



Green Marketing and Eco-Labeling Strategies As An Effort to Build Brand Image And Tourist Loyalty In Eco-Tourism In Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Eco-tourism in Indonesia faces critical challenges regarding environmental degradation, greenwashing, and shifting consumer preferences toward sustainable practices. This study examines the strategic role of green marketing mix and eco-labeling strategies in bolstering brand image and fostering tourist loyalty across key eco-tourism destinations in Indonesia. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework and the Theory of Planned Structural Behavior (TPB), this empirical investigation utilizes a quantitative equation modeling (SEM-PLS) approach. Data were collected from 385 domestic and international eco-tourists visiting certified eco-tourism sites in Indonesia. The empirical findings reveal that green marketing strategies and eco-labeling significantly enhance the destination's brand image, which subsequently acts as a strong mediating mechanism in driving long-term tourist loyalty and repeat visitation. Furthermore, eco-labeling serves as a crucial signal of trust that mitigates perceived environmental risks and greenwashing skepticism among eco-conscious travelers. The theoretical contribution of this research extends the application of green branding literature to emerging market eco-tourism contexts, while the managerial implications provide actionable frameworks for eco-tourism operators, local communities, and policymakers in designing authentic, certified green experiences that balance ecological preservation with financial viability.

Keywords: *Green Marketing, Eco-Labeling, Brand Image, Tourist Loyalty, Eco-Tourism, Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism and ecotourism have evolved from niche trends to central paradigms in the global tourism industry. Increasing ecological awareness among international and domestic tourists is driving fundamental changes in tourism consumption patterns (Chen & Chai, 2010). Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation blessed with the highest biodiversity in the world, has enormous strategic potential

for developing conservation-based ecotourism and empowering local communities (Damanik & Weber, 2006). However, the rapid growth of the tourism sector in Indonesia is often accompanied by significant ecological pressures, such as the accumulation of plastic waste, the clearing of conservation areas, and the destruction of coastal ecosystems and tropical forests (Hakim, 2017). This phenomenon creates a paradox where tourism activities that exploit natural beauty risk damaging their own primary assets if not managed through a sustainability-oriented environmental management and marketing approach (Jamrozy, 2007).

In response to the dynamics of changing consumer behavior, which is increasingly sensitive to environmental issues, green marketing strategies emerge as a holistic approach that integrates environmental stewardship into all marketing activities (Peattie, 2001). Green marketing is not simply an environmentally friendly promotional activity, but encompasses the provision of ecologically based products and services, pricing that reflects the costs of environmental sustainability, distribution channels that minimize carbon footprints, and transparent marketing communications (Polonsky, 2011). In Indonesia's ecotourism sector, the implementation of green marketing is crucial for distinguishing destinations that are truly committed to environmental sustainability from those that only superficially utilize a green narrative (Pakościńska & Szalast-Anasiewicz, 2020). When ecotourism managers consistently implement environmentally friendly products such as limiting the use of single-use plastics, managing renewable energy, and involving local communities positive emotions and value perceptions can be effectively formed among tourists (Han et al., 2009).

One of the most effective technical and operational instruments in supporting green marketing strategies is certification and eco-labeling (Rex & Baumann, 2007). Eco-labeling functions as a signaling mechanism that simplifies complex information about the environmental performance of a product or destination for consumers (Spence, 1973; Tang et al., 2014). In the ecotourism industry, certifications such as Green Globe, EarthCheck, and the Sustainable Tourism Village Certification from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia provide independent third-party verification of a destination's sustainability standards (Font, 2002). Amidst growing consumer skepticism toward false green claims (greenwashing), the existence of a credible eco-label is a determining factor in building consumer trust and reducing the perception of environmental risks felt by potential tourists (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2019).

The integration of green marketing and eco-labeling directly contributes to the formation of the brand image of ecotourism destinations (Keller, 1993). A green brand image is defined as a set of perceptions and associations in consumers' minds related to a brand's commitment and concern for environmental sustainability (Chen, 2010). In Indonesia's highly competitive tourism landscape, a strong, ecologically oriented brand image provides a differentiation advantage (Porter, 1985; Suhartanto et al., 2018). Ecotourism destinations that successfully establish a green image in the minds of tourists are perceived not only as recreational destinations but also as socially and environmentally responsible entities (Bole et al., 2017). This positive image serves as a psychological bridge connecting the stimulation of the destination's physical environment with visitors' affective and cognitive responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

Furthermore, the formation of a solid green brand image has been empirically proven to be a key predictor in creating tourist loyalty (Oliver, 1999). Tourist loyalty—as measured by revisit intention and word-of-mouth recommendation—is key to financial sustainability for ecotourism managers (Yoon &

Uysal, 2005). Tourists who feel alignment between their personal values regarding environmental sustainability (environmental self-identity) and the values offered by ecotourism destinations tend to exhibit a high level of emotional attachment (Van der Werff et al., 2013). This emotional attachment drives the creation of long-term loyalty, where tourists are not easily moved to other destinations even when offered lower prices (Han & Kim, 2010).

Although the urgency of green marketing and eco-labeling has been widely recognized in global literature, their application in the context of emerging markets such as Indonesia still faces significant empirical challenges and theoretical gaps (Tandon et al., 2020). Most previous research on green branding and eco-labeling has focused on the manufacturing and fast-moving consumer goods industries in developed countries (D'Souza et al., 2006; Kamalanabhan et al., 2006). Literature surveys on tourism show that studies that comprehensively integrate the variables of green marketing mix, eco-labeling, brand image, and tourist loyalty into a single, cohesive conceptual model for ecotourism destinations in Indonesia are still very limited (Hasan & Ali, 2015; Pramanik et al., 2021). In addition, there are contradictory findings (empirical gap) where several studies found that eco-label certification does not always have a direct impact on purchasing decisions if it is not balanced with adequate consumer awareness and understanding (Taufique et al., 2017).

From a theoretical perspective, this research is guided by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theoretical framework developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991). Within the context of this model, green marketing and eco-labeling act as external stimuli (Stimulus) that trigger tourists' cognitive processes and internal evaluations (Organism) in the form of the formation of a green brand image and trust. Furthermore, this internal evaluation results in a behavioral response (Response) in the form of tourist loyalty manifested in the intention to revisit and active participation in maintaining the sustainability of the destination (Jeong et al., 2014; Su et al., 2020). Combining these two theories provides a solid conceptual foundation for explaining the complex mechanisms by which green marketing strategies can be transformed into loyal tourist behavior.

The practical urgency of this research is further strengthened by the momentum of the recovery of the Indonesian tourism industry, which increasingly emphasizes the principles of quality tourism over mass tourism (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). The Indonesian government, through various regulations, has encouraged the strengthening of the green economy and the certification of sustainable destinations. However, the operational effectiveness of these policies at the ground level requires scientific evaluation based on empirical data to achieve a balanced economic and ecological impact (Sugiarto & Yoeti, 2019). Without a clear understanding of how tourists perceive green marketing and eco-labeling strategies, investment efforts allocated by destination managers and the government risk being inefficient or even falling into a credibility crisis due to accusations of greenwashing (Laufer, 2003).

Based on the background of the problem, research gaps, and theoretical and practical urgencies that have been described, this study aims to analyze and empirically test the influence of green marketing and eco-labeling strategies on brand image formation and its impact on tourist loyalty at ecotourism destinations in Indonesia. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions in the form of developing an integrative model of green marketing in the tourism sector of developing countries, as well as contributing practical contributions in the form of strategic guidance for ecotourism

managers, local communities, and policymakers in designing environmentally friendly marketing strategies that are credible, highly competitive, and sustainable

METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach with an explanatory correlational design to test the causal relationships between the variables studied. The population in this study was all tourists (domestic and international) who had visited certified ecotourism destinations in Indonesia. The sampling technique used a non-probability sampling method with a purposive sampling approach, where the respondent criteria were determined as tourists aged at least 17 years who had visited Indonesian ecotourism destinations in the last 12 months. The sample size was set at 385 respondents, referring to the minimum sample limit provisions for variance-based structural equation modeling and the Cochran formulation sample calculation (Hair et al., 2021). Primary data collection was conducted online and offline using a structured questionnaire instrument with a 5-point Likert scale format (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The operationalization of variables in this study was developed from a framework of green marketing and sustainable tourism literature that has been tested for validity. The Green Marketing Mix variable is measured through four indicators (Green Product, Green Price, Green Place, and Green Promotion) adapted from Polonsky (2011) and Peattie (2001). The Eco-Labeling Strategy variable is measured based on the Eco-Label Awareness, Eco-Label Trust, and Perceived Credibility indicators referring to Taufique et al. (2017). The Green Brand Image variable is measured through three dimensions (Green Brand Association, Green Brand Reputation, and Green Trust) adapted from Chen (2010). Meanwhile, the dependent variable Tourist Loyalty is measured through the Revisit Intention, Positive Word-of-Mouth (WOM), and Destination Advocacy indicators based on the categorizations of Yoon and Uysal (2005) and Su et al. (2020).

The empirical data analysis in this study was carried out using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique using SmartPLS 4 software. Model evaluation was carried out through two main stages, namely measurement model analysis (Outer Model) and structural model analysis (Inner Model) (Ringle et al., 2020). Outer Model testing includes evaluating convergent validity (Convergent Validity) with Outer Loading values $>0,70$ and Average Variance Extracted/AVE $>0,50$, discriminant validity (Discriminant Validity using HTMT criteria $<0,90$), as well as construct reliability (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha $>0,70$). Next, the Inner Model test tests the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), as well as the significance of the path coefficients through a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples at the significance level $\alpha=5\%$ (p -value $<0,05$) to decide whether to accept or reject the research hypothesis (Hair et al., 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Demographic Profile and Descriptive Analysis

The empirical data were gathered from a total of 385 valid questionnaires completed by domestic and international tourists who had visited certified eco-tourism destinations in Indonesia within the past 12 months. The demographic composition revealed that 54.8% of the respondents were female and

45.2% were male, with the majority belonging to Generation Z and Millennials aged between 18 and 42 years (78.4%). In terms of travel characteristics, 62.3% of respondents visited eco-tourism sites in Java and Bali, while 37.7% visited destinations across Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Nusa Tenggara.

The descriptive statistical analysis indicates that all research variables scored high mean values on a 5-point Likert scale. *Green Marketing Strategy* achieved an average mean score of 4.12, with the highest indicator contribution coming from green promotional transparency. *Eco-Labeling Strategy* recorded a mean score of 3.98, where eco-label credibility and trust played a predominant role. *Green Brand Image* received a mean score of 4.25, demonstrating that tourists strongly associate certified Indonesian eco-tourism sites with environmental preservation. Finally, *Tourist Loyalty* exhibited a mean value of 4.18, reflecting strong revisit intentions and positive word-of-mouth recommendations among environmentally conscious visitors.

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The evaluation of the measurement model was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4 to verify the reliability and validity of the constructs. Convergent validity was established, as all indicators outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (ranging from 0.742 to 0.915). Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all reflective constructs surpassed 0.50 (*Green Marketing* = 0.635, *Eco-Labeling* = 0.612, *Green Brand Image* = 0.688, and *Tourist Loyalty* = 0.704), confirming that the constructs account for more than half of the variance in their respective indicators.

Construct reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values, all of which exceeded the standard cutoff of 0.70. Discriminant validity was rigorously verified using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). All HTMT values between constructs fall well below the conservative threshold of 0.85, confirming that each construct in the theoretical framework represents a distinct conceptual entity.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model) and Hypothesis Testing

To evaluate the structural relationships and test the hypothesized paths, a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was performed at a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). The structural model yielded an R^2 value of 0.592 for *Green Brand Image*, indicating that 59.2% of its variance is explained jointly by *Green Marketing* and *Eco-Labeling*. Additionally, *Tourist Loyalty* achieved an R^2 of 0.648, demonstrating that *Green Brand Image*, together with marketing and eco-labeling strategies, accounts for 64.8% of the variance in tourist loyalty.

Table 1
Structural Model Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
H1	Green Marketing $\rightarrow$ Green Brand Image	0.384	6,412	0.000	Supported
H2	Eco-Labeling $\rightarrow$ Green Brand Image	0.326	5,189	0.000	Supported

H3	Green Brand Image→Tourist Loyalty	0.452	7,821	0.000	Supported
H4	Green Marketing→Tourist Loyalty	0.218	3,456	0.001	Supported
H5	Eco- Labeling→Tourist Loyalty	0.185	2,914	0.004	Supported
H6 (Mediation)	Green Marketing→Green Brand Image→Tourist Loyalty	0.174	4,891	0.000	Supported
H7 (Mediation)	Eco- Labeling→Green Brand Image→Tourist Loyalty	0.147	4.120	0.000	Supported

Source: Primary Data Processed (2026).

As detailed in Table 1, all direct paths demonstrated positive and statistically significant relationships ($p < 0.05$). specifically, *Green Marketing* ($\beta = 0.384, p < 0.001$) and *Eco-Labeling* ($\beta = 0.326, p < 0.001$) exert a significant direct positive influence on *Green Brand Image*, supporting H1 and H2. In turn, *Green Brand Image* strongly predicts *Tourist Loyalty* ($\beta = 0.452, p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Direct paths from *Green Marketing* and *Eco-Labeling* to *Tourist Loyalty* were also significant ($\beta = 0.218$ and $\beta = 0.185$, respectively), validating H4 and H5. Mediation analysis via specific indirect effect tests confirmed that *Green Brand Image* acts as a significant partial mediator for both relationships, thereby supporting H6 and H7.

Discussion

The Impact of Green Marketing on Green Brand Image and Tourist Loyalty

The empirical findings demonstrate that green marketing strategies play a vital role in building a favorable green brand image and encouraging long-term tourist loyalty in Indonesia's eco-tourism sector. These results provide strong empirical validation for the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Jeong et al., 2014). In this context, the green marketing mix acts as an external environmental stimulus (*S*) that shapes tourists' internal cognitive evaluations (*O*) regarding the destination's authentic commitment to ecological sustainability. When eco-tourism operators implement genuine eco-friendly practices—such as waste reduction initiatives, renewable energy use, and community-based conservation programs—tourists perceive the destination as ethically responsible and environmentally trustworthy.

Furthermore, the positive direct relationship between green marketing and tourist loyalty aligns with the principles of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and previous empirical research (Polonsky, 2011; Su et al., 2020). Transparent green promotion and value-based eco-pricing cultivate

positive consumer attitudes and subjective norms regarding sustainable travel. Tourists who experience authentic green operations feel a sense of psychological alignment with their personal environmental values, which directly translates into repeat visitation intentions and enthusiastic word-of-mouth advocacy. This finding challenges past criticisms suggest that green marketing in developing markets is viewed with cynicism; instead, it proves that when executed with operational authenticity, green marketing serves as a powerful driver of brand equity and customer retention (Peattie, 2001; Suhartanto et al., 2018).

The Role of Eco-Labeling Strategies in Mitigating Greenwashing Skepticism

The significant direct effects of eco-labeling strategies on both brand image and tourist loyalty underscore the critical importance of third-party certification mechanisms in sustainable tourism. Grounded in Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973; Tang et al., 2014), eco-labels function as reliable quality signals that reduce information asymmetry between destination management and eco-conscious travelers. In an era where consumers are increasingly wary of superficial green claims (*greenwashing*), verified certifications—such as *EarthCheck*, *Green Globe*, or official sustainable village certifications from Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy provide objective proof of environmental compliance (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Font, 2002).

By displaying recognized eco-labels, destinations reduce perceived environmental risks and instill a higher level of consumer trust (Nguyen et al., 2019; Taufique et al., 2017). The empirical evidence confirms that eco-label awareness directly enhances the destination's green brand reputation. Tourists feel more confident investing their time and financial resources in certified eco-tourism sites, knowing that their travel expenditures directly support certified conservation efforts and local community welfare (Rex & Baumann, 2007). Consequently, eco-labeling is not merely a technical compliance requirement; it is a strategic branding instrument that enhances competitive positioning in the emerging market context (Pramanik et al., 2021).

The Mediating Role of Green Brand Image

A key theoretical contribution of this study lies in confirming the mediating mechanism of *Green Brand Image* between sustainable marketing inputs (*Green Marketing* and *Eco-Labeling*) and behavioral outputs (*Tourist Loyalty*). The specific indirect effect calculations confirm that *Green Brand Image* accounts for a substantial portion of the total effect exerted by green strategies on tourist retention. This finding supports Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity model and Chen's (2010) framework on green brand equity.

In eco-tourism, an abstract commitment to environmental protection must be transformed into a distinct, memorable brand image in the tourist's mind to produce long-term loyalty (Bole et al., 2017; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Green marketing mix elements and certified eco-labels construct the structural foundation of this image. Once a strong green brand image is established, it acts as an emotional bridge that reinforces tourist satisfaction, place attachment, and brand advocacy (Han & Kim, 2010; Van der Werff et al., 2013). Destinations that successfully plant a clear green identity in the market enjoy higher customer resilience, lower price sensitivity, and stronger organic advocacy from their visitors (Oliver, 1999).

Managerial and Policy Implications

From a practical standpoint, the study's conclusions offer actionable guidance for eco-tourism operators, local communities, and government policymakers in Indonesia. First, operators must avoid

superficial green claims and instead align their operational practices with certified environmental standards. Investing in tangible green initiatives such as zero-single-use-plastic policies, local organic food sourcing, and transparent carbon footprint tracking provides the necessary substance behind green marketing campaigns (Hasan & Ali, 2015).

Second, policymakers and industry associations must streamline and promote official eco-labeling accreditation frameworks across regional tourism destinations. Facilitating access to affordable certification for rural and community-based eco-tourism projects (*Desa Wisata*) will elevate their market credibility, protect local ecosystems, and position Indonesia as a premier, high-quality sustainable tourism destination in Asia-Pacific (Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2021; Sugiarto & Yoeti, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully empirically proven that green marketing strategies and the implementation of eco-labeling have a positive and significant effect on the formation of a green brand image and increasing tourist loyalty at ecotourism destinations in Indonesia. The results of the PLS-SEM analysis show that green marketing instruments oriented towards operational transparency and credible environmentally friendly certification act as valuable signals that can erode consumer doubts (greenwashing skepticism) and build trust (green trust). The existence of a strong green brand image is proven to play an important role as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between environmental marketing strategies and tourists' decisions to revisit (revisit intention) and recommend the destination to others (positive word-of-mouth).

Theoretically, this finding extends the integration of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in the sustainable tourism landscape in developing countries (emerging markets). The combination of a green marketing mix and the availability of eco-labels has proven to be an effective external stimulus in shaping tourists' perceptions and emotional evaluations before ultimately expressing loyal behavior. Practically, this study provides managerial implications for ecotourism destination managers and policymakers in Indonesia to invest in official environmentally-based certification, strengthen waste/plastic-free operational standards, and package authentic green communication strategies to encourage the transformation towards quality tourism.

Despite providing significant conceptual and practical contributions, this study has several limitations that need to be considered for future research. Sampling focused on tourists in specific ecotourism destinations may limit the generalizability of the results to the context of general tourism destinations or mass tourism. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the geographic coverage and apply comparative analysis (Multi-Group Analysis) between domestic and international tourists. Furthermore, future researchers can also integrate additional moderating variables such as environmental consciousness or perceived greenwashing risk to deepen their understanding of the dynamics of consumer decisions in the ecotourism industry.

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