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Beyond Greenwashing: How Sustainability Authenticity Build Green Trust and Brand Loyalty Among Gen Z Fashion Consumers in an Emerging Market

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationships among Greenwashing, Sustainability Authenticity, Green Trust, and Brand Loyalty among Generation Z fashion consumers in Indonesia. The research aims to investigate the direct relationships between Greenwashing and Sustainability Authenticity with Green Trust and Brand Loyalty, as well as the mediating role of Green Trust. A quantitative explanatory approach with a cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data were collected from 160 Generation Z fashion consumers in Indonesia using purposive sampling and a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. The findings indicate that Greenwashing has no significant relationship with Green Trust ($p = 0.453$) or Brand Loyalty ($p = 0.307$). Sustainability Authenticity has a positive and significant relationship with Green Trust ($\beta = 0.795$; $p < 0.001$), but no significant direct relationship with Brand Loyalty ($p = 1.000$). Green Trust is positively associated with Brand Loyalty ($\beta = 0.384$; $p = 0.031$). Furthermore, Green Trust significantly mediates the relationship between Sustainability Authenticity and Brand Loyalty ($\beta = 0.305$; $p = 0.035$), whereas its mediating role in the relationship between Greenwashing and Brand Loyalty is not significant ($p = 0.683$). The model explains 71.2% of the variance in Green Trust and 30.0% in Brand Loyalty. However, limitations in measurement validity and reliability require cautious interpretation of these findings.

Keywords: Greenwashing; Sustainability Authenticity; Green Trust; Brand Loyalty; Generation Z; Sustainable Fashion.

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INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry faces increasing pressure to address environmental concerns associated with clothing production, consumption, and disposal. In response, fashion brands increasingly communicate their environmental commitments through recycled materials, responsible production processes, reduced packaging, and recycling initiatives. However, these sustainability claims do not necessarily reflect a brand's actual environmental performance. Consumers must evaluate whether environmental commitments are credible and consistent with the practices undertaken by fashion brands. Adamkiewicz et al. (2022) explained that misleading environmental claims in the fashion industry can create consumer confusion and undermine confidence in green marketing. Similarly, Apaolaza et al. (2023), in their study involving 600 Australian consumers, found that perceived greenwashing negatively affected sustainable clothing purchases, whereas trust in sustainable clothing brands positively contributed to purchasing behavior. These findings highlight the importance of credible sustainability communication in shaping consumer responses to fashion brands.

One of the challenges associated with sustainability communication is greenwashing, which refers to misleading or exaggerated environmental claims that create an inaccurate impression of a brand's environmental performance. Such practices may involve vague sustainability statements, selective disclosure of environmental initiatives, or claims that lack sufficient supporting evidence. Greenwashing may weaken consumers' confidence in fashion brands because the environmental image communicated by a brand may differ from its perceived practices. Policarpo et al. (2023) found that social cynicism negatively affected trust in green clothing brands through increased perceptions of greenwashing among Australian consumers. Similarly, Ha (2022) identified a negative relationship between greenwashing and green trust among Vietnamese consumers of electronic products. These findings indicate that perceived greenwashing is associated with weaker consumer trust, although its relationship with long-term brand loyalty in the fashion industry requires further investigation.

Beyond greenwashing, sustainability authenticity is another important consideration in consumers' evaluations of environmental responsibility. Sustainability authenticity refers to consumers' perceptions that a brand's environmental commitments are genuine, consistent, and supported by meaningful practices rather than being used primarily for promotional purposes. Unlike greenwashing, which reflects negative evaluations of potentially misleading environmental claims, sustainability authenticity emphasizes the perceived sincerity of environmental commitments. Kiong et al. (2026) demonstrated the importance of perceived sustainability authenticity in explaining consumer responses to sustainability practices in Malaysian retail environments, while also examining the role of perceived greenwashing. These findings suggest that sustainability initiatives and consumers' perceptions of their authenticity should be distinguished. However, the relationship between sustainability authenticity, green trust, and brand loyalty among fashion consumers remains an important area for further investigation.

Green trust plays an important role in connecting consumers' environmental evaluations with their relationships with fashion brands. Green trust refers to consumers' confidence in a brand's environmental credibility, reliability, and ability to fulfill its environmental commitments. In sustainable fashion, consumers may have limited opportunities to independently verify environmental information concerning product materials, manufacturing processes, and supply chains. Consequently, their trust may depend on whether a brand's sustainability claims are perceived as credible and consistent with its actions. Apaolaza et al. (2023) and Policarpo et al. (2023) demonstrated the importance of trust in consumers' responses to environmental claims, while Ha (2022) found that greenwashing was negatively associated with green trust. These findings provide a basis for examining whether greenwashing and sustainability authenticity have different relationships with green trust.

Green trust may also contribute to brand loyalty, which represents consumers' continuing preference for a brand, willingness to make repeat purchases, and intention to recommend it to others. Unlike purchase intention, brand loyalty reflects an ongoing consumer–brand relationship. Dash (2026) found that green brand trust strongly influenced green consumer loyalty in sustainable fashion and mediated the relationships between green brand quality, green brand image, and loyalty. However, the antecedents examined in that study differed from greenwashing and sustainability authenticity. Therefore, further investigation is needed to determine whether consumers' evaluations of environmental claims and authentic sustainability commitments are associated with brand loyalty directly or indirectly through green trust.

Indonesia provides a relevant setting for investigating these relationships, particularly among Generation Z fashion consumers who encounter sustainability-related information through digital communication channels.

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Although consumers can access environmental claims, product information, and discussions about fashion brands, such access does not necessarily ensure that sustainability commitments are perceived as credible. Ariawan and Setyaningsih (2026), in their study of Indonesian Gen Z consumers of H&M, found that perceived greenwashing increased perceived financial and environmental risks and negatively influenced green purchase intention. These findings indicate that Indonesian Gen Z consumers' perceptions of environmental claims are associated with their responses to fashion products. However, the study focused on purchase intention rather than brand loyalty and did not examine sustainability authenticity as a separate antecedent of green trust.

Previous studies have examined greenwashing, sustainability authenticity, green trust, and consumer outcomes across different research contexts. Apaolaza et al. (2023) and Policarpo et al. (2023) investigated greenwashing and trust in sustainable clothing, while Ha (2022) examined greenwashing and green trust in the electronics sector. Kiong et al. (2026) explored sustainability authenticity in retail shopping experiences, whereas Dash (2026) investigated green trust as a mediator of sustainable fashion loyalty. Meanwhile, Ariawan and Setyaningsih (2026) examined greenwashing perceptions and purchase intention among Indonesian Gen Z fashion consumers. Although these studies provide relevant evidence, they have not collectively established a model integrating greenwashing and sustainability authenticity as distinct antecedents of green trust and brand loyalty among Indonesian Gen Z fashion consumers. This research gap provides the basis for examining both negative perceptions of environmental claims and positive perceptions of authentic sustainability commitments within a single research model.

Based on these considerations, this study investigates the relationships between greenwashing, sustainability authenticity, green trust, and brand loyalty among Gen Z fashion consumers in Indonesia. Specifically, it examines the influence of greenwashing and sustainability authenticity on green trust, the influence of green trust on brand loyalty, and the direct influence of greenwashing and sustainability authenticity on brand loyalty. Furthermore, the study investigates whether green trust mediates the relationships between greenwashing and brand loyalty and between sustainability authenticity and brand loyalty. By integrating these relationships, the research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how consumers' evaluations of environmental responsibility are associated with green trust and long-term brand loyalty in an emerging market.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative explanatory approach with a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among Greenwashing, Sustainability Authenticity, Green Trust, and Brand Loyalty among Generation Z fashion consumers in Indonesia. Greenwashing (X1) and Sustainability Authenticity (X2) serve as independent variables, Green Trust (Z) as the mediating variable, and Brand Loyalty (Y) as the dependent variable. The study uses non-probability purposive sampling, targeting Generation Z consumers residing in Indonesia who have encountered sustainability-related claims from fashion brands. An initial sample of 160 respondents is targeted based on 16 measurement indicators, with sample adequacy further assessed through statistical power analysis (Hair et al., 2021). Primary data will be collected through an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. Each variable is measured using four indicators adapted from Lu et al. (2022) for Greenwashing, Lee and Jeong (2022) and Lee et al. (2023) for Sustainability Authenticity, Chen and Chang (2013) for Green Trust, and Khandai et al. (2023) for Brand Loyalty. Respondents will evaluate the same fashion brand across all measurement items to ensure consistency.

Data will be analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The measurement model will be evaluated through outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, rho_A, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to assess reliability and validity. The structural model will be assessed using path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Hypothesis testing will employ bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples at a 5% significance level to examine five direct relationships and two indirect relationships through Green Trust. Common Method Bias (CMB) will be addressed through questionnaire design procedures and appropriate statistical diagnostics. Since the study uses a cross-sectional design, the findings will be interpreted as statistical associations rather than definitive causal effects.

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RESULTS

Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. A total of 160 valid responses from Generation Z fashion consumers in Indonesia were included in the analysis. The measurement model was evaluated to assess convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. All constructs were measured reflectively using four indicators each.

Convergent Validity

Table 1. Convergent Validity Test Results

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	AVE	Status
Greenwashing (X1)	GW1	0.927	0.458	Not Fully Valid
	GW2	0.778		
	GW3	0.367		
	GW4	0.484		
Sustainability Authenticity (X2)	SA1	0.922	0.757	Valid
	SA2	0.828		
	SA3	0.889		
	SA4	0.838		
Green Trust (M)	GT1	0.773	0.499	Marginal
	GT2	0.910		
	GT3	0.559		
	GT4	0.510		
Brand Loyalty (Y)	BL1	0.648	0.670	Valid
	BL2	0.874		
	BL3	0.845		
	BL4	0.884		

The results indicate that Sustainability Authenticity and Brand Loyalty meet the convergent validity criteria, with AVE values of 0.757 and 0.670, respectively. Sustainability Authenticity demonstrates strong indicator loadings, ranging from 0.828 to 0.922, while Brand Loyalty has one indicator below 0.70 (BL1 = 0.648). In contrast, Greenwashing has an AVE of 0.458, with two indicators showing relatively low loadings (GW3 = 0.367 and GW4 = 0.484). Green Trust also demonstrates marginal convergent validity, with an AVE of 0.499 and relatively weak loadings for GT3 and GT4. These findings indicate that the Greenwashing and Green Trust constructs require further measurement evaluation.

Discriminant Validity

Table 2. Discriminant Validity Test Results (HTMT Criterion)

Variable	Greenwashing (X1)	Sustainability Authenticity (X2)	Green Trust (M)	Brand Loyalty (Y)
Greenwashing (X1)	-			
Sustainability Authenticity (X2)	0.496	-		
Green Trust (M)	0.672	0.982	-	
Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.461	0.478	0.651	-

Most HTMT values are below the threshold of 0.90, indicating acceptable discriminant validity between the corresponding constructs. However, the HTMT value between Sustainability Authenticity and Green Trust is 0.982, exceeding the recommended threshold. This indicates insufficient discriminant validity between these

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two constructs and suggests substantial overlap in their measurement. Therefore, further examination of the indicators is necessary to establish a clearer distinction between Sustainability Authenticity and Green Trust.

Reliability

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE	Status
Greenwashing (X1)	0.616	0.788	0.751	0.458	Not Reliable
Sustainability Authenticity (X2)	0.892	0.902	0.925	0.757	Reliable
Green Trust (M)	0.654	0.804	0.791	0.499	Marginal
Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.834	0.870	0.889	0.670	Reliable

Sustainability Authenticity demonstrates strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.892, rho_A of 0.902, and CR of 0.925. Brand Loyalty also meets the reliability criteria, with corresponding values of 0.834, 0.870, and 0.889. Meanwhile, Greenwashing has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.616, although its rho_A and CR exceed 0.70. Green Trust shows a similar pattern, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.654, rho_A of 0.804, and CR of 0.791. These results indicate that Sustainability Authenticity and Brand Loyalty demonstrate satisfactory internal consistency, whereas Greenwashing and Green Trust require additional evaluation.

Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)

The structural model was evaluated to examine the relationships among Greenwashing, Sustainability Authenticity, Green Trust, and Brand Loyalty. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the proportion of variance in each endogenous construct explained by its predictor variables. The results are presented in Table 4.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination (R^2) Results

Endogenous Variable	R^2 (Original Sample)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.300	0.423	0.126	2.381	0.017
Green Trust (M)	0.712	0.757	0.060	11.835	0.000

Green Trust has an R^2 value of 0.712, indicating that Greenwashing and Sustainability Authenticity collectively explain 71.2% of its variance, while the remaining 28.8% is not explained by the model. Meanwhile, Brand Loyalty has an R^2 value of 0.300, indicating that Greenwashing, Sustainability Authenticity, and Green Trust collectively explain 30.0% of its variance. The bootstrapping results show statistically significant R^2 estimates for Green Trust ($t = 11.835$; $p < 0.001$) and Brand Loyalty ($t = 2.381$; $p = 0.017$). These findings indicate that the structural model explains a greater proportion of variance in Green Trust than in Brand Loyalty.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values	Result
H1	Greenwashing (X1) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.253	1.022	0.307	Not Supported
H2	Greenwashing (X1) → Green Trust (M)	0.098	0.750	0.453	Not Supported

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H3	Sustainability Authenticity (X2) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	-0.000	0.000	1.000	Not Supported
H4	Sustainability Authenticity (X2) → Green Trust (M)	0.795	8.427	0.000	Supported
H5	Green Trust (M) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.384	2.154	0.031	**Supported**
H6	Greenwashing (X1) → Green Trust (M) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.038	0.409	0.683	Not Supported
H7	Sustainability Authenticity (X2) → Green Trust (M) → Brand Loyalty (Y)	0.305	2.113	0.035	**Supported**

The results show that three of the seven hypotheses are statistically supported. Sustainability Authenticity has a positive and significant relationship with Green Trust ($\beta = 0.795$; $t = 8.427$; $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Green Trust also demonstrates a positive and significant relationship with Brand Loyalty ($\beta = 0.384$; $t = 2.154$; $p = 0.031$), supporting H3. Furthermore, the indirect relationship between Sustainability Authenticity and Brand Loyalty through Green Trust is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.305$; $t = 2.113$; $p = 0.035$), supporting H7.
Conversely, Greenwashing does not demonstrate a significant relationship with Green Trust ($\beta = 0.098$; $p = 0.453$) or Brand Loyalty ($\beta = 0.253$; $p = 0.307$). Sustainability Authenticity also has no statistically significant direct relationship with Brand Loyalty ($\beta \approx 0$; $p = 1.000$). Additionally, the indirect relationship between Greenwashing and Brand Loyalty through Green Trust is not significant ($\beta = 0.038$; $p = 0.683$). Therefore, H1, H4, H5, and H6 are not supported. These results should be interpreted with consideration of the measurement limitations identified in the outer model evaluation.

DISCUSSION

The Relationship Between Greenwashing and Green Trust

The results indicate that Greenwashing has a positive but statistically insignificant relationship with Green Trust ($\beta = 0.098$; $p = 0.453$). This finding differs from Ha (2022), who reported a negative relationship between greenwashing and green trust. The insignificant result suggests that respondents' perceptions of misleading environmental claims were not statistically associated with their trust in the selected fashion brands. However, this finding should not be interpreted as evidence that greenwashing has no consequences for consumer trust, particularly because the Greenwashing construct did not fully satisfy the measurement validity criteria.

The Relationship Between Sustainability Authenticity and Green Trust

Sustainability Authenticity demonstrates a positive and significant relationship with Green Trust ($\beta = 0.795$; $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that consumers who perceive a fashion brand's environmental commitments as genuine and consistent tend to report greater confidence in its environmental credibility. The result is relevant to Kiong et al. (2026), who emphasized the importance of perceived sustainability authenticity in consumer evaluations of sustainability practices. Nevertheless, the high HTMT value between Sustainability Authenticity and Green Trust indicates that their empirical distinction requires further investigation.

The Relationship Between Green Trust and Brand Loyalty

Green Trust has a positive and significant relationship with Brand Loyalty ($\beta = 0.384$; $p = 0.031$). This finding is consistent with Dash (2026), who identified green brand trust as an important factor associated with consumer loyalty in sustainable fashion. Consumers who express greater confidence in a brand's environmental commitments also tend to demonstrate stronger brand preferences, repurchase intentions, and willingness to recommend the brand.

The Relationship Between Greenwashing and Brand Loyalty

Greenwashing does not demonstrate a statistically significant relationship with Brand Loyalty ($\beta = 0.253$; $p = 0.307$). This finding indicates that perceived greenwashing was not significantly associated with loyalty among the respondents. The result differs in outcome from Apaolaza et al. (2023), who found a negative relationship between perceived greenwashing and sustainable clothing purchases. However, purchasing behavior and brand loyalty represent different consumer outcomes, and the present findings must also be considered alongside the limitations of the Greenwashing measurement.

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The Relationship Between Sustainability Authenticity and Brand Loyalty

The direct relationship between Sustainability Authenticity and Brand Loyalty is not statistically significant (β ≈ 0; p = 1.000). This indicates that respondents' perceptions of genuine environmental commitments were not directly associated with their brand loyalty in the estimated model. Although sustainability authenticity may contribute to favorable environmental evaluations, the results do not establish a significant direct relationship with continuing brand preference, repurchase intention, or recommendation intention.

The Mediating Role of Green Trust in the Relationship Between Greenwashing and Brand Loyalty

The indirect relationship between Greenwashing and Brand Loyalty through Green Trust is not statistically significant (β = 0.038; p = 0.683). Thus, H6 is not supported. These findings indicate that the estimated model does not provide statistical support for Green Trust as a mediator of the relationship between perceived greenwashing and brand loyalty.

The Mediating Role of Green Trust in the Relationship Between Sustainability Authenticity and Brand Loyalty

The results indicate a positive and statistically significant indirect relationship between Sustainability Authenticity and Brand Loyalty through Green Trust (β = 0.305; p = 0.035). Since the corresponding direct relationship is not statistically significant, this pattern is consistent with indirect-only mediation in the estimated model. This suggests that consumers' perceptions of genuine sustainability commitments are associated with brand loyalty through their confidence in a brand's environmental credibility. However, the insufficient discriminant validity between Sustainability Authenticity and Green Trust limits the strength of this interpretation. Further measurement evaluation is necessary before drawing firm conclusions about the proposed mediating relationship.

Overall, the results indicate that Sustainability Authenticity is positively associated with Green Trust, which is also positively associated with Brand Loyalty. In contrast, Greenwashing does not demonstrate statistically significant direct or indirect relationships in the estimated model. These findings provide preliminary evidence of the relevance of sustainability authenticity and environmental trust in Gen Z fashion consumers' brand loyalty, although the identified measurement limitations must be addressed before the findings can be considered conclusive.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the relationships among Greenwashing, Sustainability Authenticity, Green Trust, and Brand Loyalty among Generation Z fashion consumers in Indonesia. The findings indicate that Greenwashing has no statistically significant direct relationship with either Green Trust or Brand Loyalty, and its indirect relationship with Brand Loyalty through Green Trust is also insignificant. In contrast, Sustainability Authenticity has a positive and significant relationship with Green Trust, while Green Trust is positively associated with Brand Loyalty. Although Sustainability Authenticity does not demonstrate a significant direct relationship with Brand Loyalty, its indirect relationship through Green Trust is statistically significant, indicating a pattern consistent with indirect-only mediation in the estimated model. The structural model explains 71.2% of the variance in Green Trust and 30.0% of the variance in Brand Loyalty. These findings suggest that consumers' perceptions of genuine environmental commitments and environmental trust are relevant to understanding brand loyalty in sustainable fashion. However, the results should be interpreted cautiously because the measurement model revealed limitations in convergent validity, reliability, and discriminant validity, particularly between Sustainability Authenticity and Green Trust. Future research should refine the measurement indicators, examine additional factors associated with Brand Loyalty, and consider broader consumer samples to strengthen the validity and generalizability of the findings.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the use of a cross-sectional survey design limits causal interpretation of the relationships among Greenwashing, Sustainability Authenticity, Green Trust, and Brand Loyalty. Second, the study involved 160 Generation Z fashion consumers in Indonesia selected through purposive sampling, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader consumer populations. Third, the measurement model revealed limitations in convergent validity and reliability, particularly for Greenwashing and Green Trust, while the high HTMT value between

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Sustainability Authenticity and Green Trust indicated insufficient discriminant validity. These measurement issues require cautious interpretation of the structural relationships, particularly the mediating role of Green Trust. Furthermore, the model explained 30.0% of the variance in Brand Loyalty, indicating that other relevant factors were not included in the study.

Future research should refine the measurement indicators to improve construct validity and reliability, particularly by establishing a clearer distinction between Sustainability Authenticity and Green Trust. Further studies are also encouraged to expand the sample size, include broader consumer segments, and consider probability sampling to improve generalizability. Additional variables, such as customer satisfaction, brand image, perceived value, and customer engagement, may be examined to provide a more comprehensive explanation of Brand Loyalty. Future researchers may also employ longitudinal or qualitative approaches to further investigate consumers' perceptions of sustainability claims and their relationships with environmental trust and brand loyalty.

DECLARATIONS

Ethics approval: This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for academic research involving human participants. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and all respondents were informed about the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process. The data collected were used exclusively for academic research purposes.

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