The Interplay of Brand Image, Brand Trust, and Customer Satisfaction in Building Customer Loyalty of Sustainable Skincare Products Among College Students

Original Article

Kadek Oktaria Vina Yanti[1*], Ida Bagus Basmantra[2]

[1,2]Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Pendidikan Nasional Denpasar, Indonesia
Email: [1] oktariavinayanti@gmail.com, [2] basmantara@undiknas.ac.id

Abstract

The rapid growth of the sustainable skincare industry and increasing competition have made it challenging for brands to maintain long-term loyalty, particularly among young and environmentally conscious consumers. Despite rising awareness of sustainability, empirical evidence explaining the psychological mechanisms underlying loyalty in this segment remains limited. This study investigates the influence of brand image and brand trust on customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction functioning as a mediating variable, focusing on sustainable skincare products among college students in Indonesia. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire administered to college students who actively use sustainable skincare products. Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine both direct and indirect relationships among the study variables. The results reveal that brand image and brand trust exert positive and significant effects on customer satisfaction. Moreover, customer satisfaction significantly impacts customer loyalty and serves as a mediating mechanism between brand image, brand trust, and customer loyalty. These findings underscore the central role of customer satisfaction in translating brand-related attributes into enduring customer loyalty. The study novelty of lies in the development of an integrated mediation model that contextualizes brand image and brand trust within the sustainable skincare industry targeting Indonesian college students, a segment that has received limited scholarly attention. The study contributes to the literature on brand loyalty and sustainable consumer behavior and provides practical insights for sustainable skincare companies to strengthen loyalty by enhancing brand image, trust, and customer satisfaction in a highly competitive market.

Keywords: Brand Image, Brand Trust, Customer Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, College Students, Skincare Products.

1. Introduction

The Indonesian cosmetics market has experienced rapid growth over the past decade, driven not only by the expansion of local brands but also by the strong presence of imported products, which are often perceived as superior by Indonesian consumers (Khairunisa & Sunitiyoso, 2023; Then & Johan, 2021). The skincare segment, in particular, has traditionally targeted female consumers and continues to evolve as preferences shift toward innovative, functional, and aesthetically appealing products (Aeni & Ekhsan, 2021; Andini & Nurhasanah, 2023; Noor et al., 2025). In recent years, this market has further transformed with the rising demand for clean beauty and sustainable skincare, especially among younger consumers such as college students and Generation Z (Bara et al., 2021; Djamaludin & Fahira, 2023).

Despite the increasing popularity of sustainable skincare products, existing research in Indonesia has predominantly focused on green marketing strategies and purchase intention (Desembrianita et al., 2024; Dwiriani & Dhakirah, 2025). Studies have shown that sustainability-related attributes such as natural ingredients, eco-friendly packaging, and ethical production positively influence consumer perceptions and repurchase intention (Annisa & Jaelani, 2025; Dewi et al., 2025; Havidz & Rahmawati, 2024; Johan & Fadhilah, 2025; Noor et al., 2025; Putra et al., 2024). While these findings highlight the importance of environmental values and trust in shaping consumer decisions, they largely overlook post-purchase outcomes, particularly customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty.

More importantly, the empirical relationship between brand image and brand trust in driving customer loyalty through customer satisfaction remains underexplored, especially within the context of sustainable skincare and among college students in Indonesia. Prior studies tend to examine these constructs in isolation or emphasize short-term behavioral intentions rather than sustained loyalty (Abbas et al., 2021; Ambarwati et al., 2024; Luthfitawati & Sutejo, 2026; Ma'azah & Prasetyo, 2023; Mittal et al., 2023). This creates a critical research gap, as loyalty is a key determinant of long-term competitiveness in highly saturated and dynamic markets such as skincare.

In addition, although digital communication strategies, such as online engagement (Fitriyana et al., 2025), influencer marketing (Rachmawati, 2024), and storytelling (Noor et al., 2025) have been shown to enhance brand trust and emotional attachment among young consumers, these factors are often discussed separately from core branding constructs. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how fundamental brand perceptions, namely brand image and brand trust, translate into loyalty outcomes when mediated by customer satisfaction in a sustainability-oriented product category.

Addressing these gaps, this study focuses on sustainable skincare products among Indonesian college students, a growing and environmentally conscious consumer segment. Specifically, this investigation evaluates a structural model in which customer satisfaction functions as a mediating conduit between brand image, brand trust, and customer loyalty. By employing PLS-SEM to dissect both direct and indirect pathways, the study illuminates the mechanisms through which brand perceptions are transmuted into sustained loyalty via post-purchase appraisal. Accordingly, the research addresses the following question: How do brand image and brand trust collectively influence customer loyalty in the Indonesian collegiate sustainable skincare market, and to what degree is this dynamic channeled through customer satisfaction? In doing so, the study contributes to branding and consumer behavior literature by extending loyalty models into the context of sustainable skincare, while also providing practical insights for brands aiming to strengthen satisfaction-driven loyalty among young consumers in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Image

Brand image refers to the set of perceptions held in consumers' minds regarding a brand, shaped through experiences, communication, and perceived service or product quality. Prior studies indicate that high service and product quality contribute positively to brand image, which subsequently enhances consumer evaluations and purchase-related behaviors (Afiftama & Nasir, 2024; Wijaya et al., 2020). In the skincare industry, brand image is particularly salient because consumers associate brands with promises of safety, efficacy, and credibility. A positive brand image increases consumer confidence in the

brand's claims, thereby encouraging repurchase intention and favorable word-of-mouth (Samudra et al., 2024).

Within the realm of sustainable skincare, brand image transcends mere functional qualities to encompass perceptions of ecological stewardship, ethical sourcing, and organizational transparency. Empirical findings indicate that a robust and favorable brand image cultivates affective responses, such as satisfaction and trust, that are pivotal for nurturing enduring customer loyalty (Suganda et al., 2022). Studies conducted in Indonesia further demonstrate that brand image significantly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty in skincare products, particularly when consumers perceive the brand as credible and aligned with their personal values (Ma'azah & Prasetyo, 2023; Yanti & Amelia, 2023). However, most existing studies emphasize direct effects and provide limited explanation of the underlying mechanisms linking brand image to loyalty, especially in sustainability-driven markets.

2.2. Brand Trust

Brand trust refers to consumers' confidence in a brand's dependability, ethical integrity, and consistent capability to deliver on its commitments (Rudzewicz & Strychalska-Rudzewicz, 2021). Trust emerges from repeated favorable experiences, trustworthy and transparent communication, and the brand's consistent delivery of promised quality and performance. In the skincare industry, where products are directly related to health and personal well-being, brand trust becomes a critical determinant of consumer decision-making.

Previous research highlights that brand trust positively influences repurchase intention, recommendation behavior, and long-term loyalty (Tariq et al., 2023). In sustainable skincare, trust plays an even more central role, as consumers often exhibit skepticism toward environmental and "green" claims. Therefore, brands must establish trust to reduce perceived risk and reinforce credibility. Research indicates that brand trust influences customer loyalty not only directly but also indirectly through its impact on customer satisfaction, particularly in industries reliant on reputation and experiential consumption (Monfort et al., 2026). Nonetheless, empirical research integrating brand trust, satisfaction, and loyalty in a single framework within the Indonesian sustainable skincare context remains limited.

2.3. Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction reflects the comprehensive assessment of whether a product or service fulfills or surpasses consumer expectations. In skincare products, satisfaction is closely associated with perceived product effectiveness, safety, and alignment with consumers' personal and ethical values. Research indicates that satisfaction increases when consumers perceive brand offerings as consistent, transparent, and value-congruent (Idemon & Nisa, 2024).

In sustainable skincare, satisfaction is influenced not only by functional performance but also by non-functional attributes such as ingredient transparency, ethical production, and environmental responsibility. Prior studies emphasize that transparency regarding ingredients and sustainability practices significantly enhances satisfaction, as it reinforces trust and reduces uncertainty (Salsabilla & Isharina, 2024). Customer satisfaction has consistently been recognized as a crucial predictor of customer loyalty, serving as a psychological mechanism through which brand perceptions and trust translate into repeated purchases and advocacy behaviors (Çömlek, 2025) However, satisfaction is often treated as

an outcome variable rather than a mediating construct, limiting its explanatory role in loyalty formation.

2.4. Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty denotes a consumer's intention and commitment to repeatedly purchase and support a specific brand over time. In the skincare sector, fostering loyalty is vital for maintaining a competitive edge, as retaining existing customers is generally more cost-effective than acquiring new ones. Loyalty is typically driven by a combination of satisfaction, trust, and positive brand perceptions.

Empirical evidence indicates that customer satisfaction directly impacts brand trust, and together, both factors exert a significant influence on brand loyalty (Salsabilla & Isharina, 2024). When consumers perceive a brand as trustworthy and consistently satisfying, they are more likely to remain loyal despite the availability of alternative products. In the context of sustainable skincare, loyalty is further strengthened when consumers believe that the brand genuinely upholds environmental and ethical values. However, existing studies often examine loyalty either as a direct outcome of green marketing or trust, without adequately capturing the mediating role of satisfaction in linking brand image and trust to loyalty.

2.5. Conceptual Research Framework

Drawing from the reviewed literature and the study's empirical focus, a conceptual framework is proposed to elucidate the relationships among brand image, brand trust, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty in the context of sustainable skincare products among Indonesian college students. In this framework, brand image and brand trust serve as primary antecedents influencing consumers' post-purchase evaluations. Both constructs are expected to positively influence customer satisfaction, which reflects consumers' overall evaluation of product performance, ethical alignment, and sustainability claims. Consequently, satisfied consumers are more inclined to exhibit customer loyalty, reflected in repeat purchase intentions, favorable word-of-mouth, and sustained commitment to the brand over time.

In addition to their indirect effects, brand image and brand trust are also hypothesized to exert direct influences on customer loyalty. This framework highlights customer satisfaction as a central mediating mechanism that explains how brand-related perceptions are translated into loyalty outcomes. By integrating these relationships into a single model, the framework addresses limitations in prior studies that largely focused on direct effects or purchase intention, offering a deeper explanation of loyalty formation within sustainable skincare markets. To enhance clarity and accessibility, the proposed conceptual framework is visually presented in Figure 1.
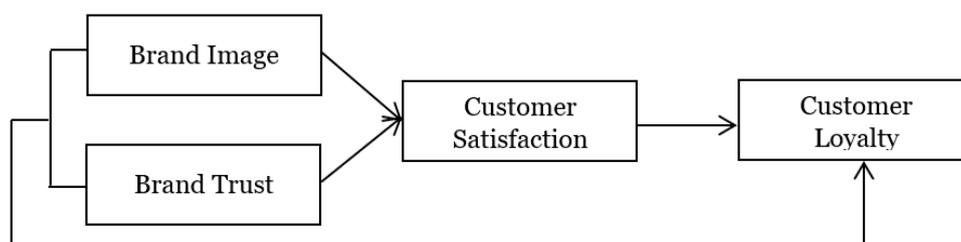

Figure 1. Conceptual Research Framework

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the relationships among brand image, brand trust, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty toward eco-friendly skincare products among Indonesian college students. A quantitative approach was chosen as it facilitates objective measurement and statistical testing of relationships between latent variables, allowing for the systematic identification of patterns and potential causal linkages (Taherdoost, 2021).

3.2. Population and Sample

The research population consists of undergraduate and graduate college students enrolled in higher education institutions across Indonesia, including public and private universities. The geographical coverage of the study includes major urban areas such as Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, and other metropolitan cities where awareness and consumption of eco-friendly skincare products are relatively high. College students were selected as the target population because they represent a significant segment of environmentally conscious consumers and are highly exposed to sustainability-related marketing communications.

A non-probability purposive sampling method was utilized to ensure that respondents conformed to the specific criteria pertinent to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria required respondents to: (1) be actively enrolled as college students at the time of data collection, (2) regularly use skincare products, (3) have purchased eco-friendly or sustainable skincare products within the past six months, and (4) demonstrate brand loyalty, indicated by repeated purchases of the same skincare brand. Following the PLS-SEM rule of thumb, which suggests a minimum of ten respondents per indicator, a total of 150 valid responses were considered adequate for the analysis.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure and Period

The questionnaire was distributed using online platforms and social media channels commonly used by college students, such as WhatsApp and Instagram, to ensure broad reach and accessibility. The online survey format was chosen to accommodate the geographical dispersion of respondents and to facilitate efficient data collection.

Before the main data collection, a pre-test was conducted with a small group of college students to evaluate the clarity, readability, and relevance of the questionnaire items. Insights from this pre-test were used to refine the wording and structure of the questionnaire.

3.4. Research Instrument and Measurement

The research instrument comprised a structured questionnaire divided into two primary sections. The first section collected respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, educational level, type of university (public or private), and frequency of skincare product use. The second section measured the study variables using established scales adapted from previous studies.

Brand image was measured using indicators reflecting perceptions of brand credibility, environmental responsibility, product quality, and overall brand reputation, adapted from prior branding and sustainable marketing literature. Brand trust was measured through items assessing reliability, honesty, and confidence in the brand's claims, particularly regarding eco-friendly attributes. Customer satisfaction was measured using indicators related to overall satisfaction, fulfillment of expectations, and satisfaction with product performance and

sustainability values. Customer loyalty was measured by items capturing repurchase intention, willingness to recommend the brand, and commitment to continue using the brand.

All measurement items were evaluated using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). The scales were adapted from previously validated instruments to ensure both content validity and applicability within the context of eco-friendly skincare products.

3.5. Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a method suitable for examining complex relationships among latent constructs and robust against non-normal data distributions (Sarstedt et al., 2021). The analysis followed a two-stage procedure. First, the measurement model was evaluated by assessing convergent validity and discriminant validity through factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), alongside reliability checks using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Second, the structural model was examined by analyzing path coefficients, the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and mediation effects via bootstrapping. These procedures ensured the rigor and statistical validity of the study's results.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was employed to evaluate the explanatory power of the structural model, representing the proportion of variance in the endogenous variables accounted for by their predictors.

Table 1. R-Square Test Result

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Brand Loyalty	0.800	0.798
Satisfaction	0.822	0.820

Source : Primary data processed (2026)

As presented in Table 1, the R^2 value for Brand Loyalty is 0.800, indicating that 80.0% of the variance in Brand Loyalty is accounted for by Brand Image, Brand Trust, and Customer Satisfaction. Similarly, the R^2 value for Satisfaction is 0.822, suggesting that Brand Image and Brand Trust explain 82.2% of the variance in Satisfaction. These results indicate that the structural model possesses substantial explanatory power. Effect sizes (f^2) were also assessed to determine the relative contribution of each exogenous variable to the endogenous constructs.

Table 2. F-Square Results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Brand Image -> Brand Loyalty	0.292	0.322	0.145	2.014	0.022
Brand Image -> Satisfaction	0.478	0.535	0.250	1.914	0.028
Brand Trust -> Brand Loyalty	0.197	0.221	0.112	1.764	0.039
Brand Trust -> Satisfaction	0.130	0.144	0.072	1.808	0.035

Source: Primary data processed (2026)

Based on Table 2, Brand Image exerts a strong effect on Satisfaction and a moderate effect on Brand Loyalty. Brand Trust demonstrates a moderate effect on Brand Loyalty and a small-to-moderate effect on Satisfaction.

Predictive relevance was evaluated using the Stone-Geisser Q^2 statistic, where a Q^2 value greater than zero indicates that the model possesses predictive relevance, while a value below zero would suggest a lack of predictive capability.

The Q^2 result for this study is shown in the calculation below:

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - R1^2)(1 - R2^2)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - 0.800)(1 - 0.822)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - (0.200)(0.178)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - 0.0356$$

$$Q^2 = 0.9644 \quad Q^2 = 96,4 \%$$

The Q^2 calculation results indicate a predictive relevance of 0.9644, or 96.4%, signifying that the model possesses an exceptionally strong capacity to explain and predict the data. Given that the Q^2 value approaches 1, it can be concluded that the structural model employed in this study exhibits excellent predictive relevance and is highly effective in accounting for the variation in the observed variables.

Table 3. Hypotheses Test Results

	Original sample (O)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Result
Brand Image -> Brand Loyalty	0.507	5.515	0.000	Valid
Brand Image -> Satisfaction	0.613	6.057	0.000	Valid
Brand Trust -> Brand Loyalty	0.416	4.545	0.000	Valid
Brand Trust -> Satisfaction	0.320	3.508	0.000	Valid

Source: Primary data processed (2026)

As presented in Table 3, all direct relationships are statistically significant, with T-statistics exceeding 1.65 and corresponding p-values below 0.05.

Table 4. Results of the Mediation Hypothesis Test

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Brand Image -> Brand Loyalty	0.081	0.093	0.080	1.011	0.156
Brand Trust -> Brand Loyalty	0.042	0.043	0.036	1.187	0.118

Source: Primary data processed (2026)

Based on Table 4, customer satisfaction does not serve as a significant mediator in the relationships between Brand Image and Brand Loyalty, nor between Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty.

4.2. Discussion

This study sought to investigate the effects of Brand Image and Brand Trust on Customer Loyalty toward sustainable skincare products among Indonesian college students, with Customer Satisfaction functioning as a mediating variable. The findings offer important theoretical and practical insights into loyalty formation within value-driven markets.

First, the results confirm that Brand Image exerts a significant positive effect on Customer Loyalty. This outcome aligns with prior research, which suggests that a strong and favorable brand image reduces perceived risk and enhances emotional attachment, especially in product categories closely tied to personal health and self-identity, such as skincare (Keller, 2013; Aaker, 1997). In sustainable consumption contexts, brand image extends beyond functional quality to include ethical values, environmental responsibility, and social credibility, which have been shown to enhance loyalty among environmentally conscious consumers (Y.-S. Chen et al., 2020; Haryono & Lestari, 2024; Le et al., 2024). For college students, whose consumption decisions are often identity-driven, alignment between brand image and personal values plays a critical role in fostering loyalty.

Second, Brand Image was found to have a significant positive effect on Customer Satisfaction. This result supports expectancy, disconfirmation theory, which posits that favorable brand perceptions shape consumer expectations and influence post-purchase evaluations (Oliver, 1980). Empirical studies in skincare and green product contexts have similarly reported that a positive brand image leads to higher satisfaction because consumers perceive the brand as reliable, responsible, and capable of fulfilling both functional and ethical expectations (Hsu et al., 2017; Santosa et al., 2021). Thus, when sustainable skincare brands successfully communicate quality and environmental commitment, consumers are more likely to experience satisfaction after product use.

Third, the findings indicate that Brand Trust has a significant positive effect on both Customer Loyalty and Customer Satisfaction. This result is in line with earlier studies emphasizing trust as a key determinant of long-term relational outcomes (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005). In the skincare industry, trust is particularly salient due to consumer concerns regarding product safety, ingredient transparency, and the credibility of sustainability claims. Previous research on green and cosmetic brands has shown that higher brand trust enhances satisfaction and directly strengthens loyalty by reducing uncertainty and perceived risk (Chen & Chang, 2012; Thanapuech & Pankham, 2024). These findings reinforce the importance of trust as a psychological assurance mechanism in sustainable skincare consumption.

However, contrary to the initial hypotheses, Customer Satisfaction did not mediate the relationships between Brand Image and Customer Loyalty, nor between Brand Trust and Customer Loyalty. This result diverges from conventional loyalty models that position satisfaction as a primary mediator (Oliver, 1999; Kotler & Keller, 2016), but aligns with several recent studies in ethical and sustainable consumption contexts. Prior research suggests that value-based loyalty may emerge independently of satisfaction, particularly when consumers perceive strong alignment between brand values and personal identity (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Islami et al., 2026). Among college students, loyalty toward sustainable skincare brands may therefore be driven more directly by brand credibility, ethical congruence, and environmental commitment than by satisfaction alone. Even when satisfaction fluctuates, consumers may remain loyal to brands that symbolize their pro-environmental identity.

Overall, these findings make a meaningful contribution to the literature on the branding and sustainable consumer behavior literature by demonstrating that Customer

Satisfaction does not always function as a mediating mechanism between brand perceptions and loyalty in value-driven markets. This challenges traditional satisfaction-based loyalty frameworks and highlights the importance of incorporating ethical, identity-based, and trust-related constructs in future research models.

From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that sustainable skincare brands should prioritize strengthening brand image and brand trust through transparent communication, credible sustainability claims, and consistent product performance. Emphasizing ethical identity and trustworthiness can help build direct loyalty among young consumers, even beyond satisfaction-based evaluations.

This study is subject to limitations, including its cross-sectional design and focus on college students, which may limit generalizability. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach, examine different consumer segments, or include additional mediating variables such as perceived value, brand identification, or environmental concern to further explain loyalty formation in sustainable skincare markets.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that brand image and brand trust are key determinants of customer loyalty toward sustainable skincare products among Indonesian college students. Both constructs significantly influence customer satisfaction and directly drive customer loyalty, indicating that loyalty in sustainability-oriented markets is shaped not only by post-purchase satisfaction but also by consumers' perceptions of brand credibility and ethical alignment.

The primary scientific contribution of this research lies in its contextual and conceptual advancement of brand loyalty theory. By examining sustainable skincare consumption among Indonesian Generation Z consumers, this study extends conventional loyalty models and reveals that customer satisfaction does not fully mediate the effects of brand image and brand trust on loyalty. This finding underscores the increasing significance of value-based and trust-driven loyalty in environmentally conscious markets, offering a nuanced understanding of loyalty formation beyond traditional satisfaction-centered frameworks.

Overall, the findings underscore that in the sustainable skincare context, brand image and brand trust serve as fundamental drivers of customer loyalty. For managers, this implies that communication and product strategies should be deliberately structured to build brand credibility and convey a clear, consistent ethical identity from the outset. This can be achieved through transparent disclosure of ingredients, verifiable sustainability claims, and consistent product quality that reflects environmental and social responsibility. By embedding these elements into branding and marketing activities, sustainable skincare companies can foster direct loyalty among college students, even when short-term satisfaction levels fluctuate.

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