DIJEMSS: Dinasti International Journal of Education Management and Social Science
E-ISSN: 2686-6331
P-ISSN: 2686-6358
DINASTI PUBLISHER
https://dinastipub.org/DIJEMSS dinasti.info@gmail.com +62 811 7404 455

DOI: https://doi.org/10.38035/dijemss.v8i1
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Received: 29 July 2026 | **Revised:** 29 September 2026 | **Accepted:** 30 October 2026

Mapping the Research Landscape of Sustainable Branding in Service Marketing: A Systematic Literature Review

Miguel A. Maramis[1], Hanni Purwati[2], Deske W. Mandagi[3]
[1]Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Klabat, Indonesia, 52410034@student.unklab.ac.id
[2]Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Klabat, Indonesia, 52420006@student.unklab.ac.id
[3]Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Klabat, Indonesia, deskemandagi@unklab.ac.id

Corresponding author: 52410034@student.unklab.ac.id[1]

Abstract: This study aims to map the research landscape of sustainable branding in service marketing by identifying publication trends, key contributors, dominant methodologies, theoretical foundations, and emerging research themes. This research employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach based on the PRISMA framework. A total of 65 articles were selected from the Scopus and Web of Science databases using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer was combined with qualitative content analysis to examine research structures, keyword networks, and thematic developments. The results indicate a significant increase in publications after 2020, reflecting growing academic interest in sustainable branding within service sectors. Survey-based studies dominate the methodology, followed by mixed methods and qualitative approaches. Social Exchange Theory (SET), Source Credibility Theory (SCT), and Stakeholder Theory emerge as the most frequently used theoretical frameworks. Bibliometric analysis reveals that research is concentrated in countries such as India and Indonesia, while institutions in Europe demonstrate higher citation impact. Keyword co-occurrence analysis identifies four main thematic clusters: sustainable destination development, green marketing in services, place branding, and corporate identity. Overlay visualization further shows a shift from traditional branding concepts toward sustainability-driven and tourism-focused applications. This study provides a comprehensive and structured synthesis of sustainable branding research in service marketing by integrating bibliometric and thematic analysis. It contributes to the literature by offering a clear conceptual mapping, identifying research gaps, and proposing future research directions using the TCCM framework. The findings also offer practical insights for service organizations in developing sustainable branding strategies aligned with evolving consumer expectations.

Keywords: Sustainable Branding, Service Marketing, Brand Equity, Green Marketing, Place Branding, Systematic Literature Review, Bibliometric Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable branding has emerged as an important topic in modern marketing, driven by the increasing emphasis on responsible and long-term oriented business practices. Broadly,

sustainable branding refers to the integration of environmental, social, and ethical considerations into brand identity, positioning, and communication (Braun et al., 2013; Wiedmann et al., 2011). This concept focuses not only on economic value creation but also on contributions to environmental sustainability and social well-being (Basile & Cavallo, 2020). In service marketing, where offerings are intangible and experience-based, sustainable branding plays a critical role in shaping customer perceptions, fostering trust, and building long-term relationships with customers (Bassano et al., 2019; Sharafuddin et al., 2024).

Although research on sustainability and branding has expanded rapidly, several critical gaps continue to constrain a comprehensive understanding of sustainable branding in service marketing. First, an authenticity gap persists, as most studies treat sustainability claims as straightforward signals of brand value while overlooking the increasing prevalence of greenwashing perceptions in service contexts, where intangibility makes verification difficult for consumers (Wiedmann et al., 2011; Al-Issa, 2024; Shanti & Joshi, 2022). Second, the literature exhibits service-specific theoretical fragmentation, as existing studies are scattered across diverse frameworks such as Stakeholder Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Source Credibility Theory without an integrated lens that captures the experiential, relational, and co-creative nature of services (Bassano et al., 2019; Sharafuddin et al., 2024; Gómez-Suárez & Yagüe, 2021). Third, contextual coverage remains uneven; while research has heavily concentrated on tourism and hospitality, emerging service contexts such as halal branding, health and wellness tourism, sustainable city tourism, and digital service platforms remain underexplored despite their strategic relevance for sustainable development (Ahmad et al., 2024; Mostafazadeh et al., 2025; Kálmán et al., 2024). Finally, prior reviews tend to map the field descriptively without proposing an integrated framework that links antecedents, internal mechanisms, outcomes, and contextual moderators of sustainable branding into a unified explanatory structure (El Sheikh et al., 2024; Kristanti, 2017).

In response to these gaps, this study develops a comprehensive and integrative framework for understanding sustainable branding in service marketing by synthesizing the multidimensional antecedents, internal mechanisms, outcomes, and contextual factors identified across the existing literature. Beyond mapping bibliometric trends, the study consolidates fragmented theoretical perspectives into a unified explanatory structure that reflects the experiential and relational nature of services (Bassano et al., 2019; Sharafuddin et al., 2024). To achieve this objective, the study employs a hybrid approach combining a systematic literature review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer, complemented by qualitative thematic analysis using NVivo, applied to 65 peer-reviewed articles published between 2001 and 2025. This research focuses on consumer-oriented services, including hospitality, tourism, banking, education, and digital service sectors (Braun et al., 2013; Shanti & Joshi, 2022; Kristanti, 2017).

In line with these goals, this research is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How is the development of sustainable branding in service marketing reviewed from publication trends, geographical distribution, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks used?

RQ2. Who are the key contributors to this field, including influential studies, journals, authors, institutions, and countries involved?

RQ3. What are the key themes and knowledge structures that make up the intellectual landscape of sustainable branding in service marketing?

RQ4. How can the antecedents, internal mechanisms, outcomes, and contextual factors of sustainable branding be integrated into a unified conceptual framework for service marketing?

RQ5. What future research directions and opportunities emerge for advancing sustainable branding in service marketing using the Theories, Contexts, Characteristics, and Methods (TCCM) framework?

Sustainable Branding in Service Marketing

In service marketing, brand value is shaped not only through communication but also through the experiences customers undergo during the service encounter (Gómez-Suárez & Yagüe, 2021). Sustainable branding therefore extends beyond promotional messaging and must be embedded in operational practices, employee behavior, and the overall service environment (Kristanti, 2017; El Sheikh et al., 2024). When sustainability values are consistently expressed across these dimensions, customers are more likely to perceive the brand as authentic and develop stronger emotional attachments to it (Al-Issa, 2024; Basile & Cavallo, 2020).

The intangible, heterogeneous, and interaction-dependent nature of services makes the implementation of sustainable branding particularly complex (Kristanti, 2017). Variations in service delivery, employee behavior, and customer expectations can lead to inconsistencies between communicated sustainability claims and actual experiences, thereby weakening brand credibility (Shanti & Joshi, 2022; Wiedmann et al., 2011). Consequently, service organizations must ensure that sustainability is consistently integrated across all customer touchpoints in order to preserve trust and reinforce brand equity (Gómez-Suárez & Yagüe, 2021; Rajput et al., 2022).

METHOD

This study applies the systematic literature review (SLR) approach as the main method to systematically review and synthesize previous research. This approach was chosen because it is able to produce a study that is transparent, objective, and replicable through the application of structured research procedures (Pati & Lorusso, 2018; Tranfield et al., 2003). In addition, SLRs are widely used in the field of marketing and management to integrate dispersed research findings and build a more comprehensive understanding (Paul & Criado, 2020). The literature review process in this study refers to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which organizes the stages of article selection into four main phases, namely identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Moher et al., 2010). This approach helps to improve consistency in the selection of literature while minimizing potential bias in the selection process (Donthu et al., 2021). Data collection is carried out through the Scopus and Web of Science databases, which are known to have wide coverage of highly reputable scientific publications in the fields of marketing, management, and other social sciences (Falagas et al., 2008). The literature search process is carried out using a combination of keywords related to the concept of sustainable branding and the context of service marketing, resulting in a collection of relevant initial articles for further analysis The research protocol is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Protocol

Research Protocol	Description
Document type	Scientific articles from Journal
Source	Scopus and Web of Science Databases
Time frame	2001-2025
Search field	Title, abstract & keywords
Language	English
Search terms	TITLE-ABS-KEY (sustainable AND branding AND in AND service AND marketing)
Subject area	Business, Management and Accounting; Economics; Computer Science; Decision Science.
Inclusion criteria	Sustainable Branding in Service Marketing
Exclusion criteria	Studies originating from non-peer reviewed books, book chapters, practical reports, theses/ dissertations, working papers and predatory journals, non-English articles and articles without full text.
Analysis method	Descriptive bibliometric analysis, conceptual mapping and network analysis.

Source(s): Authors' own work (2026)

The bibliometric analysis was conducted to generate a descriptive profile of sustainable branding research in service marketing and to map its intellectual and thematic structure. Using VOSviewer, keyword co-occurrence and co-citation analyses were performed to identify dominant research clusters, influential studies, and the evolution of research trends. A minimum occurrence threshold of five keywords was applied to ensure the inclusion of high-frequency terms for network visualization. Data cleaning procedures, including removal of duplicates and standardization of keywords, were conducted to ensure accuracy and consistency in mapping (Donthu et al., 2021; Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

Identification of sources and search strategy

The identification stage focused on retrieving high-quality and relevant studies related to sustainable branding in service marketing. Two major databases, Scopus and Web of Science, were selected due to their extensive coverage and indexing reliability in the fields of business, management, and social sciences. A Boolean search string adapted from prior systematic literature reviews was applied across titles, abstracts, and keywords to ensure both comprehensiveness and precision (Marzi et al., 2025). The time frame (2001–2025) was chosen to capture the early development and recent evolution of sustainable branding within service marketing contexts. Data cleaning procedures were systematically applied, including removal of duplicates, standardization of keywords (e.g., merging "sustainable branding" and "green branding"), and exclusion of incomplete metadata to ensure consistency in bibliometric mapping (Donthu et al., 2021).

Screening and selection process

A multi-stage screening process was conducted following the PRISMA framework. Initially, a number of records were identified from the selected databases, after which duplicate records were removed. Subsequently, articles not written in English were excluded to maintain consistency in analysis. Non-journal publications such as conference papers, book chapters, and reports were also excluded to ensure methodological rigor and comparability (Kitchenham et al., 2009).

Further screening was conducted through full-text assessment to ensure relevance to the topic of sustainable branding in service marketing. Articles that did not directly address sustainability, branding, or service-related contexts were excluded. The final sample consisted of 65 articles, which is considered adequate for both bibliometric and qualitative analysis as it provides sufficient coverage for network visualization while maintaining depth for thematic interpretation (Donthu et al., 2021).

Data extraction and analysis

Data were extracted using a structured coding framework capturing key information such as authorship, publication year, methodologies, theoretical foundations, and main findings. The analysis followed a two-stage approach.

First, bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer was conducted to map the intellectual structure of sustainable branding research in service marketing through keyword co-occurrence and co-citation networks. A minimum occurrence threshold of five keywords was applied to ensure clarity in visualization and to focus on the most relevant and frequently discussed themes (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

Second, a qualitative thematic analysis using NVivo was performed to identify deeper patterns and thematic structures across the selected studies. The coding process categorized the literature into key thematic dimensions such as sustainability practices, green marketing strategies, place and destination branding, corporate identity, and consumer-related outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research profile on Sustainable Branding in Service Marketing

Publication trends

Figure 2 presents the annual publication trend related to sustainable branding in service marketing from 2001 to 2025. Overall, the number of publications during the early period was relatively low and unstable. Between 2001 and 2010, the volume of articles published each year was very limited, and in some years no publications were recorded at all. This pattern indicates that sustainable branding in the context of service marketing was still in an early stage of development and had not yet become a primary focus of academic research.

A more pronounced expansion occurred after 2020, when publications began to grow more consistently. This growth peaked in 2024 and 2025, recording the highest publication counts of the entire observation period. The surge reflects intensified academic interest in sustainable branding, particularly within the service sector.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that sustainable branding in service marketing has evolved from a relatively limited topic into an increasingly mature and relevant field of research. The recent rise in publications indicates substantial potential for further development from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

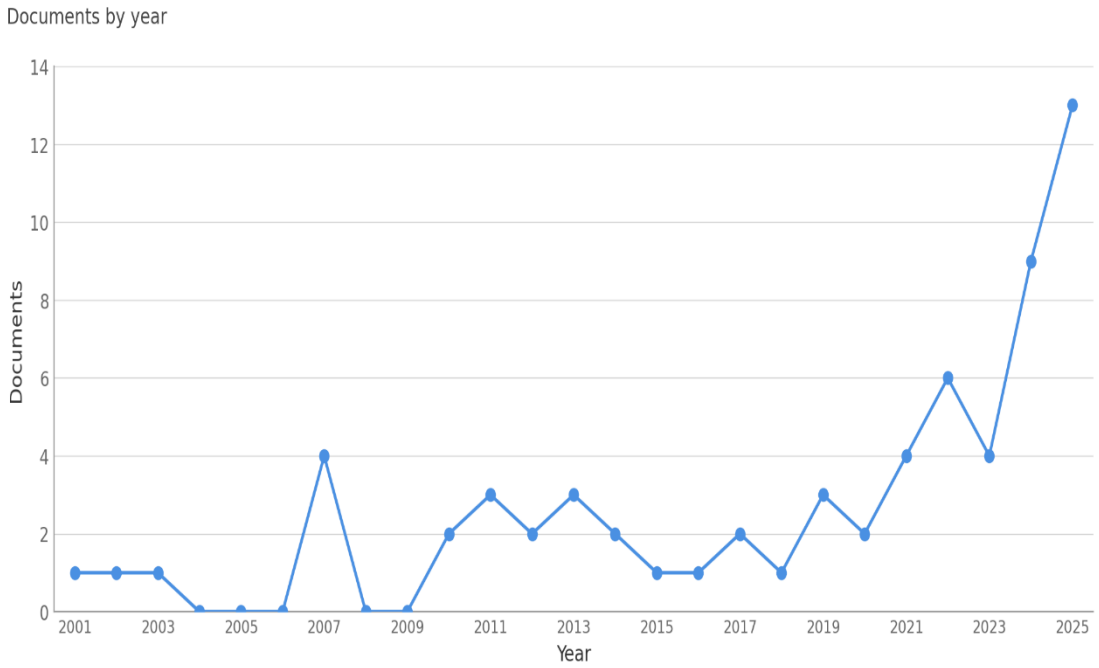


Figure 2. Number of Publication Per Year

Source(s): Authors' own work (2026)

Research methodologies

Research on sustainable branding in service marketing has progressed from exploratory qualitative approaches such as interviews and case studies (Serdane et al., 2020; Sadek et al., 2015; Tasci et al., 2014; Croom et al., 2007) toward more diverse methodological designs. Survey-based research has emerged as the dominant empirical methodology, providing theory-driven and generalizable insights into consumer perceptions and behavior (Wiedmann et al., 2011; Mulcahy et al., 2021; Shanti & Joshi, 2022; Gómez-Suárez & Yagüe, 2021; Andreassen & Lanseng, 2010). The growing adoption of mixed methods reflects the increasing complexity of sustainable branding research, combining qualitative depth with quantitative rigor (Kalogeras et al., 2025; Pazari et al., 2025; Zulu et al., 2021). Overall, the methodological trend indicates a shift from exploratory approaches toward more integrated and theoretically grounded research designs.

Theoretical foundations

The theoretical grounding of sustainable branding in service marketing reflects a strong orientation toward behavioral and communication-based perspectives. Among the identified frameworks, Social Exchange Theory (SET) emerges as the most dominant (20 studies), highlighting the importance of reciprocal value and perceived benefits in shaping consumer responses to sustainable branding practices (Al-Issa, 2024; Alam et al., 2022; Andreassen & Lanseng, 2010). Communication-oriented frameworks, particularly Source Credibility Theory (SCT), are also widely used (15 studies), emphasizing the role of trust, credibility, and message effectiveness in shaping consumer perceptions of sustainability-related branding (An & Oh, 2019; Croom et al., 2007; Sadek et al., 2015). Stakeholder Theory (13 studies) underscores the importance of considering multiple actors and interests in developing and implementing sustainable branding strategies (Tasci et al., 2014; Braun et al., 2013; Kálmán et al., 2024). Other theoretical perspectives appear with lower frequency but provide complementary insights. Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) (3 studies) focuses on consumer engagement with media and content, while Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) and the Resource-Based View (RBV) (2 studies each) emphasize innovation adoption and organizational capabilities in

supporting sustainability initiatives (Surya Diarta & Artini, 2023; Basile & Cavallo, 2020). Similarly, Social Identity Theory (SIT) (2 studies) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (2 studies) contribute to understanding group behavior and intention formation in sustainable consumption contexts (ElNaggar & Hammad, 2024; Pandey, 2019).

Knowledge structure of Sustainable Branding in Service Marketing

Keywords co-occurrence analysis of Sustainable Branding in Service Marketing

Figure 4 illustrates the keyword co-occurrence network in sustainable branding within service marketing. The term "marketing" appears at the core of the network, strongly connected with key concepts such as "sustainability," "branding," and "sustainable development," highlighting the central role of marketing in integrating sustainability into branding practices. Other closely related terms, including "place branding," "brand equity," and "internal branding," further indicate the importance of brand-related constructs within the research landscape. The network reveals several distinct clusters representing different research themes. One cluster emphasizes sustainability-oriented topics, including "sustainability," "tourism," "equity," and "environment," reflecting the integration of environmental and social considerations. Another cluster focuses on tourism and destination-related themes such as "sustainable tourism," "destination branding," "tourism development," and "cultural heritage," suggesting strong links between branding and tourism contexts. In addition, communication and service-related dimensions are represented through keywords such as "service quality," "brand image," and "corporate branding," indicating the role of customer perception and service experience in sustainable branding. The presence of terms such as "environmental protection" and "ecotourism" further reflects the growing emphasis on environmental responsibility.

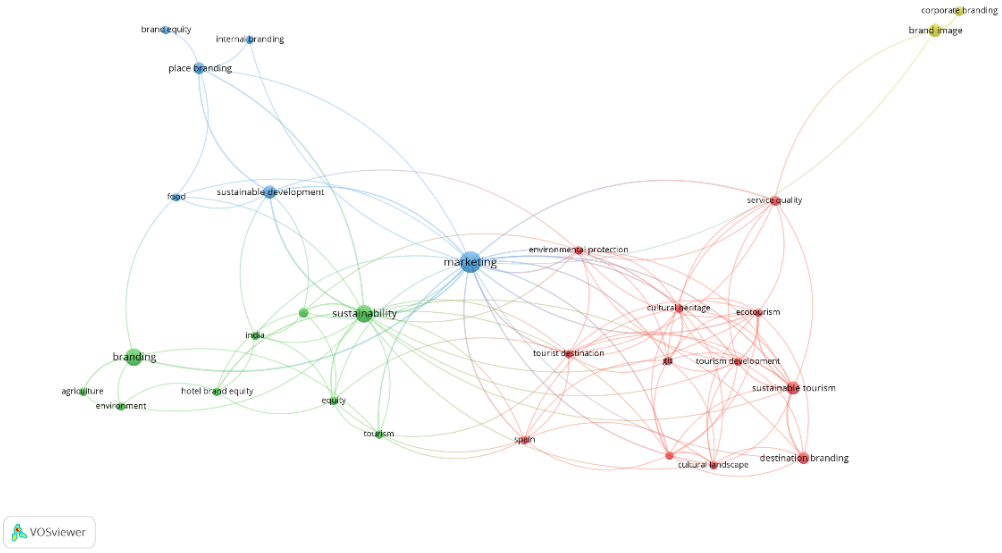


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence analysis.

Source(s): Authors' own work (2025)

Table 9. Thematic clusters of high frequency keywords related to Sustainable Branding

Cluster	Keywords	Issues/Theme	Sample Studies
1 (12 items)	Cultural heritage, cultural landscape,	Sustainable Destination and Cultural Tourism	Basile & Cavallo (2020); Serdane et al.

Cluster	Keywords	Issues/Theme	Sample Studies
	destination branding, ecosystem service, ecotourism, environmental protection, service quality, sustainable tourism, tourism development, tourist destination		(2020); Pazari et al. (2025); Sudarma et al. (2026); Braun et al. (2013)
2 (9 items)	Agriculture, branding, environment, equity, green marketing, hotel brand equity, India, sustainability, tourism	Green Marketing and Sustainability in Services	Shanti & Joshi (2022); Rajput et al. (2022); Moraga et al. (2026); Dudekula et al. (2025)
3 (6 items)	Brand equity, food, internal branding, marketing, place branding, sustainable development	Place Branding and Strategic Service Value	Wiedmann et al. (2011); Askegaard & Kjeldgaard (2007); Lopes et al. (2022); El Sheikh et al. (2024)
4 (2 items)	Brand image, corporate branding	Corporate Identity and Brand Image	Kristanti (2017); Freiburg (2009); Panda (2002); Bhattacharya & Chattopadhyay (2022)

Source(s): Authors' own work (2026)

The analysis of these 65 documents demonstrates that brand sustainability research has evolved from a primarily environmental concept into a comprehensive service marketing strategy that encompasses cultural dimensions, hotel governance, and image innovation.

Integrated Framework of Sustainable Branding in Service Marketing

Building upon the bibliometric mapping, thematic clusters, and temporal analysis presented in Sections 4.1 to 4.3, this section synthesizes the findings into an integrated conceptual framework of sustainable branding in service marketing. The framework was developed through a qualitative thematic analysis using NVivo, which categorized the literature into key dimensions covering antecedents, mediating mechanisms, outcomes, and contextual factors. As illustrated in Figure 6, the synthesis reveals three primary antecedent domains, three central mediating processes, and three major outcome domains, which are integrated within an antecedent–mechanism–outcome structure consistent with established marketing review logic (Donthu et al., 2021; Paul & Cristóbal-Fransi, 2020). The findings demonstrate that sustainable branding in service marketing is a multidimensional and dynamic process shaped by organizational drivers, internal psychological evaluations, and strategic outcomes, further conditioned by contextual moderators and reinforced through a feedback loop.

The integrated framework consolidates the dominant theoretical foundations identified in Section 4.1, namely Social Exchange Theory (SET), Source Credibility Theory (SCT), and Stakeholder Theory, together with the four thematic clusters revealed by keyword co-occurrence analysis: sustainable destination and cultural tourism, green marketing in services, place branding and strategic service value, and corporate identity and brand image. By integrating these elements, the framework positions sustainable branding not as a static

communication tool but as a systemic process linking organizational sustainability commitments with consumer-perceived outcomes (Bassano et al., 2019; El Sheikh et al., 2024).

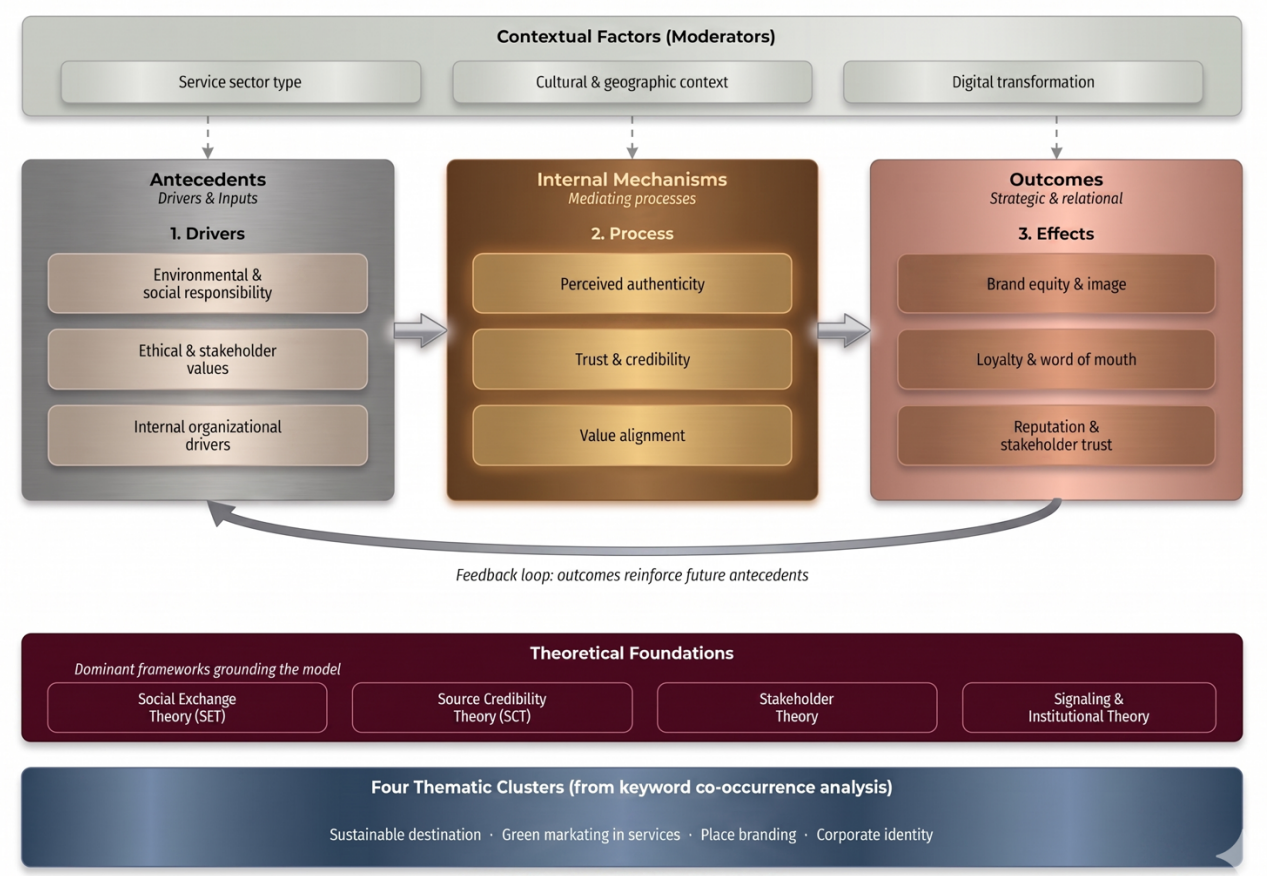


Figure 6. Integrated Framework of Sustainable Branding in Service Marketing

Source(s): Authors' own work (2026)

Multidimensional Antecedents (Drivers and Inputs)

Figure 6 and Table 11 reveal that the integrated framework is initiated by three primary categories of antecedents that collectively drive the adoption of sustainable branding in service contexts: environmental and social responsibility, ethical and stakeholder-oriented values, and internal organizational drivers. These categories extend beyond traditional marketing communication perspectives, reflecting the increasing complexity of service experiences in sustainability-driven and digitally mediated environments.

By integrating antecedents, internal mechanisms, outcomes, contextual moderators, and a dynamic feedback loop, the proposed framework addresses the fragmentation observed in prior sustainable branding research and offers a holistic perspective tailored to service marketing contexts. It also provides a structured conceptual basis for the future research agenda elaborated in the next section, where the TCCM framework is applied to articulate specific theoretical, contextual, characteristic, and methodological directions for advancing sustainable branding scholarship in service environments.

Direction for Future Research

Theoretical directions

Although existing research is predominantly grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), Stakeholder Theory, and Source Credibility Theory (SCT) (Al-Issa, 2024; Tasci et al., 2014; An & Oh, 2019), future studies should expand theoretical perspectives to capture the complexity of sustainable branding in service marketing. First, the integration of the Theory of

Planned Behavior (TPB) can provide deeper insights into how sustainability perceptions influence consumer intentions and behavioral outcomes in service settings. Second, the adoption of Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) is essential for understanding how value co-creation between service providers and customers shapes sustainable brand experiences. Third, Institutional Theory may help explain how external pressures, such as regulations and global sustainability standards, shape organizational branding strategies (Tovmasyan & Gevorgyan, 2024). Furthermore, Signaling Theory can be applied to examine how sustainability claims function as signals of credibility and authenticity, particularly in mitigating consumer skepticism toward greenwashing practices (Wiedmann et al., 2011; Shanti & Joshi, 2022). Integrating these theoretical perspectives will enable a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable branding mechanisms in service environments.

Contextual directions

Current research is heavily concentrated in specific geographical contexts, such as India and Indonesia, and is largely focused on the tourism and hospitality sectors (Shanti & Joshi, 2022; Rajput et al., 2022). Future studies should broaden the scope of investigation across both sectors and contexts. First, there is a need to explore underrepresented service sectors, including higher education, healthcare, banking, and digital platforms, where sustainable branding may operate differently due to varying levels of customer interaction and perceived risk. Second, comparative studies between developed and developing countries are necessary to understand how cultural, economic, and institutional differences influence sustainable branding adoption. In addition, future research should examine high-pressure environmental contexts, such as regions affected by climate change or over-tourism, to clarify how sustainable branding contributes to resilience and recovery. Expanding research into emerging service ecosystems, such as creative industries and digital services, will also yield new insights into sustainability-driven branding strategies.

Methodological Innovations

Methodologically, the field is still dominated by cross-sectional survey designs, which limit the ability to capture dynamic changes in consumer perceptions and behavior over time. Future research should therefore adopt more advanced and diverse methodological approaches. First, longitudinal studies are needed to examine how sustainable branding influences customer loyalty and brand equity over extended periods. Second, experimental designs can be used to test causal relationships between sustainability communication and consumer responses. Third, the use of big data analytics and AI-based sentiment analysis should be expanded to analyze real-time consumer perceptions across digital platforms. This approach can provide deeper insights into how sustainability narratives are constructed and interpreted in online environments. Finally, integrating mixed-method approaches, including qualitative techniques such as interviews and case studies with quantitative analysis, will enhance both theoretical depth and empirical rigor (Donthu et al., 2021; Paul & Criado, 2020).

Discussion

The findings of this systematic literature review provide several insights that align with, and in some cases extend, prior scholarship on sustainable branding. The dominance of Social Exchange Theory, Source Credibility Theory, and Stakeholder Theory across the reviewed studies confirms that consumer responses to sustainable branding are shaped primarily by perceived reciprocity, source trustworthiness, and multi-stakeholder accountability. These results corroborate earlier work emphasizing the relational nature of services (Bassano et al., 2019; Sharafuddin et al., 2024) and reinforce the argument that intangibility and co-creation make trust-building mechanisms central to brand evaluation in service contexts. The

integration of these three theoretical lenses into a single explanatory structure addresses the theoretical fragmentation noted in earlier reviews and provides a more cohesive basis for future empirical investigation.

The thematic clustering revealed by the keyword co-occurrence analysis shows that sustainable branding research has gravitated toward four interconnected domains: sustainable destination and cultural tourism, green marketing in services, place branding and strategic service value, and corporate identity and brand image. The temporal overlay further demonstrates a conceptual evolution from traditional brand-equity constructs toward sustainability-driven and digitally mediated applications. This trajectory aligns with broader shifts in marketing scholarship, where digital transformation, ESG-related disclosure, and stakeholder-oriented value creation have become increasingly central. Importantly, the integrated framework proposed in this study repositions these themes within a single antecedent–mechanism–outcome structure, supplemented by contextual moderators and a feedback loop, thereby moving the field beyond descriptive mapping toward an explanatory and systemic understanding of sustainable branding in service marketing.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that sustainable branding in service marketing has evolved from a relatively peripheral topic into a central pillar of contemporary marketing research, propelled by the growing importance of sustainability, the expansion of service-based economies, and shifting consumer expectations. By integrating findings from a systematic literature review, the study reveals that sustainable branding is not a static or purely communicative concept but a multidimensional and dynamic process shaped by complex interactions among sustainability drivers, organizational practices, and consumer perceptions.

The results confirm that while environmental and social responsibility remain foundational antecedents, the research landscape has broadened to include ethical considerations, internal branding processes, and service experience dynamics. Importantly, the findings highlight that these antecedents activate internal mechanisms such as perceived authenticity, trust, and value alignment, which serve as central drivers in shaping customer responses. These processes ultimately produce a wide range of outcomes, including enhanced brand equity, customer loyalty, and long-term relational value. The inclusion of contextual factors further demonstrates that sustainable branding operates as an adaptive and evolving system, with significant implications for organizational performance and long-term sustainability.

Theoretical Implications

This study advances theoretical understanding by developing an integrative perspective that connects the antecedents, underlying mechanisms, and outcomes of sustainable branding within a unified structure. By synthesizing insights from dominant frameworks such as Social Exchange Theory (SET), Stakeholder Theory, and Source Credibility Theory (SCT), the study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how sustainability-driven branding is formed and reinforced in service contexts.

Practical Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings emphasize that managing sustainable branding requires a proactive, integrated, and value-driven approach. Given the central role of perceived authenticity and trust, service providers must move beyond symbolic communication and ensure consistency between sustainability claims and actual practice. Effective strategies include transparent communication, alignment between internal operations and external messaging, and the delivery of meaningful customer experiences that reflect sustainability

values. Organizations should also strengthen internal branding to ensure that employees consistently represent the brand's sustainability commitment in service interactions. The findings further highlight the importance of leveraging digital platforms to communicate sustainability initiatives, where credibility and transparency play a crucial role in shaping public perception. In addition, firms should actively monitor customer feedback and engagement, recognizing that consumer perceptions of sustainability are continuously formed and reshaped through interaction and experience. Effective sustainable branding should focus not only on image building but also on creating long-term value for both customers and stakeholders, ensuring that sustainability becomes an integral part of the overall service strategy.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that open avenues for future research. The analysis is largely based on literature indexed in major databases, highlighting the need for broader inclusion of studies from diverse contexts, particularly in emerging service markets with different institutional and cultural characteristics. In addition, there is a relative lack of longitudinal research examining the evolution of sustainable branding over time, especially regarding how consumer perceptions and brand relationships develop in the long term. This suggests the need for future studies to adopt longitudinal and experimental designs.

Declarations

Funding. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of Interest. The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Author Contributions. Conceptualization, M.A.M. and D.W.M.; methodology, M.A.M., H.P., and D.W.M.; formal analysis, M.A.M. and H.P.; investigation, M.A.M. and H.P.; data curation, M.A.M.; writing—original draft preparation, M.A.M. and H.P.; writing—review and editing, D.W.M.; visualization, M.A.M.; supervision, D.W.M.; project administration, D.W.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data Availability. The bibliometric data analyzed in this study were derived from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The processed datasets and coding sheets supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Use of Generative AI. The authors used generative AI tools solely for language editing and proofreading purposes during manuscript preparation. All conceptual content, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions are the original work of the authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity of the manuscript.

Acknowledgments. The authors thank the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Klabat, for providing institutional support during the development of this study.

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