comfort, and transparency of business practices in building a credible image of sustainability.

Practically, this study emphasizes that local coffee shop operators must integrate sustainable branding with consistent tangible practices to avoid perceptions of greenwashing. The consumer experience dimension must also be carefully considered, ensuring that sustainability practices do not compromise the comfort of enjoying the product. Furthermore, coffee shops may expand the meaning of sustainability through consumer education regarding coffee origins, farmer involvement, and sustainable social programs. From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the discourse on sustainable branding in the food and beverage sector by demonstrating the gap between communicated brand images and consumer understanding, while also affirming that sustainability has the potential to serve as a tie-breaker factor in competitive contexts. These findings open opportunities for further studies that compare the dynamics of consumer perceptions across different segments as well as regional and global contexts.

SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that local coffee shop entrepreneurs in Indonesia strengthen the implementation of *sustainable branding* by emphasizing authenticity and consistency throughout the entire value chain. Sustainability efforts should not be limited to visual symbols such as paper straws or eco-friendly packaging, but should also include transparency in sourcing materials, collaboration with local coffee farmers, and responsible waste management. Consumer education on deeper aspects of sustainability should also be enhanced through open brand communication, environment-based loyalty programs, and customer experiences that remain comfortable without compromising product functionality. This approach is expected to enhance consumer trust and foster long-term brand loyalty.

Furthermore, for policymakers and academics, this study opens opportunities to develop public policies and further research exploring the interrelation between sustainable branding, consumer behavior, and regulatory support for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Local governments and financial institutions are encouraged to provide incentives, training, and access to green financing for local coffee shops committed to sustainable practices. Future studies are advised to expand the context through quantitative or comparative approaches across regions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing consumer perceptions of *sustainable branding* in Indonesia's food and beverage sector.

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