



The Role of Perceived Authenticity in Moderating the Effect of Sustainable Marketing on Consumer Loyalty to Indomaret Fresh in Ambon City

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of sustainable marketing on consumer loyalty to Indomaret Fresh in Ambon City, considering the role of perceived authenticity as a moderating variable. A quantitative approach was used through a cross-sectional survey of 200 respondents who had purchased environmentally friendly products. The data were analyzed using SEM-PLS techniques through the SmartPLS 4 application. The results showed that sustainable marketing had a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty. In addition, perceived authenticity was found to strengthen this relationship, meaning that loyalty increased when consumers perceived sustainability practices to be implemented consistently and authentically. These findings not only enrich the theoretical study of sustainable marketing but also provide practical implications for modern retailers to emphasize honesty and consistency in their sustainability strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the concept of sustainability has become increasingly important in business strategies around the world. (García-Rivas et al., 2023). Environmental, social, and ethical issues are now considered more than just moral imperatives, but also as a strategic factor that determines the competitiveness of the company (Aydoğmuş et al., 2022). The public, especially consumers, are becoming increasingly critical in evaluating products and brands, including the extent to which a company consistently implements its sustainability commitments. This trend is also evident in Indonesia, with growing public awareness of the environmental impact of consumption, the rise of green lifestyles, and increasing demand for environmentally friendly products.

Indomaret Fresh, one of the retail business units under the Indomaret network, offers fresh products such as fruits, vegetables, and daily household necessities. The characteristics of the products offered make Indomaret Fresh closely associated with sustainability issues, both in terms of the supply chain, packaging methods, and consumption patterns of the community. The challenge that arises is how sustainable marketing efforts can be truly accepted by consumers and build consumer loyalty. In practice, consumers are now increasingly cautious due to the prevalence of greenwashing, which is when companies make sustainability claims that do not match reality (Forliano et al., 2025). This has led to consumer skepticism about sustainability claims, including in modern retail sectors such as Indomaret Fresh.

From an academic perspective, there has been extensive research on the relationship between sustainable marketing and consumer behavior. In general, previous studies confirm that sustainable marketing practices can strengthen brand image (Monfort et al., 2025), enhancing customer engagement (Anwar et al., 2025), to build loyalty (Singh et al., 2024). However, one important aspect that is often overlooked is how consumers perceive the authenticity of these sustainability claims. The level of consumer trust in the honesty and consistency of claims has the potential to be a strong or weak determining factor in the influence of sustainable marketing on loyalty. Therefore, this study offers a theoretical contribution by presenting perceived authenticity as a moderating variable that has rarely been touched upon in previous studies, especially in the context of Indonesian retail.

From a practical standpoint, this study is expected to provide guidance for Indomaret Fresh managers and other modern retailers. In a competitive retail industry, customer loyalty is an important asset (Närvänen et al., 2020). Although sustainability practices can be a differentiation strategy, their effectiveness is highly dependent on consumers' perceptions of authenticity. The findings of this study can help management formulate sustainability communication strategies that are not only informative but also believed by consumers to be truthful and consistent, thereby having a real impact on increasing loyalty.

Previous research in various industrial contexts has shown that sustainable marketing can strengthen the relationship between companies and

customers. For example, (Rastogi et al., 2024) found that sustainable marketing practices in the Indian electronics industry play an important role in strengthening loyalty through brand image enhancement. Other research by (Jia et al., 2023) in the hospitality sector confirms that sustainable marketing strategies can encourage more responsible consumer behavior, especially when reinforced by corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. Meanwhile, (J. Sun & Wang, 2025) using the fsQCA approach to show that a combination of environmental, social, and economic dimensions can increase consumer equity towards a brand.

However, most of these studies focus on specific industrial sectors such as electronics, tourism, and fashion. Research that focuses more on the modern retail sector, especially retailers that sell fresh products, is still relatively scarce. This sector is directly related to consumers' basic needs and has a significant environmental impact, for example through the food supply chain and the use of single-use plastics. In addition, many previous studies have emphasized the role of mediating variables such as brand image. (Aji, 2025) or customer loyalty (Gong et al., 2023), Meanwhile, moderating variables such as perceived authenticity are still rarely studied, especially in research conducted in Ambon City.

Academic studies on sustainable marketing in Indonesia's modern retail sector are still limited. With a vast number of outlets and a large consumer base, Indomaret Fresh has become a strategic company in promoting more sustainable consumption practices. However, there has been no research specifically examining how Indomaret Fresh's sustainable marketing practices impact consumer loyalty in Ambon City. The main question that arises is whether the sustainability strategies implemented by modern retailers are truly effective in building consumer loyalty.

Although literature has shown a positive relationship between sustainable marketing and consumer loyalty, there are still inconsistent results when the authenticity of sustainability claims is not taken into account. Consumer skepticism about greenwashing can weaken or even negate this positive effect. Therefore, studies are needed that explicitly examine the role of perceived authenticity as a moderator in the relationship between sustainable marketing and consumer loyalty. This research will contribute to bridging this theoretical gap while providing empirical evidence in the Indonesian retail sector.

In line with the above description, the purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of sustainable marketing on the loyalty of Indomaret Fresh consumers in Ambon City and to examine the extent to which perceived authenticity plays a role as a variable that strengthens or weakens this relationship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Marketing and Customer Loyalty

The concept of sustainable marketing stems from the need for companies to balance business objectives with social and environmental responsibilities. Sustainable marketing is a marketing practice that is not only oriented towards short-term financial gains, but also emphasizes contributions to environmental

sustainability and the welfare of the wider community. (Tabelessy, Walter; Girsang, Wardis; Nanere, 2025). In practice in the retail sector, this strategy can be realized in the form of using environmentally friendly packaging, selling local products, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and implementing social responsibility programs (Herbes et al., 2024).

Previous studies have consistently shown a positive relationship between sustainable marketing and consumer loyalty. Loyalty is defined as the tendency of customers to make repeat purchases and recommend the product to others (Puspitasari et al., 2023; Tabelessy, 2025). (Shaafia et al., 2024), found that sustainable marketing strategies successfully strengthened customer loyalty through positive brand image in the fashion industry in Jakarta.

Meanwhile, studies (Aly et al., 2025) emphasizes that sustainable marketing, through environmental awareness, green communication, and eco-friendly packaging, has been proven to increase trust and ultimately strengthen consumer loyalty. From these findings, it can be understood that the better consumers' perception of a company's sustainability initiatives, the greater the possibility of forming consumer loyalty.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Sustainable marketing has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty.

The Role of Perceived Authenticity as a Moderating Variable in the Relationship between Sustainable Marketing and Consumer Loyalty

Perceived authenticity is consumers' assessment of a brand's sincerity, honesty, and consistency in delivering its claims and actions. (Eggers et al., 2013). Perceived authenticity not only has a direct impact on consumer loyalty, but also plays an important role in strengthening the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies and consumer loyalty. A number of studies confirm that perceived authenticity acts as a psychological filter for consumers in assessing the sustainability messages conveyed by companies (Xu et al., 2021). When consumers view sustainability as authenticity and something that must remain consistent, its positive impact on loyalty will be even stronger (Bulmer et al., 2024; H. Sun et al., 2024). Conversely, if it is perceived as merely a marketing strategy without sincerity, the potential for loyalty can weaken, and even lead to negative perceptions due to greenwashing practices.

Previous research also shows that perceived authenticity can strengthen consumer engagement with sustainability strategies (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022), and serves as a moderating variable that influences the relationship between various marketing factors and consumer behavior (Meng & Choi, 2017). Thus, perceived authenticity is not only a direct determinant of consumer loyalty, but also functions as a moderating variable in the relationship between sustainable marketing and consumer loyalty.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Perceived authenticity positively and significantly moderates the relationship between sustainable marketing and consumer loyalty.

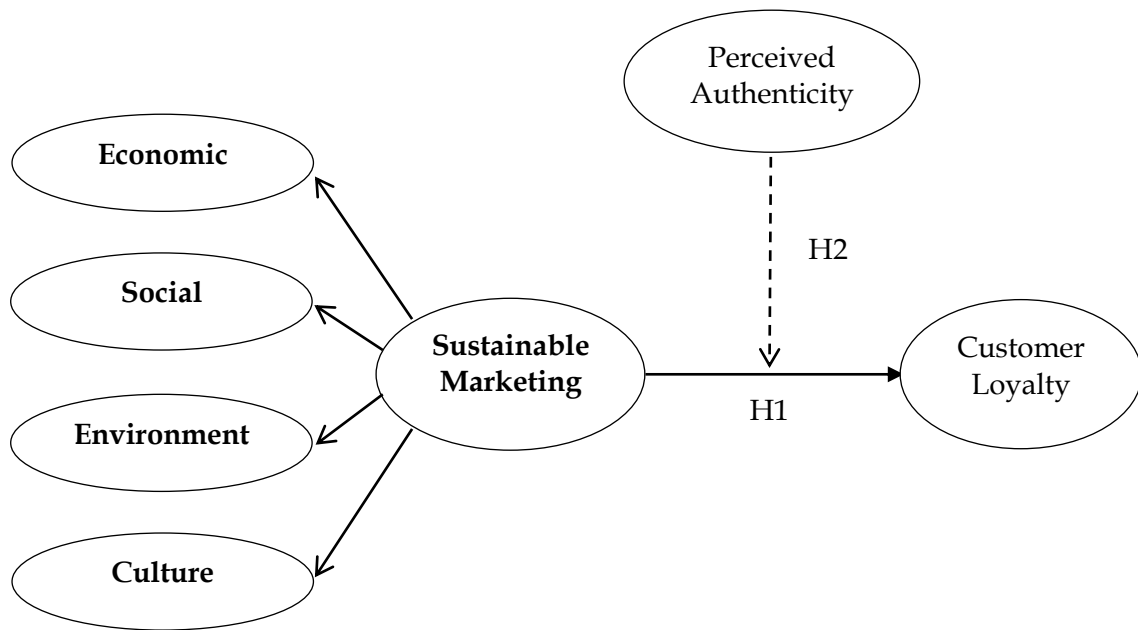


Figure 1. Research Model

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design. This method was chosen because the main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between variables and measure the strength of the influence that occurs in a certain period (Zhao et al., 2025). The research model was designed to examine the effect of sustainable marketing on consumer loyalty with perceived authenticity as a moderating variable.

Population and Sample

The population of this study included Indomaret Fresh consumers in Ambon City who had purchased environmentally friendly products in the past twelve months. The sample was obtained through purposive sampling with the criteria of having purchased environmentally friendly products and being at least 17 years old. A total of 200 respondents were collected in this study, which was considered sufficient to obtain stable SEM-PLS analysis results (Sitaniapessy, Rainier Hendrik; Tabelessy, 2025).

Research Instruments

This study examines three main constructs, namely sustainable marketing (SM) using four main dimensions, perceived authenticity (PA), and consumer loyalty (CL). The SM construct is adapted from (Jung et al., 2020), PA is measured based on instruments adapted from (Napoli et al., 2014), and CL uses indicators adapted from (Tabelessy, 2023). All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). In this research framework, PA was also positioned as a moderating variable that could potentially strengthen or weaken the relationship between SM and CL.

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected using questionnaires distributed directly to Indomaret Fresh consumers in Ambon City. Before distributing 200 questionnaires, a trial run was conducted with 40 respondents to ensure the reliability and initial validity of the instrument.

Data Analysis Techniques

SmartPLS 4 was used in this study to analyze the relationships between constructs using PLS-SEM, as it is capable of handling complex models with small samples, supports both reflective and formative indicators, and tests non-linear relationships (Sitaniapessy, Rainier Hendrik; Tabelessy, 2025). In the context of this study, the SM construct was treated as a Higher Order Construct (HOC) processed using a two-stage approach. Thus, the use of SmartPLS 4 not only enabled the testing of validity, reliability, and relationships between variables, but also facilitated a more accurate analysis of HOC in the structural model (Hwa et al., 2023), including testing the moderating role of PA on the relationship between SM and CL.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evaluasi Model Pengukuran

To verify the measurement model in this study, an examination of construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity was conducted with reference to the guidelines suggested by (Sarstedt et al., 2022). Construct reliability was tested using Composite Reliability (ρ_a); the results show that each construct has a value between 0.764 and 0.808 (Table 1), which meets the recommended range of 0.60–0.95. These findings indicate that the measurement instrument has adequate internal consistency in representing the related constructs. Convergent validity was evaluated through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) with a minimum limit of 0.50; all constructs obtained AVE between 0.676 and 0.721 (Table 1), which means that most of the indicator variation can be explained by the intended construct.

To assess discriminant validity, the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was used as recommended (Sarstedt et al., 2022), with a maximum threshold of 0.90 between constructs. All HTMT values were below this threshold (Table 2), proving that the research constructs were distinct and did not overlap. Overall, these results indicate that the measurement model meets the statistical criteria for validity and reliability.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability

Measurement	Economic	Social	Environment	Culture
Composite reliability (ρ_a)	0,806	0,764	0,790	0,808
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0,719	0,676	0,703	0,721

Source: Output SmartPLS 4, 2025

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

Construct	Economic	Social	Environment	Culture
Economic				
Social	0,853			

Environment	0,850	0,838		
Culture	0,771	0,848	0,860	

Source: Output SmartPLS 4, 2025

High Order Construct Measurement Model

Evaluation of measurement models at higher construct levels follows guidelines (Sarstedt et al., 2022), covering reliability testing, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Reliability testing with rho_a shows values for all constructs ranging from 0.890 to 0.939 (Table 3), which is within the recommended range of 0.60–0.95 and indicates good internal reliability. Convergent validity, measured using AVE with a minimum threshold of 0.50, showed values between 0.747 and 0.852 (Table 3), indicating that the proportion of indicator variance explained by the construct was quite large.

Discriminant validity for high-order models was tested with HTMT with a reference limit of 0.85 (Sarstedt et al., 2022); all construct pairs showed HTMT values below this threshold (Table 4), so that the constructs in the model can be said to have adequate discrimination.

Table 3. Validity and Reliability

Measurement	<i>Sustainable Marketing</i>	<i>Perceived Authenticity</i>	Customer Loyalty
Composite reliability (rho_a)	0,890	0,913	0,939
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	0,747	0,852	0,802

Source: Output SmartPLS 4, 2025

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

Construct	<i>Sustainable Marketing</i>	<i>Perceived Authenticity</i>	Customer Loyalty
<i>Sustainable Marketing</i>			
<i>Perceived Authenticity</i>	0,411		
Customer Loyalty	0,465	0,632	

Source: Output SmartPLS 4, 2025

Structural Model

1. Path Coefficient Analysis

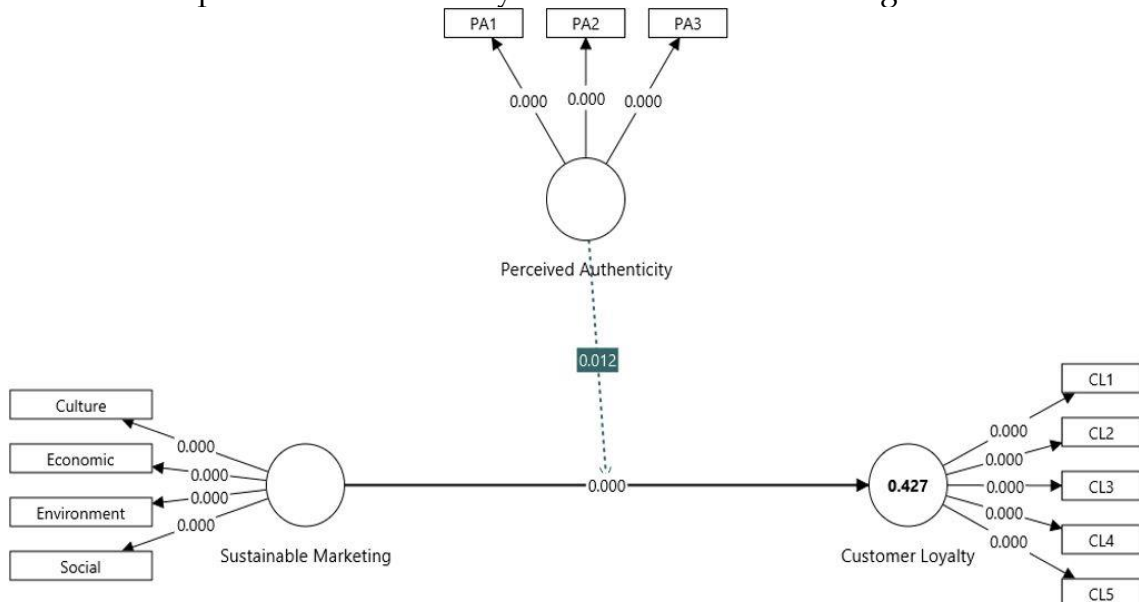
Structural model testing was conducted by analyzing path coefficients to examine the relationships between variables. Based on the results (Table 5), all hypotheses proposed were statistically significant. Sustainable marketing has a positive and significant effect on consumer loyalty ($O = 0.404$; $T = 3.504$; $P = 0.000$), indicating the important role of sustainable marketing practices in increasing consumer loyalty. In addition, the interaction between perceived authenticity and sustainable marketing functions as a positive and significant moderator of consumer loyalty ($O = 0.170$; $T = 2.504$; $P = 0.012$), meaning that the level of perceived authenticity strengthens the relationship between sustainable marketing and consumer loyalty.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P-Value	Noted
H1 <i>Sustainable Marketing</i> → <i>Customer Loyalty</i>	0,404	3,504	0,000	Accepted
H2 <i>Perceived Authenticity</i> * <i>Sustainable Marketing</i> → <i>Customer Loyalty</i>	0,170	2,504	0,012	Accepted

Source: Output SmartPLS 4, 2025

Figure 2 shows the results of the research model analysis using the SEM-PLS approach with the SmartPLS 4 application, which includes three main constructs, namely sustainable marketing, consumer loyalty, and perceived authenticity, and involves moderation that connects the interaction between the constructs of perceived authenticity and sustainable marketing.



Source: Output SmartPLS 4, 2025

Figure 2. Research Model Analysis

2. R-Square Analysis

R-Square (R^2) is used to measure the proportion of variation in endogenous constructs that can be explained by exogenous constructs in the model. In these moderation results, the R^2 value for consumer loyalty is 0.427 with an adjusted R^2 of 0.418 (Table 6). Referring to the guidelines (Hair et al., 2019), an R^2 value of 0.427 falls into the moderate category, indicating that the interaction between sustainable marketing and perceived authenticity has an important contribution in strengthening the variation in consumer loyalty.

Table 6. R-Square

Construct	R-square	R-square adjusted
Customer Loyalty	0,427	0,418

Source: Output SmartPLS 4, 2025

The Effect of Sustainable Marketing on Consumer Loyalty

Research findings show that the sustainable marketing practices implemented by Indomaret Fresh have a significant impact on consumer loyalty. This strategy is realized through the use of environmentally friendly packaging, the provision of fresh local products, and involvement in social programs that foster consumer trust. This trust encourages repeat purchases because consumers feel that their consumption activities not only fulfill individual needs but also make a positive contribution to the environment and society. Consistent sustainability practices also build a positive image for the company, strengthening consumer preference for Indomaret Fresh over its competitors. This consistency also creates an emotional bond that makes it more difficult for consumers to switch to other retailers.

In addition, the results of the study indicate that authentic sustainability can strengthen long-term consumer commitment. The loyalty that is formed is not only reflected in repeat purchases, but also through emotional attachment and a sense of pride that encourages consumers to give positive recommendations to others, both directly and through digital media. Thus, it can be concluded that sustainable marketing functions as a strategic element that not only increases consumer satisfaction in the short term but also builds deeper and more sustainable loyalty in the long term in the context of modern retail. These research results are in line with research from (Shaafia et al., 2024) and (Aly et al., 2025).

Perceived Authenticity Moderates the Relationship Between Sustainable Marketing and Consumer Loyalty

The findings show that perceived authenticity acts as a moderating variable that can strengthen the relationship between sustainable marketing and consumer loyalty. This indicates that the success of Indomaret Fresh's sustainable marketing strategy depends not only on the programs implemented, but also on how consumers perceive the authenticity and sincerity of these efforts. In other words, perceived authenticity becomes a cognitive lens that consumers use to interpret and respond to sustainability claims communicated by companies.

If consumers judge that sustainability actions are consistent with company claims, then consumer loyalty levels tend to increase. This form of loyalty is not only evident in repurchase intentions, but also in stronger brand preferences and long-term emotional attachment. Conversely, if consumers feel that sustainability strategies are merely marketing rhetoric or contain elements of greenwashing, then this positive influence will weaken, and may even potentially damage the company's image among consumers.

Therefore, perceived authenticity can be seen as a determining factor in the success of sustainable marketing practices in building consumer loyalty. For modern retailers such as Indomaret Fresh, the main challenge lies not only in implementing sustainability programs, but also in how these programs are communicated in a transparent, consistent, and credible manner. Without consumers' perception of authenticity, sustainability initiatives run the risk of not generating the expected long-term loyalty. The results of this study are in

line with research from (Meng & Choi, 2017) and (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022) which proves that perceived authenticity is a moderating construct.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that sustainable marketing has a positive effect on the loyalty of Indomaret Fresh consumers in Ambon City, where sustainability efforts such as the use of environmentally friendly packaging, the provision of local products, and social engagement are able to build trust that encourages repeat purchases, preferences, and long-term commitment. The findings also confirm that perceived authenticity as a moderator strengthens this effect, such that consumer loyalty increases when sustainability programs are perceived as authentic and consistent, but weakens if they are considered mere rhetoric or greenwashing.

FURTHER STUDY

Further research could add variables such as consumer satisfaction, brand trust, brand image, and consumer engagement to enrich the conceptual model of the relationship between sustainable marketing and consumer loyalty. In addition, personal values regarding sustainability or perceived value could also be tested to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms involved in the formation of consumer loyalty.

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