

A Conceptual Model of Sustainable Marketing: The Role of Brand Love and Trust in Strengthening Generation Z's Repurchase Intention for Local MSMEs

Febri Sari Siahaan*¹, Usep Suhud², Setyo Ferry Wibowo³, Christian Wiradendi Wolor⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Jakarta Jl. Rawamangun Muka Raya, Rawamangun, Jakarta Timur, DKI Jakarta 13220, Indonesia

Email: febri_1717925070@mhs.unj.ac.id^{1*}, usuhud@unj.ac.id², setyoferry@unj.ac.id³, christianwiradendi@unj.ac.id⁴

Abstract

This conceptual article develops an integrated sustainable marketing framework to explain how local micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) can strengthen Generation Z's repurchase intention. Drawing on an integrative synthesis of literature on sustainable marketing, social media marketing, consumer-based brand equity, brand trust, brand love, and repurchase intention, the article develops a serial-parallel mechanism. Sustainability-oriented social media marketing is proposed to strengthen brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality. These brand equity dimensions subsequently build brand trust as a rational assurance mechanism and brand love as an affective attachment mechanism; both are expected to strengthen repurchase intention. The model contributes by connecting sustainability-oriented communication with cognitive and emotional relationship mechanisms in a unified framework tailored to resource-constrained local MSMEs. It also provides a staged adoption logic and specifies boundary conditions that can guide future empirical validation across MSME sectors and Generation Z consumer groups.

Keywords

Sustainable marketing, Social media marketing, Brand trust, Brand love, Repurchase intention

Introduction

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are central to employment, local value creation, and economic resilience. In Indonesia, they account for the overwhelming majority of business units and absorb a substantial share of the workforce, yet many operate with limited financial resources, restricted market access, and uneven digital capabilities (Anatan & Nur, 2023). Digital platforms have expanded their reach, but visibility alone does not guarantee customer retention. For resource-constrained MSMEs, repeat purchasing is especially important because it stabilizes revenue, reduces the cost of acquiring new customers, and helps convert satisfied buyers into advocates (Hokmabadi et al., 2024)

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Generation Z is a strategically important segment in this context. Its members are intensive users of social media and frequently evaluate brands through digital content, peer communication, and observable organizational conduct. They also express strong concern for environmental and social issues; however, this concern does not always translate into consistent behavior, indicating a persistent attitude-behavior gap (D'Acunto et al., 2025). Consequently, MSMEs cannot rely on sustainability claims alone. They must communicate credible practices, deliver reliable quality, and create brand meanings that Generation Z regards as authentic (Dragolea et al., 2023).

Repurchase intention provides an appropriate outcome for examining whether these efforts create durable customer relationships. It captures a consumer's willingness to buy again rather than merely express a favorable attitude. Prior studies associate repurchase intention with perceived quality, brand equity, satisfaction, trust, and emotional attachment (Fan et al., 2025). In sustainability-oriented markets, repeat purchasing also signals that ethical and environmental positioning has been translated into a relationship that consumers consider valuable enough to maintain (Li et al., 2026; Pancić et al., 2023) .

Social media marketing is particularly relevant because it allows local MSMEs to communicate product information, sustainability practices, and brand stories at comparatively low cost. Interactive and credible content can strengthen brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality, which are core dimensions of consumer-based brand equity (Cheung et al., 2020). Yet these perceptions do not automatically produce repeat purchasing. Consumers must also believe that the brand is dependable and feel that it has personal or symbolic relevance. Brand trust and brand love therefore represent distinct but complementary mechanisms: trust reduces uncertainty, whereas love deepens affective attachment (Laradi et al., 2023).

Three gaps motivate the present framework. First, sustainable marketing research continues to emphasize large firms, green products, or reporting practices, leaving the customer-retention mechanisms of local MSMEs less developed (Basit et al., 2024). Second, studies often examine digital marketing, brand equity, trust, or emotional attachment separately, making it difficult to explain how an initial social media encounter develops into repeat purchasing. Third, research on Generation Z frequently emphasizes sustainable attitudes or initial purchase intentions, while paying less attention to the relational processes required for repurchase.

This article addresses these gaps by developing a conceptual model in which sustainability-oriented social media marketing strengthens brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality; these dimensions then shape brand trust and brand love, which jointly strengthen repurchase intention. The framework contributes by integrating rational and emotional pathways within a single serial-parallel structure, specifying how sustainable marketing can operate through consumer-based brand equity, and locating these mechanisms in the local MSME and Generation Z context (Setyaningsih et al., 2024). Practically, it translates the model into a staged strategy that MSMEs can adopt without requiring the advertising resources of larger firms.

Literature Review

Sustainable Marketing

Sustainable marketing creates customer value while considering environmental integrity, social well-being, and long-term economic viability. It therefore extends beyond promoting green products and requires firms to align market communication with responsible sourcing, truthful claims, stakeholder welfare, and durable value creation (Nadeem et al., 2025). The triple-bottom-line perspective reinforces this balance by treating people, planet, and profit as interdependent rather than competing outcomes (Nica et al., 2025).

For local MSMEs, sustainable marketing is credible only when communication corresponds with observable practice. Transparency reduces suspicion of greenwashing, while consistent ethical conduct strengthens the authenticity of the brand (Agarwal et al., 2025). In this article, sustainable marketing is treated as the normative orientation of social media marketing: digital communication should be transparent, evidence-based, customer-oriented, and consistent with the enterprise's environmental and social commitments (Ayaz et al., 2025; Isac et al., 2025).

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing enables firms to distribute content, interact with customers, monitor responses, and encourage user participation (Dwivedi et al., 2021). These activities increase brand visibility and enrich the associations through which consumers interpret the brand (Ali et al., 2024; Cheung et al., 2020). For MSMEs, the interactive nature of social media is particularly valuable because responsiveness, founder stories, production transparency, and customer testimony can partly compensate for limited advertising expenditure.

Sustainability-oriented content can further improve informativeness, relevance, and brand attitude when consumers regard it as specific and credible (Nabivi, 2025). Its effect nevertheless depends on execution. Repetitive claims without evidence may undermine trust, whereas concrete information about materials, labor practices, waste reduction, or community benefits can strengthen both brand image and perceived quality. Social media marketing is therefore positioned as the model's initiating mechanism rather than as an end in itself (Rizkita et al., 2025).

Consumer-Based Brand Equity

Consumer-based brand equity represents the value that brand knowledge adds to a consumer's response (Appiah-Nimo et al., 2023). The present model focuses on brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality because these dimensions capture whether consumers know the brand, attach favorable and distinctive associations to it, and judge its offering as dependable. Together, they convert exposure to social media content into structured evaluations that can guide later relational judgments (Fan et al., 2025).

The three dimensions are related but not interchangeable. Awareness makes the brand cognitively available; image gives it meaning; and perceived quality supplies a functional basis for confidence. A local MSME may therefore be visible without having a favorable image, or may have an appealing story without being perceived as capable of delivering consistent

quality. Treating the dimensions separately makes the proposed mechanisms more diagnostic and empirically testable.

Brand Trust

Brand trust is the consumer's willingness to rely on a brand because it is perceived as competent, honest, and dependable. It reduces perceived risk and becomes especially important when consumers cannot directly inspect production processes or verify sustainability claims (Açıkgöz et al., 2024). Favorable brand image and consistent perceived quality provide evidence from which this confidence can develop, while transparent communication strengthens the belief that the brand will act as promised (Atulkar, 2020).

Trust is rational in function but relational in consequence. Once established, it lowers uncertainty surrounding subsequent transactions and increases the likelihood that consumers will choose the same brand again. In the local MSME context, trust may also offset concerns about business continuity, service consistency, and product standardization (Guerra-Tamez et al., 2024).

Brand Love

Brand love refers to a strong positive emotional attachment toward a brand. It goes beyond satisfaction because it includes affection, identity relevance, passion, and a desire to maintain the relationship (Mustafa et al., 2022) (Mustafa et al., 2022). Positive brand experiences, self-expressive meanings, and perceived authenticity can transform a favorable evaluation into deeper attachment. Research also indicates that brand love supports loyalty, advocacy, and resilience when competing alternatives are available (Na et al., 2023).

Brand love is particularly relevant to Generation Z because brands may function as expressions of values and community membership. A local MSME that demonstrates an authentic purpose, communicates in a recognizable human voice, and invites participation can become emotionally meaningful (Badham & Valentini, 2025). Unlike trust, which primarily reassures, brand love motivates continued preference through attachment.

Repurchase Intention

Repurchase intention reflects a consumer's stated likelihood of purchasing again from the same brand. It is a forward-looking indicator of customer retention and a key precursor of behavioral loyalty. Trust strengthens repurchase intention by reducing uncertainty, whereas brand love strengthens it by increasing attachment and resistance to alternatives (Hussain et al., 2025; Sharma et al., 2024).

Among Generation Z, repurchase intention is also shaped by authenticity and value alignment. Sustainable positioning can contribute to repeat purchasing when it is supported by credible quality and consistent conduct, but claims that appear exaggerated can weaken the relationship (Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). The model therefore treats repurchase intention as the outcome of a sequence that combines exposure, brand evaluation, rational assurance, and emotional attachment.

Conceptual Development Approach

This article adopts a theory-building conceptual approach because its purpose is to integrate constructs that are commonly examined in separate literature streams and to develop logically coherent, testable relationships. Consistent with guidance on integrative literature reviews (Snyder, 2019), the synthesis focuses on conceptual connection, theoretical explanation, and model development rather than on estimating pooled effects or cataloguing every publication in the field. The literature was used for its theoretical relevance to six domains: sustainability-oriented marketing communication, consumer-based brand equity, brand trust, brand love, repurchase intention, and the Generation Z-MSME context (Tiep Le et al., 2021). Foundational sources were retained to establish construct definitions and core theoretical logic, while recent peer-reviewed studies were used to clarify mechanisms, contextual relevance, and boundary conditions. Sources were considered when they contributed directly to construct definition, causal reasoning, theoretical integration, or the contextualization of the proposed relationships.

Conceptual development proceeded in three analytical steps. First, sustainable marketing was positioned as the strategic orientation underlying sustainability-oriented social media communication. Second, brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality were organized as consumer-based brand equity mechanisms that translate communication into brand evaluation. Third, brand trust and brand love were distinguished as parallel rational and affective mechanisms linking brand equity to repurchase intention. The direction of each relationship was assessed against the dominant theoretical logic and relevant empirical findings before the hypotheses and integrated framework were specified.

Conceptual Framework

The proposed model follows a serial-parallel logic. Sustainability-oriented social media marketing first shapes three dimensions of consumer-based brand equity: brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality. These dimensions then operate through two parallel relational mechanisms. Brand trust captures rational assurance that the MSME is reliable and will deliver on its promises, while brand love captures affective attachment and identity relevance. Both mechanisms are expected to strengthen repurchase intention. Sustainable marketing therefore operates as the orientation of communication and conduct, not as an isolated promotional claim.

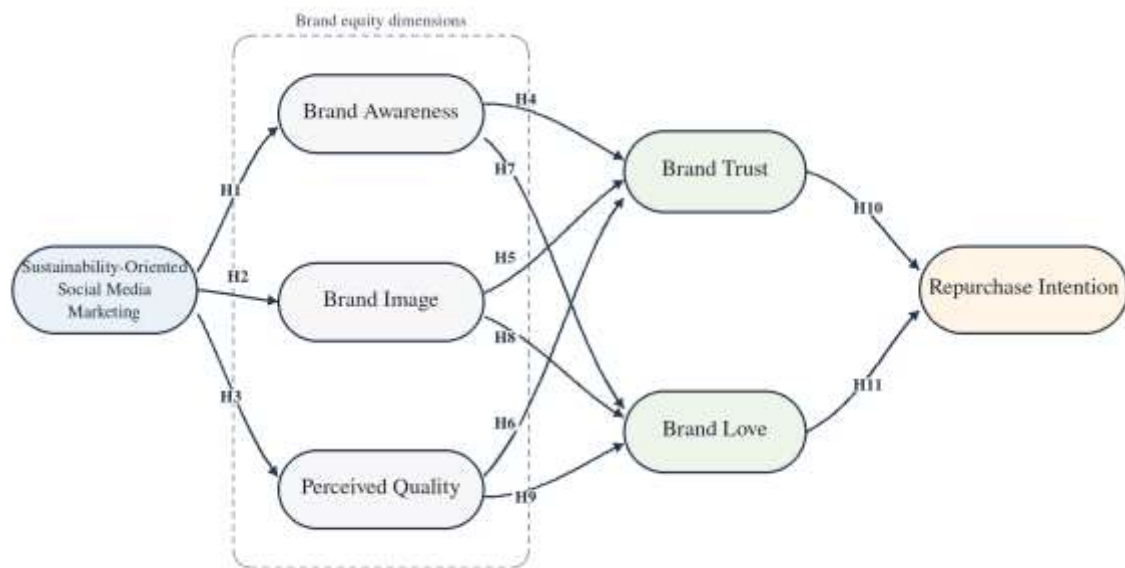


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model

Hypothesis Development

Social media activity increases the frequency and richness of brand exposure. Interactive, informative, and consistent communication improves recognition, develops favorable associations, and provides cues from which consumers infer quality. When sustainability communication is specific and credible, it can also make the brand more relevant without separating sustainability from the broader brand experience (Laradi et al., 2023; Nabivi, 2025). Accordingly:

H1: *Sustainability-oriented social media marketing positively influences brand awareness.*

H2: *Sustainability-oriented social media marketing positively influences brand image.*

H3: *Sustainability-oriented social media marketing positively influences perceived quality.*

Brand equity dimensions supply the evidence used to evaluate whether a brand is dependable. Awareness lowers ambiguity by making prior information accessible, brand image signals integrity and value alignment, and perceived quality indicates competence and consistency. Together, these evaluations should reduce uncertainty and strengthen brand trust (Açikgöz et al., 2024; Monfort et al., 2025).

H4: *Brand awareness positively influences brand trust.*

H5: *Brand image positively influences brand trust.*

H6: *Perceived quality positively influences brand trust.*

The same dimensions can also create emotional attachment. Familiarity enables repeated positive contact, a favorable image gives the brand symbolic and identity-relevant meaning, and perceived quality sustains rewarding experiences. These mechanisms encourage affection and attachment rather than merely reducing risk (Mustafa et al., 2022; Na et al., 2023).

H7: *Brand awareness positively influences brand love.*

H8: *Brand image positively influences brand love.*

H9: *Perceived quality positively influences brand love.*

Finally, brand trust and brand love provide complementary reasons to repurchase. Trust makes another transaction feel safe and predictable, while love makes continued preference emotionally desirable. Evidence across retail and digital contexts links both mechanisms with loyalty and repurchase outcomes (Hussain et al., 2025; Sharma et al., 2024).

H10: *Brand trust positively influences repurchase intention.*

H11: *Brand love positively influences repurchase intention.*

Method

This study adopts a conceptual research design to develop an integrated framework explaining how sustainable marketing can strengthen Generation Z's repurchase intention toward local micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Drawing on an integrative synthesis of relevant literature, the study brings together six interconnected domains: sustainable marketing, social media marketing, consumer-based brand equity, brand trust, brand love, and repurchase intention. Following Snyder (2019), the literature was selected based on its theoretical relevance, contribution to construct development, and ability to explain the relationships proposed in the model. The framework was developed by positioning sustainability-oriented social media marketing as the initial driver of brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality, which subsequently shape brand trust and brand love as complementary rational and emotional mechanisms leading to repurchase intention. Foundational studies were used to establish the conceptual definitions and theoretical logic, while recent peer-reviewed research was incorporated to strengthen the relevance of the framework to Generation Z consumers and resource-constrained local MSMEs. This process resulted in an integrated serial-parallel model and eleven hypotheses that can be empirically examined in future research.

Discussion

From Sustainable Digital Communication to Brand Equity

The framework explains why social media marketing should not be evaluated solely through reach, impressions, or short-term engagement. For local MSMEs, its strategic value lies in changing what consumers know and believe about the brand. Sustainability-oriented communication can raise awareness by making the brand recognizable, improve image by associating it with responsibility and authenticity, and enhance perceived quality by demonstrating materials, processes, service standards, and customer outcomes. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that interactive social media capabilities build brand knowledge and equity (Cheung et al., 2020; Laradi et al., 2023). The sustainable character of the model depends on congruence between communication and practice. If claims are vague or unsupported, increased exposure can magnify skepticism rather than equity. Conversely, transparent evidence can make responsible practices relevant to consumers and improve brand attitudes (Isac et al., 2025; Nabivi, 2025). The model thus treats sustainability as a credibility discipline that shapes how social media content is designed and substantiated.

Rational and Emotional Routes to Repurchase Intention

Brand equity is an intermediate mechanism rather than the final outcome. Awareness, image, and perceived quality help consumers form two different relational judgments. Brand trust is grounded in expectations of competence, honesty, and consistency; it is particularly important when a small enterprise has limited institutional visibility. Brand love develops when the brand's meanings and experiences become personally significant. The two mechanisms should therefore be modeled in parallel rather than collapsed into a single loyalty construct. This dual-route explanation is especially useful for Generation Z. Sustainable values can create symbolic relevance, but the documented attitude-behavior gap means that emotional agreement alone may be insufficient (Tiep Le et al., 2021). Trust provides the assurance needed to act, while brand love sustains preference beyond functional comparison. Their combined presence offers a stronger explanation of repurchase intention than either mechanism in isolation and clarifies why a credible but emotionally distant brand, or a loved but unreliable brand, may struggle to retain customers.

Applicability, Adoptability, and Conceptual Robustness

The framework is applicable to local MSMEs whose products or services permit repeated purchasing and whose customer relationships are influenced by social media. Examples include food and beverage, fashion, beauty, craft, and personal-service businesses. The mechanisms are sufficiently general to travel across these categories, but their relative strength may vary. Perceived quality may dominate in functional products, whereas brand image and love may be stronger in identity-expressive categories. The model should therefore be tested across sectors rather than assumed to be invariant. Adoptability is supported by a staged implementation sequence (Probohudono et al., 2025). MSMEs can first document credible sustainability and quality practices, then translate these practices into consistent content, use interaction and customer evidence to reinforce brand equity, and monitor whether trust and attachment are developing before expecting repeat purchases. This sequence does not require sophisticated technology; it requires message consistency, evidence, responsiveness, and alignment between online claims and customer experience. Digital capability and innovation remain enabling conditions, particularly where MSMEs face limited resources (Wijaya et al., 2025).

Conceptual robustness here refers to internal coherence, explicit mechanisms, and falsifiable relationships, not to empirical confirmation. The revised framework corrects the causal direction between brand equity dimensions and brand trust and specifies both trust and love as direct antecedents of repurchase intention. Robustness should subsequently be examined by comparing the proposed serial-parallel model with plausible alternatives, testing indirect effects, assessing measurement invariance across industries or regions, and introducing boundary conditions such as product involvement, price sensitivity, perceived authenticity, and platform type.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The first theoretical contribution is the integration of sustainable marketing, social media marketing, and consumer-based brand equity in a single process model. Sustainable

marketing is often treated as a corporate practice or environmental message, whereas this framework explains how it can influence a customer-retention outcome through identifiable brand-building mechanisms. The model thereby connects responsible communication with consumer memory, association, and quality judgments. Second, the model distinguishes rational and emotional relational pathways. Brand trust explains why favorable brand equity reduces uncertainty, while brand love explains why the brand becomes affectively meaningful. Modeling both paths clarifies that repurchase intention is not produced by functional evaluation or emotional attachment alone. It also creates testable serial indirect effects from social media marketing through each brand equity dimension and each relational mechanism. Third, the framework extends these mechanisms to local MSMEs and Generation Z. This context matters because smaller firms often depend on authenticity and interaction rather than mass-media scale, while Generation Z combines intensive digital engagement with heightened scrutiny of sustainability claims. The model therefore identifies conditions under which resource constraints may be partially offset by credible, relationship-oriented digital communication.

Practical and Policy Implications

For MSME practitioners, the framework implies that content should be designed around evidence rather than generic sustainability language. Posts can show sourcing decisions, production methods, durability, waste reduction, employee or community practices, and corrective responses when expectations are not met. These cues support perceived quality and trust more effectively than unsubstantiated claims. Consistent visual identity, founder or employee stories, customer participation, and shared-value narratives can simultaneously reinforce image and brand love. Performance monitoring should follow the causal sequence. Reach and recognition indicators are useful for awareness, sentiment and association measures for image, review content and return rates for perceived quality, confidence and complaint-resolution indicators for trust, and advocacy or voluntary engagement for brand love. Repurchase intention and actual repeat transactions should be assessed only after these intermediate signals are established. This prevents MSMEs from interpreting engagement metrics as evidence of loyalty. Government agencies, industry associations, and MSME support programs can improve adoption by providing templates for substantiating sustainability claims, training in ethical digital communication, simple brand-metric dashboards, and access to verification or certification services. Such support is important because smaller firms may possess responsible practices but lack the capability to communicate them consistently. Policies should encourage transparency without imposing reporting requirements that exceed the administrative capacity of micro-enterprises.

Conclusion and Future Research

This article proposes a conceptual explanation of how sustainable marketing can strengthen Generation Z's repurchase intention toward local MSMEs. Sustainability-oriented social media marketing is expected to build brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality. These dimensions then foster brand trust and brand love, which provide rational and emotional reasons to purchase again. The framework shifts attention from short-term digital exposure to the relational process through which responsible communication may generate durable customer value. The model contributes a coherent serial-parallel structure, clarifies the distinct functions of trust and love, and offers an adoption sequence suited to resource-constrained enterprises. It also responds to the need for a framework whose applicability, adoptability, and conceptual robustness can be evaluated explicitly rather than assumed. The

article remains conceptual and does not claim exhaustive coverage of the literature. The proposed relationships have not yet been empirically validated. Future studies should test the measurement and structural models with Generation Z customers who have purchased from local MSMEs, estimate the specific indirect effects, and compare rival causal structures. Multi-group and measurement-invariance analysis can assess sectoral or demographic differences, while longitudinal or experimental designs can test temporal ordering and causality.

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