

Sustainability Marketing and Consumer Perception Effects on Brand Trust and Loyalty in Fashion Retail

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ABSTRACT

Growing environmental sustainability concerns have encouraged fashion companies to adopt sustainability marketing to strengthen consumer trust and loyalty. However, limited research has examined its impact in the Malaysian fashion market. This study, therefore, investigates how sustainability marketing and consumer perception influence brand trust and loyalty toward UNIQLO Malaysia. The study employed a quantitative research methodology by means of an online survey, which was sent to UNIQLO consumers. Data was collected from 152 UNIQLO consumers. In order to analyze the data, SPSS was employed to conduct descriptive, correlational, and multiple regression analyses, and trust and loyalty were measured on a scale. The regression model explains 77.9% of the variance in brand trust and loyalty ($R^2 = 0.779$). Sustainability marketing practices ($\beta = 0.410$, $p < 0.001$) and consumer perception and attitude ($\beta = 0.518$, $p < 0.001$) both show significant positive effects. These results support the need for sustainability marketing initiatives and strong consumer perception when building a brand and consumer relationship. The study contributes empirical evidence on sustainability marketing within the Malaysian fashion retail context.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty; Brand Trust; Consumer Perception; Fashion Retail; Sustainability Marketing

JEL Classification: M31; M14; Q56

INTRODUCTION

Consumer awareness of ethical issues and environmental concerns has resulted in rapid transformations in the fashion industry. With widespread concerns regarding the environmental impact and unsustainable practices of the fashion industry, the adoption of sustainable production practices, and the responsible management of supply chain processes, retailers have begun integrating sustainability practices into their marketing communications and business practices. Among global brands, UNIQLO, through the green transformation of business operations, has focused on the environmental dimension, the promotion of ethical production and fair-trade practices, and the active participation of consumers to facilitate positive behavioral changes. [Majeed et al. \(2022\)](#) stated that the promotion of green marketing has enabled an emphasis on the selling of environmentally responsible products, services, and the adoption of sustainable corporate behaviors. [Camilleri et al. \(2023\)](#) recommend that retailers achieve a positive and sustainable transformation of their business practices to reduce the detrimental impact on the environment, promote the cause of social justice, and create positive relationships with consumers.

Plausible explanations for the ability of high-context cultures to communicate subtle social meanings include the risks of social disruption via individualistic and low-context communication and the complexities of the communication process when multiple channels (other than language) operate simultaneously. Furthermore, in high-context cultures, rapid and high-volume social changes are generally associated with substantial disruption to the existing social order ([Naidoo & Chadha, 2025](#)). Therefore, cultivating social order preservation skills may improve rapid and substantial changes in the environment. In personal, social, and professional interactions, soft skills are beneficial. Numerous instances may result in subtle displacement avoidance through the use of soft skills in communication. Prospective communication issues may comprise the actions of another party and the avoidance of communication with them, and they may possibly lead to dysfunction and mental issues.

The sustainability initiatives taken by UNIQLO provide a valuable case study in the area of corporate responsibility. UNIQLO's RE.UNIQLO Clothing Recycling program, initiatives that utilize recycled and organic materials, and carbon reduction methods demonstrate the steps UNIQLO has taken to be ecologically responsible and to improve its reputation socially and emotionally with consumers, which helps to increase brand loyalty ([Kee et al., 2024](#)). This indicates the needed research to evaluate the sustainability of marketing initiatives in the fast fashion industry.

The study's parameters are rooted in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach. According to the TBL approach, sustainable growth is only achievable when companies learn to find equilibrium between profit, profit, and the profit that results from socially responsible and environmentally responsible initiatives ([Kusmendar et al., 2025](#)). In contrast, the TPB focuses on how positive consumer sentiment, consumer perceptions of social norms, and consumer perceptions of social control (framed in the context of being responsible) determine the extent to which people become responsible by engaging in sustainable consumption ([Salleh et al., 2024](#)). In the context of the above, both theory perspectives collectively examine how sustainability marketing initiatives shape consumers' perceptions, and their resulting trust, and loyalty (including brand loyalty) in the fast fashion industry in Malaysia.

While the global fashion industry is prioritizing sustainability at a rapid pace, not much empirical research has focused on sustainability marketing, consumer perception, and brand loyalty, specifically in the context of an emerging market like Malaysia. In the case

of Malaysia, research on sustainability marketing in the context of consumer perception is sparse. There is research on consumer perception and loyalty towards global fashion brands, but there is not much research on consumer perception and loyalty towards global fashion brands and consumer trust and loyalty towards sustainable initiatives. This research attempts to fill that gap by studying the Malaysian fashion market. With the above in mind, this research aims to study the impact of sustainability marketing and consumer perception of brand trust and loyalty towards the UNIQLO Malaysia brand. This empirical research, grounded in the TBL framework and TPB, adds to the growing body of literature related to sustainability marketing by studying the impact of sustainable marketing on consumer trust and loyalty in the fashion retail industry. The study will benefit fashion retailers in Malaysia to improve brand trust and equity, as well as instill long-term relationships with customers through sustainability marketing practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hypotheses Development

Sustainability Marketing Practices in the Fashion Industry

Sustainability marketing in the fashion sector integrates the environmental and ethical aspects of the business and aims to encourage responsible consumption and production (Pricopoaia et al., 2025). Unlike traditional marketing that focuses on communicating promotional messages, sustainability marketing includes the adoption of circular production, responsible sourcing of production materials, and sustainability reporting (Ariyani et al., 2024). These initiatives demonstrate a brand's authenticity in addressing the environmental concerns of the fashion industry and help to reduce the impact of sustainability neglect (Mandarić et al., 2021). Fashion firms are transforming their business practices in order to respond to the growing global focus on climate change, pollution, and the ethical treatment of workers, and to comply with global sustainability frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Thakker & Sun, 2023). Sustainability transformation is now seen more as a strategic necessity and a source of competitive advantage, rather than an optional corporate responsibility.

Sustainability marketing significantly influences how consumers view brands and how they form emotional bonds with brands. Gong et al's (2023) study notes that marketing sustainability initiatives lead to improved brand image, increased brand credibility, brand trust, and greater customer loyalty and continued customer engagement. Positive brand attitudes and repeat purchase intent strengthen when consumers view the brand as socially responsible and environmentally responsible. In the fashion retail sector, Li et al. (2024) state that perceived sustainability strongly affects customer attitudes and purchase intent. Effective sustainability initiatives promote clear, consistent, and honest sustainability communications with consumers.

Sustainability and environmental responsibility have significance for brand equity in Asian retail. Wang and Li (2024) note the importance of corporate environmental responsibility (CER) in developing brand sustainability and competitiveness. Furthermore, positive assessments of a brand's environmental responsibility and commitment result from implementing CER. Such assessments enhance corporate reputation and stakeholder trust, and also improve brand value. These assessments also counter the sceptical, greenwashing, and brand credibility undermining perceptions. At the same time, CER represents the balance of the corporate system and the natural environment and encourages the adoption of responsible environmental practices that reflect sustainability and the corporate system's strategic objectives (Ndasauka, 2024).

From this perspective, other than the RE.UNIQLO clothing recycling program, the use of renewable and sustainable energy to operate their stores and other eco-friendly initiatives, UNIQLO's other sustainability initiatives have the same positive impact. These initiatives provide UNIQLO's Malaysian consumers with positive and responsive IR to the CER of the brand. In a competitive fashion industry, customer trust and brand equity will be enhanced, particularly when sustainability is integrated into the primary value-creating activities instead of the external promotional activities.

Vardarlier and Esra's (2020) empirical study confirms that sustainability marketing, brand trust, and brand image have a positive relationship. Consistency and genuineness in green marketing increase brand trust and create a positive image of the brand. Similar results were found by Vuong and Bui (2023), who stated that strong and positive brand image, combined with perceived environmental and social responsibility, enhances customer satisfaction, trust, and brand loyalty. All of the above shows that sustainability marketing practices help to develop trust, decrease scepticism, and significantly enhance consumer loyalty in the fashion sector. Thus, this study formulated the following hypotheses, taking into consideration the theory and previous empirical evidence.

H1: Sustainability marketing practices have a positive and significant effect on brand trust and loyalty in the fashion industry.

Attitudes and Perceptions of Customers in Relation to the Sustainable Fashion Industry

Consumer perception is the brand evaluation process. This is based on several elements, such as value, convenience, risk, and the quality of service. These elements evaluate customers' loyalty intentions and behavioral reactions to brand stimulus (Gan et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2023). Positive brand evaluations lead to positive brand attitudes and supportive behaviors (repeat purchases and brand advocacy). Consumer perception impacts the intention to purchase, but also the brand's emotional and cognitive evaluations, which are especially important for trust and loyalty.

The Malaysian fashion industry has seen changing consumer attitudes regarding the environment and social sustainability issues. An increase in consumer sustainability awareness correlates with environmental sustainability and responsible purchasing decisions. The TPB explains this process as attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control are the antecedents of these behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). When consumers align their personal values with the sustainability initiatives of the brand perceived as credible, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward that brand, increase brand trust, and practice environmentally responsible purchasing (Ramany et al., 2022). Khan et al. (2025) confirm this theory by claiming that sustainability attitudes, social influence, and environmental awareness are the three key purchasing behavior motivators that reinforce the sustainable consumption cycle.

Moreover, consumer perception is essential to the conversion of sustainability efforts into brand loyalty and trust. Research about sustainable brands shows consumer trust is affected greatly by brand image, satisfaction, and perceived value (Monfort et al., 2025). Trust is the first step to loyalty. A brand is likely to enjoy consumer loyalty if trust, social responsibility, and ethical practices are attributed to it by consumers. Consistent and authentic sustainability efforts are rewarded by consumers through long-term loyalty and repeat purchases.

Though consumers may be optimistic about a brand, that does not mean that they will stick with it long-term. Trust is the key to a lasting brand relationship and does not work if sustainability efforts are viewed as unsubstantiated or overly optimistic. When

consumers feel sustainability efforts are misleading, the brand becomes less trusted and less loyal. Because of this, it is vital that brands do not mislead consumers and do, in fact, practice sustainable efforts in order to be trusted.

In terms of sustainable apparel consumption in Malaysia, research indicates that environmental concern, coupled with social influence and social media communication, affects buying behavior (Ramany et al., 2022). There is no doubt that young Malaysian consumers are more aware of “sustainability”, but this is not always reflected in their consumption behavior (Zain et al., 2023). The growing concern for sustainability is expected to positively influence consumers’ perceptions and attitudes towards sustainability initiatives, thereby increasing brand trust and brand loyalty.

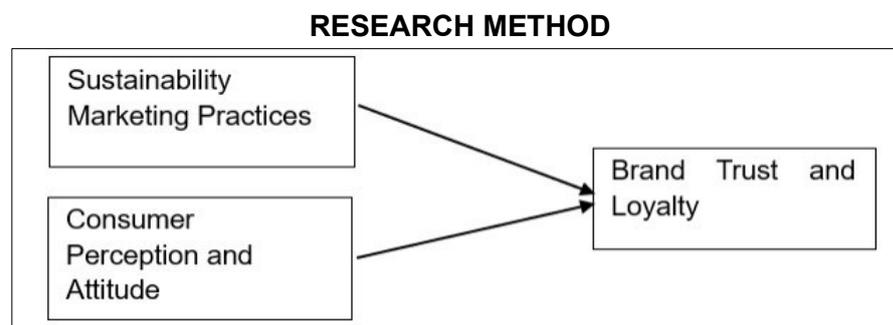
Since this is the case, for UNIQLO Malaysia’s sustainability initiatives, consumer perception and attitudes towards sustainable practices are likely to positively influence brand trust and brand loyalty.

H2: Consumer perception and attitude toward sustainability initiatives have a positive and significant effect on brand trust and loyalty.

Conceptual Framework

The study framework model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Framework



Research Design and Context

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of sustainability marketing practices and consumers’ perception and attitude toward brand trust and loyalty of UNIQLO Malaysia. The study situates itself within the fast fashion industry because the role of sustainability marketing has started to shape consumers’ perception, attitude, and buying behavior. The study focuses on consumers who are acquainted with UNIQLO Malaysia, particularly young consumers aged 18 to 30. This age group is selected because they are active players within the fashion consumption circle and are advocates of the cause of environmental sustainability. The study deployed the individual consumer level of analysis because of the personal nature of the perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, and responses toward sustainability and brand-related initiatives and outcomes.

Sampling and Data Collection

The study employed a non-probability convenience sampling method, expanding the boundary of time and accessibility to respondents. Data collection was done using an online survey shared on social media and academic-based networks targeting consumers who know UNIQLO Malaysia. The study collected 152 usable responses, which is adequate for regression analysis within social science. The sample shows that most participants were students, who constitute 84.9% of the sample. This is consistent with the young consumer segment UNIQLO Malaysia targets. The sample consists of

65.8% females and 34.2% males. The participants were the most educated, with the largest proportion (75.7%) of respondents holding a bachelor's degree, and smaller proportions holding a diploma, master's, doctoral, and secondary degree.

Measurement of Variables

The data was collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire that was created through Google Forms. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions, and the respondents' answers were structured based on a five-point Likert scale with 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The respondents were able to indicate their level of agreement with the statements that were asked regarding the marketing practices of sustainability, the respondents' perception and attitude, and the respondents' trust and loyalty to the brand UNIQLO Malaysia.

All constructs within this study were assessed using multi-item scales from reliable and reputable peer-reviewed journals. The sustainability marketing practices in this study were measured by how respondents viewed sustainability and practices for recycling, ethically sourced recycling, and sustainability communication. Consumer perception and attitude were captured by respondents' emotions and evaluations. The measurement of brand trust and loyalty was based on respondents' confidence in the brand and their loyalty towards UNIQLO Malaysia.

Before the questionnaire was distributed on a wide scale, it underwent a pre-test where a few respondents were asked to check the clarity, reliability, and logical order of the measurement items. This was to reduce confusion and to obtain precise answers.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were applied to summarize the demographic data of the respondents and the general patterns of their responses. To evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement scales, reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha. In regard to the examined relationships for each of the study variables, correlation analysis was performed, and multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the proposed hypotheses and the impact of sustainability marketing practices and consumer perception on brand trust and loyalty.

RESULTS

Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Demographics (N=152)

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age		
Below 18	2	1.3
18-24	129	84.9
25-34	14	9.2
35-44	4	2.6
45 and above	3	2
Gender		
Female	100	65.8
Male	52	34.2
Educational Level		
Bachelor's Degree	115	75.7
Diploma	23	15.1
Master's Degree	7	4.6
PhD	4	2.6
Secondary	3	2

Occupation		
Student	129	84.9
Working Professional	16	10.5
Self-Employed	5	3.3
Unemployed	2	1.3

Demographic data from the 152 respondents in this study are presented in Table 1. The sample is heavily concentrated in younger age groups, as most respondents are in the 18-24 age bracket (N = 129, 84.9%). This is followed by 25-34 years old (N = 14, 9.2%), 35-44 (N = 4, 2.6%), and 45+ (N = 3, 2.0%). Only a small number of respondents are below the age of 18 (N = 2, 1.3%).

In regard to gender distribution, out of the 152 respondents, females are the majority (N = 100, 65.8%), and male respondents are 52 (34.2%). This shows quite a gender disparity, as female respondents are the majority by a significant margin.

Concerning the number of respondents by level of educational attainment, the majority holds a bachelor's degree (N = 115, 75.7%), followed by diploma holders (N = 23, 15.1%). A small number of respondents hold a Master's degree (N = 7, 4.6%), a PhD (N = 4, 2.6%), and secondary level education (N = 3, 2.0%).

Regarding occupation, most respondents are students (N = 129, 84.9%). Next are working professionals (N = 16, 10.5%). Very few respondents are self-employed (N = 5, 3.3%) or unemployed (N = 2, 1.3%). These are the least represented occupational categories in the sample.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients, and Zero-order Correlations for All Study Variables

Variables		1	2	3
1	Sustainability Marketing Practices	0.910		
2	Consumer Perception and Attitude	0.808***	0.900	
3	Brand Trust and Loyalty	0.828***	0.849***	0.933
Number of items		3	3	3
Mean		3.9984	4.0855	4.0382
Standard Deviation		0.74279	0.73021	0.75036

Note: N=152; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. The diagonal entries represent Cronbach's coefficient alpha.

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, and zero-order correlations for all the variables of the study, such as sustainability marketing practices, consumer perception and attitude, and brand trust and loyalty. All of the constructs exhibited internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values from 0.900 to 0.933, which is greater than the threshold of 0.70. For the correlation analysis, the variables all had positive correlations, and the variables had positive correlations for sustainability marketing practices and consumer perception and attitude (r = 0.808), and brand trust and loyalty (r = 0.828). In the same way, consumer perception and attitude are noted to be positively correlated with brand trust and loyalty (r = 0.849). Mean scores were all positive, and the mean scores were from 3.998 to 4.086. The means demonstrate that there was a positive perception of the respondents for the variables. The standard deviations, which were from (0.730-0.750), exhibited a moderately reasonable variable of the respondent's answer, and showed moderate answer variability.

Table 3. Regression Analysis

R change		0.779			
Variables		Value	Beta	t-value	p-value
1	Sustainability Marketing Practices		0.410***	6.280	<0.001
2	Consumer Perception and Attitude		0.518***	7.942	<0.001
Model summary					
R ²		0.779			
F-Value		263.259			

Note: N=152; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

Table 3 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis that was done to determine the impact of sustainability marketing practices and consumer perception and attitude on brand trust and loyalty. The regression model shows a strong positive impact and is statistically significant with an R² value of 0.779. This means that brand trust and loyalty are affected 77.9% by the two independent variables included in the model. This model is also statistically significant with an F-value of 263.259.

H1 states that sustainability marketing practices positively and significantly impact brand trust and loyalty. The regression results show that sustainability marketing practices positively and significantly impact brand trust and loyalty ($\beta = 0.410$, $t = 6.280$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H1 is accepted.

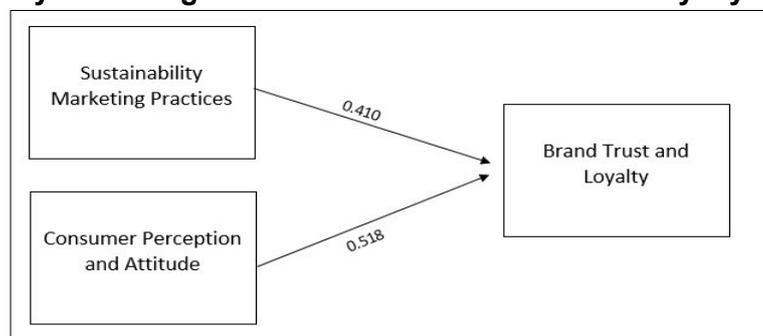
H2 analyzes the effect of consumer perception and attitude on brand trust and loyalty. The results indicate that consumer perception and attitude positively and significantly affect brand trust and loyalty ($\beta = 0.518$, $t = 7.942$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H2 is supported. The result indicates that consumers who have a more positive perception and attitudes towards the initiative will tend to have more trust and loyalty to the brand.

Figure 2 shows the final structural model.

Figure 2. Structural Model

DISCUSSION

H1: Sustainability Marketing Practices and Brand Trust and Loyalty



The results of this study confirm that sustainability marketing practices positively influence brand trust and loyalty. Brand trust and loyalty are significantly predicted by sustainability marketing practices ($\beta = 0.410$, $p < 0.001$), which supports H1. This means that positive consumer evaluation and relationship development with a brand are the results of sustainability initiatives carried out by a fashion brand.

This result is logically valid as sustainability marketing in the fashion business is more than just “green” marketing, but involves “sustainability” marketing, which consists of an ethical and environmental approach to business and marketing (Pricopoaia et al., 2025). Genuine sustainability means that the production, supply chain, and corporate communication are responsible for their environmental impacts, and this is also seen in the fashion business (Thakker & Sun, 2023).

This study corroborates earlier studies that explore the linkage of sustainability marketing and the consumer-brand relationship. Gong et al. (2023) interpreted sustainable marketing activities as improving brand trust and the emotional attachment between consumers and brands that translates into increased loyalty and engagement. Similarly, Li et al. (2024) noted that sustainability perception significantly improves the attitude and buying tendencies of consumers within the scope of the fashion retail market. As consumers engage in sustainability practices, like recycling, ethical sourcing, and sustainable materials, they appreciate the brand as responsible and trustworthy.

Sustainability marketing, from the angle of corporate social responsibility, entails responsible environmental practices that improve corporate image and stakeholder trust. Wang and Li (2024) posit that the perception of CER improves brands' sustainability and competitiveness. Such CER practices improve consumer trust and counter allegations of greenwashing. This means that consumer sustainability marketing engagement should align with the environmentally responsible practices of the organization. Ndasauka (2024) advocates that environmental responsibility characterizes the relationship between organizations and the ecosystem, and sustainability should, therefore, be integrated into the organization's core strategies.

This study's empirical outcomes are consistent with studies that suggest measurable green marketing practices that show clear evidence of enhancing brand reliability and brand perceptions. Vardarlier and Esra's (2020) study showed that consistent and transparent sustainability communication increases consumer trust in a brand. The same is true with the aforementioned studies, Vuong and Bui (2023), where environmental and social responsibility are perceived to be antecedents of trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. UNIQLO Malaysia's RE.UNIQLO's clothing recycling program, use of recycled plastic to make clothes, and eco-friendly energy retail make the brand credible, and the sustainable practices make the brand close to the customers (UNIQLO Sustainability, n.d.).

For marketing sustainability in a brand, strengthening trust with the customers is proven. If the sustainability initiatives are perceived as transparent and genuine, the long-term relationship is secured. Increasing brand loyalty in the retail market is a competitive advantage.

H2: Consumer Perception and Attitude Toward Sustainability Initiatives

The results of the regression analysis confirm that the consumer perceptions and attitudes toward sustainability initiatives significantly impact brand trust and loyalty. Consumer perception was the most significant predictor in the model ($\beta = 0.518$, $p < 0.001$), which is supportive of H2. This indicates that the evaluative and interpretive processes of consumers regarding sustainability initiatives are of significant importance to the initiatives, fostering trust and loyalty toward the brand.

Consumer perception involves an evaluative process where individuals consider brand equity, brand trust, quality of service, and the potential risks (Wang et al., 2023). Positive perceptions of a brand's sustainability initiatives lead consumers to experience positive attitudes toward the brand and adopt supportive behaviors such as repeat purchases

and brand advocacy. In sustainable fashion, these stakeholders' perceptions significantly direct both the rational and emotional aspects of their responses to the brands in question.

The results of this study are aligned with the TPB, which places primary importance on attitude formation and the consequent direction of behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Under TPB, positive attitudes of consumers toward sustainability initiatives translate into a stronger determination to support environmentally friendly brands. Attitude toward sustainability (along with social and environmental awareness), as Khan et al. (2025) point out, tends to have a strong effect on consumers and their sustainable purchasing behavior.

Furthermore, the role of consumer perception in transforming sustainability initiatives into trust and loyalty toward a brand is very important. According to Monfort et al. (2025), the perception of value, satisfaction, and brand image are the most important elements that enhance brand trust. This means that increased trust in a brand serves as the basis for greater brand loyalty and makes it possible for a more enduring relationship between consumers and brands. Sustainability initiatives that consumers value positively are credible, and this sustains positive consumer perception of the brand and encourages loyalty to purchase the brand.

In the Malaysian fashion market, the awareness of consumers about the social aspect of sustainability and the digital communication channels has tilted the perception about sustainability. Young Malaysian consumers are aware of the social issues related to sustainability, but this awareness does not necessarily translate to the purchase of sustainable fashion (Ramany et al., 2022). The awareness and purchase of sustainable fashion are instigated by social media (Zain et al., 2023). To strengthen the consumer perception and skepticism over greenwashing claims, social media should be used to communicate the sustainability of fashion brands.

Thus, the results of the study ascertain the perception of consumers as the most important factor of trust and loyalty to the brand. There may be well-formulated sustainability initiatives, but if the consumer's perception does not change, then the impact of the initiatives is zero. The communication of such initiatives then becomes a focus of brands like UNIQLO Malaysia. Communicating the sustainability initiatives, such as recycling, responsibly sourced materials, and streamlining the processes of production to uphold ethics, is a communication of positive perception and long-term loyalty to the brand.

CONCLUSION

This research focused on the impact of sustainability marketing on consumer perception, trust, and loyalty towards brands, and used the context of UNIQLO Malaysia and its green transformation. Out of the 152 respondents, the studies show that marketing oriented towards sustainability transforms how consumers assess and interact with different brands in the fashion industry. This confirms the fact that more and more companies are realizing that sustainability marketing is not an add-on to a brand, but is central to a brand strategy (Park et al., 2022). With the rising concern of the fast fashion industry and the ethical and sustainable consumption movement, marketing sustainability in the fashion industry can be a strong means of building branding and also enhancing the trust of consumers.

The findings also indicate that UNIQLO Malaysia's consumer sustainability initiatives are, on average, positively evaluated. Survey participants noted favorable perceptions toward the recycling program, the responsible and ethical sourcing initiatives, and the

environmental goal transparency initiatives, among other environmental initiatives that the company operates. The appreciation of sustainability marketing practices, consumer perception, and relational commitment and trust toward the brand, with their high mean values, indicates that the sustainability initiatives are integrated into the brand strategy and that the consumers appreciate this. Previous studies have also demonstrated that sustainability marketing leads to an improved brand image and consumer trust; this is especially true when the environmental initiatives are perceived to be genuine and not a façade (Gong et al., 2023; Vardarlier & Esra, 2020).

It is of note that the regression analysis indicates that both sustainability marketing practices and consumer perception are positive predictors of brand trust and loyalty. Of the two predictors, consumer perception was identified as the stronger predictor, indicating that the sustainability initiatives undertaken by companies are less likely to succeed if they fail to anticipate the perceptions of consumers. Ideally, sustainability initiatives undertaken by companies would be perceived as authentic and communicated effectively as the primary reason for increased consumer trust and loyalty. This is consistent with the TPB, which posits that positive attitudes precede and breed intended consumer behaviors (Ajzen, 1991).

On a more overarching theoretical level, and for the principles of the TBL to apply, it must be recognized that for sustainable business success, equal weighting must be paid to financial, social, and environmental performance (Elkington, 2018). Incorporating sustainability into business practices and uses of business communication will be a viable option to strengthen consumer trust and enhance brand loyalty, in addition to securing and sustaining long term relationships with eco-friendly consumers, for fashion retailers like UNIQLO Malaysia.

This research shows that consumer perceptions, trust, and loyalty can be positively impacted through sustained and transparent marketing communication about sustainability. This work adds to the growing body of literature on sustainability marketing and provides the first evidence of the phenomenon within the context of Malaysian fashion retail. The findings also help fashion retailers who want to market sustainably to keep their relationship with their customers.

LIMITATION

The work of this research has given great insight into sustainability marketing and the consumer perception of the marketing of UNIQLO to the Malaysian public; however, there are some limitations to this research that should be acknowledged.

The study used a non-probability, convenience-based sampling method, whereby the majority of the data were young, and more specifically, students. Students are a significant part of fashion consumers; however, this demographic concentration may put limits on the findings and the depth of the application of the results to the generalized Malaysian consumer. People of different ages, income levels, and professions may hold different views on sustainability and brand loyalty. Future researchers who desire to place the findings of their work on a larger stage should consider the use of probability sampling, as well as a more varied respondent composition.

The second part of the research examined the self-reported survey data obtained from an online questionnaire. Self-reported data has the risk of being compromised due to various response biases, such as social desirability bias, where participants may exaggerate their level of concern for the environment, or they attest to being more supportive of sustainable practices than their actual purchasing behavior demonstrates. Therefore, the described perceptions of individuals may diverge from the actual

consumption behavior. In future research, the surveys may be complemented with other techniques such as behavior data, observation, or experiments.

The third point is related to the cross-sectional design of the study, which fails to capture the evolution of consumer perceptions, trust, and brand loyalty, and how they change over time. Initiatives aimed at sustainability demand time and effort from both brands and consumers, as the brand's sustained transparency may shift consumers' perceptions towards sustainability. Such shifts in attitudes may be the result of new brand initiatives or increased social concern around the environment. A longitudinal study would be ideal to understand the duration of the impact of sustainability-oriented practices in marketing and the change in behavior of consumers.

Finally, this study analyzes UNIQLO Malaysia as a singular brand case study. While considering UNIQLO as a notable case of sustainability efforts in the fashion industry, the results may not be applicable to other fashion retailers with different sustainability approaches or brand positioning. Also, the study's research model consists of a small number of variables and omits considerations of elements such as environmental awareness, price sensitivity, social influence, cultural context, and the prevailing economic climate that might affect consumer perceptions and loyalty. Subsequent studies may develop the conceptual model unevenly by including additional variables, analyzing several fashion brands, and undertaking cross-national or cross-retail comparative studies in different contexts.

Despite these limitations, the study clarifies the context in which its findings can be placed and shows some of the work that remains in order to develop the understanding of sustainability marketing and consumer behavior in the fashion industry.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the study, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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