

Linking Sustainability to Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Brand Image in Local Restaurant Branding

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine the effect of sustainable branding on customer loyalty, with brand image as a mediating variable in the context of local restaurants.

Research Method: This research employs a quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the proposed relationships. Data were collected through an online survey from 138 customers of local restaurants in North Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Results and Discussion: The findings reveal that brand image has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty. The People and Planet dimensions of sustainable branding significantly influence brand image but do not directly affect customer loyalty; instead, their effects are fully mediated by brand image. In contrast, the Prosperity dimension does not significantly influence brand image but demonstrates a strong direct effect on customer loyalty. These results indicate that sustainable branding operates through dual pathways: an indirect, perception-based mechanism via brand image (People and Planet) and a direct, value-based mechanism (Prosperity).

Implications: This study contributes to the literature by providing a contextual application of sustainability-driven branding in the restaurant industry and offers practical guidance for managers on how to strategically leverage sustainability initiatives to strengthen brand image and foster long-term customer loyalty.

Keywords: sustainable branding; customer loyalty; brand image; restaurant industry; theory of planned behavior.

Introduction

The restaurant industry in Indonesia is one of the fastest-growing sectors and is currently facing intense competition. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), this industry experienced a 10.17% annual growth in the second quarter of 2024, contributing significantly to employment generation, business opportunities, and national tax revenue (Salam, 2024; Munfarida & Arida, 2023). Alongside this growth, consumer behavior is evolving, with increasing awareness of sustainability issues, including environmental responsibility and social impact (Mandagi *et al.*, 2026). Consumers are no longer focused solely on price, product quality, and service, but also on the sustainability values embedded in a brand (Rantung *et al.*, 2025). This shift highlights the growing importance of sustainable branding as a key determinant of customer loyalty in the restaurant industry.

The increasing relevance of sustainability underscores the urgency for businesses to integrate environmental, social, and economic considerations into their branding strategies (Wulyatiningsih *et al.*,



2026). Sustainable branding is not merely an operational practice but a strategic approach that encompasses environmental conservation, responsible governance, and social contribution to build a strong brand image. As noted by Casidy and Lie (2023), effective communication of sustainability initiatives is essential for shaping customer perceptions and influencing their behavioral intentions. When sustainability practices are clearly communicated, they enhance public understanding and positively influence brand image, which ultimately affects customer decisions. Supporting this, a recent report indicates that 73% of consumers consider sustainability an important factor when choosing a restaurant, 41% of consumers over the age of 20 consider it very important, and 72% are willing to pay more for restaurants that prioritize sustainability (Zuluaga, 2025). These findings emphasize that sustainability is not only relevant but also strategically critical in shaping customer preferences and loyalty.

Despite growing attention to sustainability, brand image, and customer loyalty, existing research remains limited in several aspects. Previous studies, such as Rastogi et al. (2024), have examined the relationship between sustainability, brand image, and customer loyalty, but primarily in the electronics sector. There is still limited research that simultaneously investigates these three variables within the restaurant industry, particularly by considering sustainable branding as a multidimensional construct encompassing People, Planet, and Prosperity. Furthermore, the mediating role of brand image in linking sustainable branding to customer loyalty in this specific context remains underexplored. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the impact of sustainable branding on customer loyalty, with brand image as a mediating variable in the restaurant industry.

This research is significant both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical perspective, it advances understanding of sustainable branding by positioning it as a multidimensional, strategic construct that influences customer loyalty through direct and indirect mechanisms. It also enriches the literature by providing empirical evidence from the restaurant sector, which has been relatively underexplored. From a practical standpoint, this study offers insights to help restaurant managers design and communicate sustainability initiatives more effectively, strengthening brand image and fostering long-term customer loyalty. Given the growing importance of sustainability in shaping consumer behavior, this research underscores the urgency for businesses to adopt sustainability-driven branding strategies to achieve competitive advantage and ensure long-term business sustainability (Zulfikar, 2024).

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Theory of Planned Behavior

This research is based on the theoretical framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), which explains and predicts how a person's intentions and behavior are formed, and assumes that humans can think rationally, using the information obtained as a guide to behavior. This theory states that a person's intention to do something is influenced by attitudes or assessments that are held, whether positive or negative, towards the behavior they will make, then subjective norms related to a person's perception of social pressure to do or not do a behavior, and a person's perception of how easy or difficult it is to do a behavior. This theory is the basis for analyzing the impact of sustainable branding on brand image and customer loyalty. When this theory is linked to sustainable branding, consumers' attitudes toward purchasing environmentally friendly products are strongly influenced by their beliefs about the benefits they will receive. Within the concept of sustainable

branding, this theory can be used to understand the impact of attitudes and behavior on consumers' choices of sustainable products (Hidayat & Sananta, 2024). Businesses can build positive consumer attitudes by using recycled materials or implementing ethical business practices. By grounding the concept of brand sustainability in marketing through this theoretical model, we can understand the value of aligning consumer expectations with sustainability and demonstrate that this concept is not just a passing trend but a powerful force in driving consumer loyalty (Mandung, 2024). Consumers' decisions to purchase products from a particular brand are influenced by the opinions of those closest to them, including family and friends. When those closest to them start talking about or purchasing environmentally friendly products, consumers will feel compelled to do the same to gain social acceptance. When others reinforce consumers' beliefs, it influences their behavior (Margie *et al.*, 2024). A strong brand image associated with sustainability can enhance consumer perceptions of social norms. Businesses can promote this image through marketing transparency, environmentally friendly product labels, and a clear commitment to ethics. When consumers find it easy and affordable to purchase sustainable products, trust in the brand will increase, and loyalty will form as they have repeated positive experiences. Various external and internal factors drive consumer behavioral decisions and intentions, including consumer attitudes towards products and the behavior to continue purchasing, which underlie consumer loyalty when purchases are made repeatedly (Amanda & Marsasi, 2024).

Sustainable Branding

Sustainable branding is a relevant issue today, especially when linked to business strategy. Companies that implement sustainability in their practices or daily operations must be committed to environmental, social, and economic aspects. The three main pillars of the sustainability concept are economic growth, environmental protection or well-being, and social equality (Meutia, 2020). According to Kumar and Christodoulopoulou (2013), Successful sustainability implementation requires companies to establish sustainability as a goal and make it part of their core mission. Therefore, when businesses adopt this sustainability concept, they must be able to raise individual and group awareness of product production and use without sacrificing the three key aspects of sustainability. Sustainable branding is important because it increasingly influences customers' choices of products and services. Therefore, businesses are increasingly encouraged to implement this strategy to build consumer trust amid growing environmental concerns (Khan *et al.*, 2025). The implementation of sustainability strategies is also important, as it influences brand perception by conveying attributes of commitment and reputation (Castro-Gomez *et al.*, 2024). Of course, when customers trust a business and have a positive perception of its brand, they are more likely to buy from that brand. According to Elkington (1994), the concept of sustainable branding can be operationalized in three dimensions. The first dimension is People, which encompasses social aspects, such as societal welfare and justice, as well as the company's positive impact on employees and the community. The second dimension is Planet, which refers to environmental aspects, including sustainable business practices, well-managed natural resources, and minimal negative impact on ecosystems. The last dimension is Prosperity or Profit, which refers to economic aspects, namely the company's financial and economic benefits that are stable and sustainable in the long term. Moreover, this concept is an important foundation for many businesses as they integrate sustainability strategies into their processes. Researchers often focus on topics related to brand sustainability. For example, research from Flores-Hernandez *et al.* (2020) discusses the role of sustainable branding in the retail industry. Research from Foroudi *et al.* (2025) in the hospitality and

tourism industry. Then, research from Chen et al. (2024) was conducted in the fashion industry. However, research on sustainable branding in the food and beverage industry remains limited.

Brand Image

Brand image is a consumer's overall view of a brand, shaped by impressions and perceptions formed through their experiences using the brand or information from others who have used it. When consumers view a brand positively, the brand image will be good. In the digital era, brand image plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and behavior. A strong brand image increases a company's visibility and builds consumer trust, leading to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Lolemo & Pandya, 2025). It will be difficult for competitors to imitate when a strong brand image is embedded in consumers' memories, so brand image can serve as a basis for customers to assess whether a business meets their needs and desires (Andrian & Fadillah, 2021). Brand image is important because it is a crucial consideration when running a business. A positive and strong brand image makes it easier to attract new customers and retain existing ones (Bernarto *et al.*, 2020). Companies can expand their product or service lines by leveraging the positive brand image already established, but they must always pay attention to maintaining and improving that strong brand image (Nugroho *et al.*, 2020). According to Kotler and Keller (2016), brand image is a consumer's perception of a brand, formed from information remembered and retained in consumers' minds. This concept emphasizes that there are three indicators of brand image, namely the strength of association related to how strongly information about the brand is remembered and persists in the mind, the benefits of association related to the brand are considered positive and provide benefits or satisfaction for needs, and the uniqueness of association related to the advantages of the brand that are distinctive, unique and different from others so that they become the reason consumers choose the brand. Researchers often use research topics concerning brand image. For example, research from Snadrou and Haoucha (2024) in the education industry. Research from Maulana and Ayuningtyas (2023) in the healthcare industry. Then, research from Huang and Zheng (2023) was conducted in the technology industry. This research will focus on brand image in the food and beverage industry.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty refers to a customer's commitment to consistently choose and repurchase a particular brand and recommend it to others. It reflects a long-term relational bond manifested through both behavioral patterns and attitudinal attachment, making the brand an integral part of the consumer's life (Sari, 2021). As emphasized by Putri *et al.*, (2021), customer loyalty is a core organizational objective, enabling firms to generate sustainable competitive advantage and long-term profitability through mutually beneficial relationships with customers. The importance of customer loyalty lies in its strategic role in ensuring business continuity and growth. Loyal customers are more likely to make repeat purchases, resist competitors' offerings, and contribute to positive word-of-mouth. This loyalty is often developed when customers experience satisfaction and form emotional connections with a brand (Sudirjo *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, strong attachment to a brand can lead customers to reject alternative products or services, even under competitive pressure (Suwarsito & Aliya, 2020). In this sense, customer loyalty is not merely transactional but relational, reflecting deeper psychological and emotional engagement.

Conceptually, customer loyalty is best understood as a multidimensional construct. Day (1969) distinguishes between attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty refers to a customer's psychological commitment, encompassing beliefs, preferences, and emotional attachment toward a brand. Behavioral loyalty, on the other hand, is reflected in actual purchase behavior, particularly the consistency and frequency of repeat purchases over time. The integration of these two dimensions provides a more comprehensive understanding of loyalty by capturing both consumers' internal mindset and external actions, with important strategic implications for long-term business success. Recent studies further highlight that various relational and experiential factors across different contexts influence customer loyalty. For instance, research by Mandagi *et al.*, (2024) demonstrates how destination branding elements, such as brand gestalt, shape tourist attitudes, satisfaction, and ultimately loyalty. Similarly, Walean *et al.*, (2024) emphasize the mediating role of customer satisfaction in strengthening the relationship between brand-related constructs and loyalty in the telecommunication sector. Extending this perspective, Walean *et al.*, (2025) highlight the interplay between social media marketing, brand trust, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, suggesting that loyalty is shaped through a combination of cognitive, emotional, and relational mechanisms.

Although customer loyalty has been widely examined across various industries, such as logistics (Pramudita, 2020), transportation (Yurindera, 2024), and retail (Pasianus & Kana, 2021), studies integrating customer loyalty with sustainability-oriented branding, particularly in the food and beverage or restaurant industry, remain limited. This indicates a gap in the literature, as the increasing importance of sustainability in shaping consumer preferences suggests that sustainability-related perceptions may also influence loyalty formation. Therefore, examining customer loyalty within the context of sustainable branding provides a relevant and necessary extension to existing research. Sustainable branding is a relevant issue today, driven by consumer preferences for environmental sustainability and social and economic progress. When a business implements a sustainability strategy, it creates positive consumer perceptions, which in turn enhance its brand image. Previous research from (Shireesha *et al.*, 2024; Sah *et al.*, 2025) found that sustainability initiatives can increase positive perceptions of brand image. Thus, the following hypothesis can be constructed:

H1a: The people dimension of sustainable branding has a significant influence on brand image

H1b: Planet dimension of sustainable branding has a significant influence on brand image

H1c: The prosperity dimension of sustainable branding has a significant influence on brand image

Sustainable branding not only impacts brand image but also customer loyalty. When customers learn that a company is implementing a sustainability strategy, which creates a positive brand image, it will also impact their loyalty. Consumers will become loyal when the brand implements sustainability, and the brand image will improve as well. Previous research by Watson *et al.* (2023) and Zhang *et al.* (2023) found that sustainability strategies, such as green perceptions, positively contribute to customer loyalty. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2a: People dimension of sustainable branding has a significant influence on customer loyalty

H2b: Planet dimension of sustainable branding has a significant impact on customer loyalty

H2c: The prosperity dimension of sustainable branding has a significant influence on customer loyalty

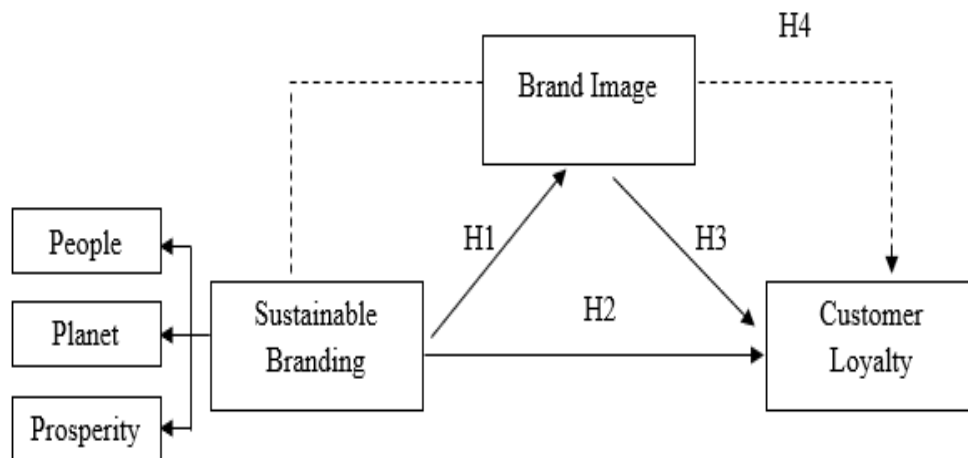
A positive brand image can also lead to customer loyalty. When customers perceive a brand as having a positive image, it increases their loyalty, making them more likely to purchase from that brand, recommend it to others, and make it difficult to switch to other brands. Research by Febriani et al. (2022) and Bhaswara and Patrikha (2021) found that brand image significantly influences customer loyalty. Thus, the following hypothesis can be constructed:

H3: Brand image has a significant influence on customer loyalty

Then, the effect of brand sustainability on customer loyalty may also be mediated by brand image. Implementing a brand sustainability strategy will improve brand image and increase customer loyalty. Research from Rastogi et al. (2024) shows that sustainability practices enhance brand image and loyalty. However, while focusing on sustainability marketing, this study will focus on branding. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H4: The three dimensions of sustainable branding (People, Planet, and Prosperity) significantly influence customer loyalty, with brand image as the mediator.

The relationship between all research variables and the hypotheses to be tested can be seen in Figure 1:



Source: Author (2026)

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Research

Research Method

Research Design

To achieve this research objective, which is to determine the impact of sustainable branding on brand image and customer loyalty in the restaurant industry, this research design uses a quantitative descriptive method to provide a general overview of a behavior, condition, or variable without considering relationships among variables. This method serves to describe the characteristics of a population through surveys or observations (Syahroni, 2022). Moreover, this research uses quantitative correlational methods to examine relationships among two or more variables and the strength of those

relationships. According to Hasbi et al. (2023), this correlation method aims to determine the degree of relationship between variables without attempting to influence them, so there is no manipulation.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The population in this study was all customers at a local restaurant in North Sulawesi. However, due to the large population, a representative sample was selected. The sample was selected using non-probability sampling techniques, including convenience and snowball sampling. Using the convenience sampling technique, the researcher visited the Mie Gacoan restaurant and directly asked customers to participate in the study. According to Firmansyah and Dede (2022), the advantage of this technique is that it is inexpensive and not time-consuming. It also uses the snowball technique, in which researchers select participants who meet the study criteria and ask them to recommend other eligible participants. This is a sampling technique that initially uses a small number, then increases it. Because the small number of data sources is not yet sufficient, they seek other people to serve as data sources (Suriani *et al.*, 2023). The sample size is determined using the N5 formula, namely the number of indicators multiplied by 5 (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Based on the formula's provisions, the minimum number of samples in this study is 135, namely, 27 indicators multiplied by 5. In this study, we got 138 respondents. The sample criteria include Mie Gacoan customers ranging from teenagers to adults, to determine whether loyal customers pay attention to the restaurant's sustainability and image.

Data and Instrumentation

The research instrument was a questionnaire. At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide general information about age, gender, domicile, and occupation, and to read the questionnaire instructions. The next section contained statements about the research variables, each rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Starting from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), somewhat disagree (3), neutral (4), somewhat agree (5), agree (6), and strongly agree (7). To measure the sustainable branding variable, the researcher used 3 dimensions, comprising 5 questions each on people, planet, and prosperity. There are 15 questions on the sustainable branding variable adopted from the research by Shams et al. (2025), Lariviere and Smit (2022), and Winit et al. (2023). The brand image variable is measured using 5 questions adopted from Parris and Guzman (2023) and Gomez-Rico et al. (2023). Meanwhile, the customer loyalty variable is measured using 7 questions adopted from research by Jai et al. (2022) and Cuesta-Valino et al. (2022).

Data Collection Procedure

This study used a survey data collection model in the form of a questionnaire, conducted from the end of September to the beginning of November 2025. The survey was conducted online (via a Google Form link) and offline. During data collection, researchers visited the Mie Gacoan restaurant to meet customers in person. They also contacted target respondents who met the research criteria to invite them to participate in the study. If they agreed, they were immediately sent a link to an online questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, they were asked to provide recommendations to other target respondents or share the questionnaire link with their acquaintances who met the research criteria.

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using Microsoft Excel and SmartPLS software. Descriptive analysis using Microsoft Excel began. This analysis aimed to determine the respondent profile by age, gender, domicile, and occupation. Correlation analysis was then performed using SmartPLS software, followed by structural equation modeling (SEM), to examine the relationships among the research variables and assess their direct and indirect influences. The data analysis using SmartPLS is divided into several stages. First, convergent validity testing uses standardized factor loadings, which are considered valid if all indicator loadings are above 0.7. Second, discriminant validity testing uses the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, in which discriminant validity is met if the square root of the AVE (average variance extracted) exceeds the intervariable correlations. Third, reliability testing uses Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), and AVE (Average Variance Extracted), with variables declared reliable if CA and CR are greater than 0.7 and AVE is greater than 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2014). After these three stages, the final stage is to test the structural model to examine the relationships among the study's variables.

Results and Discussion

Analysis Result

Data were collected from the end of September to the beginning of November, yielding 138 respondents. Based on the results in Table 1 below, of the 138 respondents, the largest age group was 20-29 years old, with 103 people, followed by those under 20 years old, with 16 people. Respondents were female (121) and male (17). By city of domicile, the largest number of respondents was from the Other group (Bolaang Mongondow and Sangihe regions) with 49 people, followed by Minahasa with 34. By occupation, the largest group of respondents were private employees, with 63 people, followed by the other group (e.g., teachers, health workers, and others not included in the options), with 39 people.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	< 20	16	11.6
	20 - 29	103	74.6
	30 - 39	15	10.9
	40 - 50	4	2.9
Gender	Female	121	87.7
	Male	17	12.3
Domicile	Bitung	5	3.6
	Manado	33	23.9
	Minahasa	34	24.6
	Minahasa Selatan	1	0.7
	Minahasa Tenggara	1	0.7
	Minahasa Utara	9	6.5
	Other	49	35.5
	Tomohon	6	4.3
Occupation	Entrepreneur	7	5.1
	Other	39	28.3
	PNS	9	6.5
	Private Employee	63	45.7
	Student	20	14.5

Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)



Measurement Model

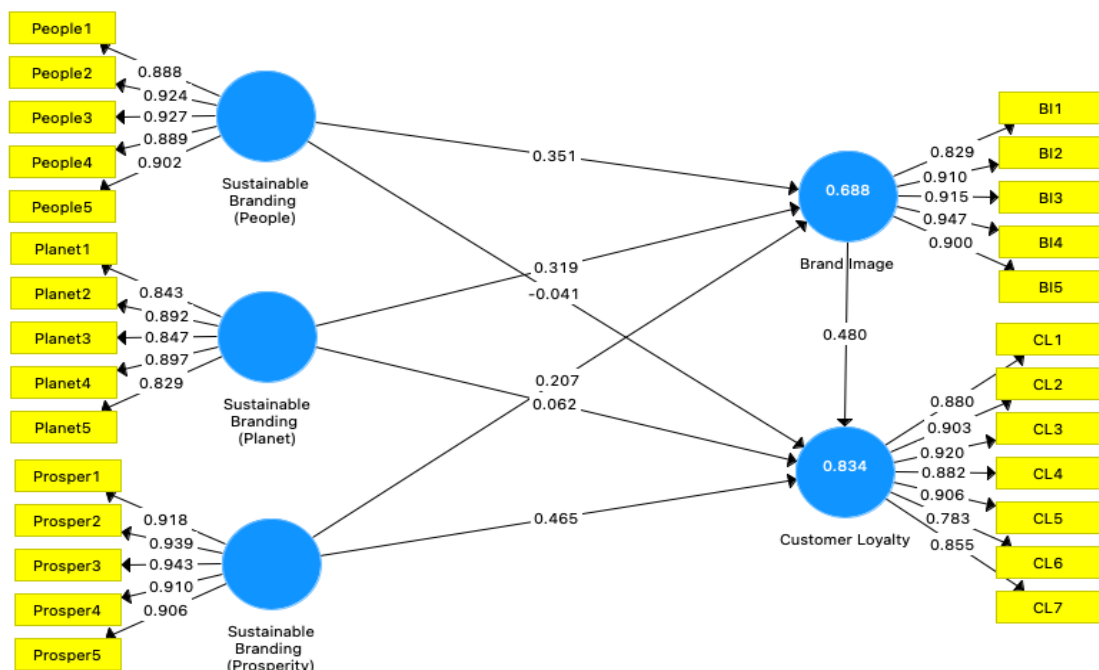
Data analysis began with an evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method in SmartPLS. This test aimed to verify the validity (convergent and discriminant) and reliability (internal consistency) of the research variables: sustainable branding, brand image, and customer loyalty. This validation is a prerequisite before conducting hypothesis testing on the structural model.

Convergent Validity

The first analysis, convergent validity, was conducted by examining the factor loadings of all existing indicators. Figure 2 and Table 2 show that all indicators have factor loadings above 0.70, indicating convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

The second validity test is discriminant validity, which is assessed using two criteria: the Fornell-Larcker and Cross-Loading criteria. The Fornell-Larcker validity test is conducted by comparing the square root of a variable's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) with the correlations between that variable and other latent variables in the model. The validity criteria are met if the square root of the AVE for each variable exceeds its correlations with other variables. The results of the validity test based on the Fornell-Larcker criteria are shown in Table 3, which indicates that almost all square roots of the AVEs on the diagonal of the table exceed the corresponding inter-variable correlation coefficients, except for Sustainable Branding (Planet). This indicates a fairly high degree of validity.



Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)

Figure 2. Measurement Model

Table 2. Factor Loading

Variable	Indicator	Factor Loading
Brand Image	BI1	0.83
	BI2	0.91
	BI3	0.92
	BI4	0.95
	BI5	0.90
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0.88
	CL2	0.90
	CL3	0.92
	CL4	0.88
	CL5	0.91
	CL6	0.78
	CL7	0.86
Sustainable Branding	People1	0.89
	People2	0.92
	People3	0.93
	People4	0.89
	People5	0.90
	Planet1	0.84
	Planet2	0.89
	Planet3	0.85
	Planet4	0.90
	Planet5	0.83
	Prosper1	0.92
	Prosper2	0.94
	Prosper3	0.94
	Prosper4	0.91
	Prosper5	0.91

Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	1	2	3	4	5
Brand Image (1)	0.90				
Customer Loyalty (2)	0.86	0.88			
Sustainable Branding_People (3)	0.79	0.79	0.91		
Sustainable Branding_Planet (4)	0.78	0.81	0.80	0.86	
Sustainable Branding_Prosperty (5)	0.79	0.86	0.86	0.88	0.92

Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)

The second validity test examines the cross-loading value of each indicator. A measurement model is considered discriminant validity if the correlation between an indicator and its latent variable is significantly greater than the correlations between that indicator and other latent variables in the research model. The results of the cross-loading test in Table 4 indicate that discriminant validity is met, as all correlations between indicators and their respective variables exceed the correlations between indicators and other variables.

Table 4. Cross Loading

	Brand Image	Customer Loyalty	Sustainable Branding_(People)	Sustainable Branding_(Planet)	Sustainable Branding_(Prosperity)
BI1	0.83	0.81	0.71	0.66	0.72
BI2	0.91	0.77	0.72	0.74	0.74
BI3	0.92	0.77	0.68	0.71	0.68
BI4	0.95	0.80	0.75	0.73	0.72
BI5	0.90	0.73	0.67	0.67	0.68
CL1	0.78	0.88	0.75	0.80	0.84
CL2	0.78	0.90	0.73	0.78	0.82
CL3	0.80	0.92	0.70	0.71	0.77
CL4	0.72	0.88	0.65	0.65	0.70
CL5	0.83	0.91	0.76	0.73	0.79
CL6	0.60	0.78	0.58	0.59	0.63
CL7	0.76	0.86	0.63	0.72	0.71
People1	0.74	0.76	0.89	0.75	0.80
People2	0.70	0.74	0.92	0.75	0.79
People3	0.72	0.68	0.93	0.74	0.75
People4	0.70	0.67	0.89	0.70	0.75
People5	0.69	0.71	0.90	0.69	0.81
Planet1	0.74	0.71	0.73	0.84	0.77
Planet2	0.75	0.72	0.68	0.89	0.73
Planet3	0.57	0.64	0.64	0.85	0.71
Planet4	0.70	0.74	0.76	0.90	0.80
Planet5	0.58	0.67	0.64	0.83	0.77
Prosper1	0.72	0.77	0.80	0.79	0.92
Prosper2	0.71	0.81	0.81	0.81	0.94
Prosper3	0.75	0.79	0.81	0.84	0.94
Prosper4	0.71	0.78	0.76	0.81	0.91
Prosper5	0.74	0.83	0.80	0.78	0.91

Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)

Reliability

To further assess construct reliability, evaluations for Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are presented in Table 5. All research variables, namely Sustainable Branding, Brand Image, and Customer Loyalty, have Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability values above 0.70, indicating high internal consistency and reliability across the items measuring each construct. Meanwhile, for AVE, all variables exceed the 0.50 threshold. Thus, all variables are declared reliable, indicating that the measurement of each concept in this study has met the measurement model's quality standards.

Table 5. Construct Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Image	0.94	0.94	0.96	0.81
Customer Loyalty	0.95	0.95	0.96	0.77
Sustainable Branding_(People)	0.95	0.95	0.96	0.82
Sustainable Branding_(Planet)	0.91	0.92	0.94	0.74
Sustainable Branding_(Prosperity)	0.96	0.96	0.97	0.85

Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)



Goodness of Fit

Then, an overall model fit assessment was conducted using the Goodness-of-Fit measure, as shown in Table 6. The results show that the SRMR is below 0.08, indicating that the model fits the data well and is acceptable. Furthermore, the NFI value is below the 0.90 threshold, indicating that the model is appropriate. Thus, the results show that the model represents the data and aligns with the collected data, allowing it to proceed to the structural model analysis stage.

Table 6. Goodness of Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.05	0.05
d_ULS	1.12	1.12
d_G	1.48	1.48
Chi-Square	1030.73	1030.73
NFI	0.80	0.80

Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)

Structural Model

After testing the measurement model and ensuring that all validity and reliability indicators are met, the next stage is to test the structural model, namely, to test each hypothesis in this study, both direct and mediation effects.

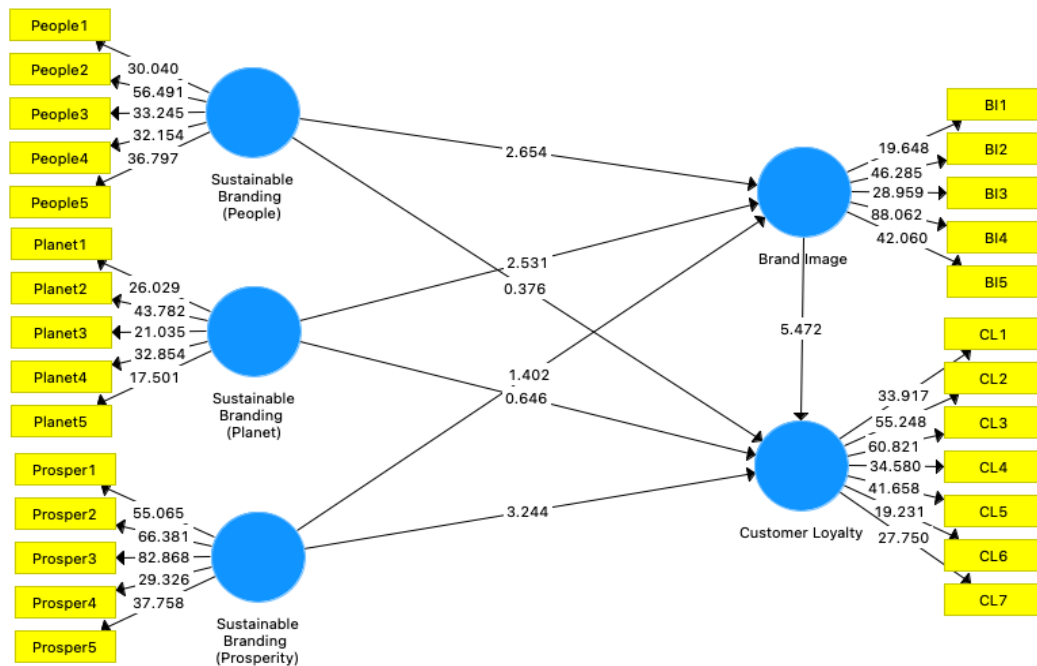
Direct Effect

With all validity and reliability requirements met during the measurement model evaluation stage, the analysis proceeded to the structural model testing stage. The primary objective of this stage was to verify the relationships among variables as specified by the proposed hypotheses. Path coefficient significance testing was performed using the bootstrapping technique in SmartPLS. Comprehensive results from the hypothesis testing regarding direct effects are presented in Table 7 and Figure 3.

Table 7. Results of Direct Effect Testing

Relationship between variables	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Significant?
Brand Image → Customer Loyalty	0.48	0.09	5.47	0.00	Yes
People → Brand Image	0.33	0.13	2.65	0.01	Yes
People → Customer Loyalty	-0.05	0.11	0.38	0.71	No
Planet → Brand Image	0.31	0.13	2.53	0.01	Yes
Planet → Customer Loyalty	0.08	0.10	0.65	0.52	No
Prosperity → Brand Image	0.23	0.15	1.40	0.16	No
Prosperity → Customer Loyalty	0.46	0.14	3.24	0.00	Yes

Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)



Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)

Figure 3. Structural Model

Regarding the first hypothesis (H1a-H1c), the analysis results indicate that not all Sustainable Branding indicators significantly and positively influence the Brand Image of the Mie Gacoan restaurant. The People indicator has a significant influence (t-statistic = 2.65, p-value < 0.05). The Planet indicator also has a significant influence (t-statistic = 2.53, p-value < 0.05). However, the Prosperity indicator does not have a significant influence (t-statistic = 1.40, p-value > 0.05). This implies that sustainable branding practices related to the people aspect, whether employees, communities, or stakeholders, can strengthen brand image. Moreover, in practice, social responsibility programs and attention to the people aspect can improve brand image. Environmental initiatives can also improve brand image, as concern for the environment positively impacts it. However, the economic or prosperity aspect did not influence brand image in this study. Perhaps the prosperity indicator is understood as an internal aspect, less visible to consumers in the research context, so it does not directly change the image. This result is inconsistent with the literature, which shows that sustainable branding has a positive and significant influence on brand image (Shireesha *et al.*, 2024; Sah *et al.*, 2025).

For the second hypothesis (H2a-H2c), the analysis shows that not all sustainable branding indicators significantly and positively influence customer loyalty among Mie Gacoan customers. The People indicator has no significant influence (t-statistic = 0.38, p-value > 0.05). The Planet indicator also has no significant influence (t-statistic = 0.65, p-value > 0.05). However, the Prosperity indicator has a significant influence (t-statistic = 3.24, p-value < 0.05). This implies that the people aspect does not directly influence customer loyalty. Customers become loyal not only because of aspects of employees, the community, stakeholders, and so on. Environmental aspects also do not directly influence loyalty. When a restaurant takes the initiative to care for the environment, it does not immediately make customers loyal. However, aspects of prosperity, such as economic contribution and well-being, have a direct positive effect on loyalty. Companies that focus on economic aspects can increase customer loyalty faster than those that focus on social and environmental aspects. This result is inconsistent with

the literature, which shows that sustainable branding has a positive and significant influence on customer loyalty. (Watson *et al.*, 2023; Zhang *et al.*, 2023).

The third hypothesis (H3) indicates that brand image has a significant positive influence on customer loyalty (t-statistic = 5.47, p-value < 0.05). This implies that a positive brand image typically builds trust and makes customers feel they are getting better value from the product or service, ultimately increasing long-term loyalty. This result is consistent with the literature, indicating that brand image has a significant positive influence on customer loyalty (Febriani *et al.*, 2022; Bhaswara & Patrikha, 2021).

Mediating Effect

After obtaining the hypothetical results for the direct effect, we next examine the results of the mediation effect. The mediation analysis results in Table 8 provide insight into the role of Brand Image as a mediator between each of the Sustainable Branding indicators (People, Planet, and Prosperity) and Customer Loyalty.

Table 8. Results of Mediation Effect Testing

Relationship between variables	STDEV	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Significant?
People → Brand Image → Customer Loyalty	0.07	2.26	0.02	Yes
Planet → Brand Image → Customer Loyalty	0.06	2.46	0.01	Yes
Prosperity → Brand Image → Customer Loyalty	0.08	1.29	0.20	No

Source: SmartPLS Output (2026)

The results show that brand image does not mediate all indicators of sustainable branding in relation to customer loyalty. The People and Planet indicators have significant results. The People indicator has a significant influence, mediated by brand image (t-statistic = 2.26, p-value < 0.05). The Planet indicator has a significant influence, mediated by brand image (t-statistic = 2.46, p-value < 0.05). Actions that focus on People and Planet are often considered good or morally correct actions. When a business implements these effectively, it will build a positive brand image because it is considered ethical and responsible. Moreover, a positive brand image will increase consumer loyalty because they feel part of a brand that has a positive impact on people and the planet. However, prosperity does not have a significant influence when mediated by brand image (t-statistic = 1.29, p-value >0.05). This aspect of prosperity or profit relates to the core purpose of a company or business: to generate income. Focusing on profitability may not directly shape consumer perceptions of sustainability. If consumers perceive a business's primary motive as profit, this will create a negative brand image and not significantly increase loyalty. When economic factors drive loyalty, brand image may not be required as a mediator; the relationship may be direct. These results are inconsistent with the findings of Rastogi *et al.* (2024).

Discussion

This study shows that sustainable branding does not operate as a single, uniform mechanism in shaping customer loyalty. Instead, each sustainability dimension—People, Planet, and Prosperity—plays a different role in influencing brand image and loyalty. The processed data indicate three main findings: first, the People and Planet dimensions significantly affect brand image; second, brand image



significantly affects customer loyalty; and third, the Prosperity dimension significantly affects customer loyalty directly, but not through brand image. These findings suggest that sustainability-driven branding in the restaurant industry works through both symbolic-perceptual and utilitarian-economic pathways.

The finding that the People dimension significantly influences brand image supports the first hypothesis and confirms that consumers form favorable perceptions when a restaurant is seen as caring for employees, communities, and broader stakeholders. In the context of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), this result is reasonable because socially responsible practices help shape positive consumer beliefs and attitudes toward the brand. When customers perceive that a restaurant behaves ethically and contributes to social well-being, they are more likely to develop a favorable mental association with that brand. This is consistent with the notion that brand image is built through strong, beneficial, and unique associations stored in consumers' memory (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In local restaurant settings, where customer interactions are often direct and personal, social responsibility may be especially visible and emotionally meaningful. Therefore, the result supports earlier arguments that sustainability-related initiatives strengthen consumers' perceptions and evaluations of brands (Shireesha *et al.*, 2024; Castro-Gomez *et al.*, 2024).

A similar pattern appears in the Planet dimension. The result shows that environmental sustainability significantly strengthens brand image, indicating that consumers respond positively to environmentally responsible restaurant practices. This finding is also in line with theoretical expectations. From a branding perspective, environmental concern contributes reputational value because it signals that the business is responsible, modern, and aligned with contemporary consumer values (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2013). From a behavioral perspective, such practices may shape favorable attitudes and social approval, both of which are central in explaining intention and behavior within TPB (Ajzen, 1991). In the restaurant sector, environmental actions—such as reducing waste, using sustainable packaging, or managing resources responsibly—can function as visible cues that enhance the restaurant's symbolic appeal. This finding corresponds with previous research showing that sustainability initiatives can improve perceptions of brand image and strengthen brand positioning (Sah *et al.*, 2025; Li & Lin, 2024). Thus, the current study reinforces the view that environmental commitments are not only operational decisions but also branding signals that affect how consumers interpret the brand.

However, the Prosperity dimension does not significantly influence brand image, and this is one of the most important outcomes of the study. This result does not fully support the expectation that all sustainability dimensions contribute equally to brand image. A plausible explanation is that consumers may not readily interpret prosperity-related indicators as part of sustainability in the same way they interpret social and environmental actions. Economic success, profitability, or financial stability may be perceived as internal business outcomes rather than visible evidence of ethical or sustainable conduct. In other words, while People and Planet may be interpreted as moral and public-facing commitments, Prosperity may be understood as the firm's own interest. This interpretation helps explain why prosperity was less effective in shaping brand image. The result partially contradicts broader claims that sustainability dimensions collectively enhance brand-related perceptions (Timiyo, 2022), but it also suggests that consumer interpretation of sustainability is selective. In local restaurant branding, not all dimensions are equally salient in shaping the image.

The study also reveals that People and Planet do not directly influence customer loyalty. This means that customers do not become loyal merely because a restaurant is socially or environmentally

responsible. Instead, these dimensions first need to shape a positive brand image, which then contributes to loyalty. This is an important theoretical implication because it shows that sustainability-related values alone may not be sufficient to generate repeat patronage unless they are translated into meaningful brand perceptions. Customer loyalty, as a multidimensional construct, includes both behavioral repetition and attitudinal commitment (Day, 1969). Social and environmental sustainability may strengthen attitudinal appreciation, but that appreciation becomes loyalty only when embedded in a favorable overall image of the brand. This helps explain why indirect paths through brand image are significant, whereas direct paths are not. The result, therefore, supports the idea that consumers often process sustainability as a reputational attribute first, and only later convert that perception into loyalty behavior (Rastogi *et al.*, 2024; Parris & Guzman, 2023).

By contrast, the Prosperity dimension has a strong direct influence on customer loyalty. This suggests that customers are responsive to the restaurant's economic value, affordability, and practical benefits. In the case of Mie Gacoan, this finding is particularly understandable because consumers may directly associate prosperity-related outcomes with price fairness, value for money, business consistency, and the restaurant's ability to continue delivering satisfying offerings. Unlike social and environmental initiatives, which may require interpretation through image formation, economic value can be experienced directly. This makes the pathway from Prosperity to loyalty more immediate. The result aligns with the broader understanding that customer loyalty is strengthened when customers perceive a brand as consistently delivering value and meeting their expectations (Putri *et al.*, 2021; Sudirjo *et al.*, 2023). In this sense, the current study suggests that loyalty in the restaurant industry may still be strongly grounded in tangible value considerations, even when sustainability branding is present.

Another central finding is that brand image significantly influences customer loyalty, which supports the third hypothesis. This result is highly consistent with the literature and confirms that brand image remains a key mechanism through which consumers decide whether to continue supporting a brand. A positive image reduces uncertainty, increases trust, and makes customers more confident that the restaurant will continue to meet their needs. In practical terms, when consumers perceive a restaurant as distinctive, beneficial, and reliable, they are more likely to repurchase and recommend it to others. This corresponds with prior studies showing that brand image is a strong antecedent of customer loyalty across sectors (Febriani *et al.*, 2022; Bhaswara & Patrikha, 2021). In the present study, the significance of brand image also clarifies why the People and Planet dimensions matter: not because they independently create loyalty, but because they strengthen the image that ultimately fosters loyal behavior.

The mediation analysis further strengthens this interpretation. The significant mediating effects of brand image on the relationships between People and loyalty, and between Planet and loyalty, indicate full mediation. This means that social and environmental sustainability influence loyalty only after they are cognitively and emotionally translated into a favorable image of the brand. This is theoretically meaningful because it demonstrates that sustainability communication and interpretation are essential. A restaurant may engage in positive social and environmental practices, but if these do not shape how consumers see the brand, loyalty gains may be limited. This supports the argument that sustainability should not be treated solely as back-end operations but as part of a coherent branding strategy that builds public meaning and perception (Casidy & Lie, 2023; Winit *et al.*, 2023). At the same time, the non-significant mediating effect of brand image on the Prosperity–loyalty relationship shows

that economic value works differently. Prosperity appears to bypass image formation and affect loyalty more directly, suggesting a more utilitarian mechanism.

The findings both support and refine previous theories on sustainable branding. They support the idea that sustainability can shape consumer outcomes, but they also show that the effects are dimension-specific and mechanism-specific. The article does not fully confirm a universal sustainability-to-loyalty pathway; instead, it shows that People and Planet operate through image-building processes, while Prosperity operates through direct value recognition. Therefore, the study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that sustainable branding in local restaurants is not a single-route process, but a dual-pathway system. For restaurant managers, this means that social and environmental initiatives should be clearly communicated to strengthen brand image, while prosperity-related value should be maintained to secure direct loyalty outcomes. In this way, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of how sustainable branding can be strategically used to support long-term competitiveness in the restaurant industry.

Conclusion

This research provides valuable insights for all business owners, particularly regarding the importance of sustainable branding in enhancing brand image and customer loyalty. The data analysis revealed several key findings. First, the people and planet indicators have a positive and significant impact on brand image, while the prosperity indicator has no significant impact. However, these results do not necessarily lead all business owners to pay more attention to the two impactful indicators; rather, they should continue to focus on the prosperity aspect to maintain a positive brand image. Second, only the prosperity indicator has a positive and significant impact on customer loyalty. However, the people and planet indicators do not have a significant impact. Similar to the first finding, having only a few indicators has an impact, but this does not necessarily lead all business owners to focus more on them. However, sustainable branding must still be maximized across all areas to increase customer loyalty to the product as a whole. Third, brand image has a positive and significant influence on customer loyalty. This means that when customers have a positive perception of a product's brand image, it increases their loyalty and leads to repeat purchases. Fourth, brand image does not mediate the relationship between all sustainable branding indicators and customer loyalty. Only the people and planet indicators are mediated by brand image in the increase in customer loyalty.

This study enriches the literature on sustainable branding by demonstrating that the three dimensions of sustainability (People, Planet, and Prosperity) play distinct roles in shaping brand image and customer loyalty. The finding that People and Planet influence brand image through brand image, while Prosperity influences directly, broadens the understanding of the different pathways of influence among sustainability aspects. This study also adds to the limited literature on sustainable branding in the Indonesian local restaurant sector. It also provides a practical contribution, helping businesses, particularly in the restaurant industry, implement strategies to strengthen brand image and customer loyalty. This relates to the application of sustainability aspects, including social, environmental, and economic aspects, in business practices.

The researchers have endeavored to conduct this study as well as possible, but it does have limitations. The sample composition is uneven, with a predominance of certain genders and ages. Furthermore, the study is limited to only three variables. Therefore, further research is needed to expand the sample size to avoid imbalances in sample composition. Further research could also examine

additional relevant variables or include additional mediating or moderating variables. Further research could also be conducted in other industries, beyond the restaurant industry. This study confirms that brand sustainability is a crucial strategy for Mie Gacoan to maintain and enhance customer loyalty. By combining socio-environmental practices that build brand image (People and Planet) with economic value that directly increases loyalty (Prosperity), the company can strengthen its position as a fast-food restaurant that is not only affordable but also socially and environmentally responsible.

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