INTEGRATING AI AND ESG TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE BRAND LOYALTY: IMPLICATIONS FOR CLIMATE-RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT IN EMERGING MARKETS

MSc. Vu Xuan Truong*

Abstract: ***Climate-resilient development requires not only technological innovation but also behavioral shifts toward sustainable consumption. Grounded in stakeholder theory and green consumer behavior, this study proposes an AI-driven sustainable brand loyalty framework integrating ESG-oriented branding with data analytics to support climate resilience. Addressing a key research gap, the study examines how brands can foster climate-friendly consumer behavior in emerging markets. The model suggests that ESG-aligned brand values enhance green trust, which drives engagement and sustainable brand loyalty, while AI enables effective prediction and personalization of green behaviors. Using Vietnam's smartphone retail sector as an illustrative context, the framework shows how AI-enabled strategies can promote recycling, extend product life cycles, and encourage green choices while strengthening long-term relationships. By positioning brands as agents of sustainable consumption, the study extends climate resilience discourse beyond technological solutions and provides practical implications for policymakers and businesses in emerging markets.***

• Keywords: *artificial intelligence, brand loyalty, ESG, green consumer behavior, climate resilience, emerging markets.*

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1. Introduction

Global development agendas increasingly emphasize climate-resilient pathways that integrate environmental sustainability, technological innovation, and behavioral change amid rising climate risks. While existing discourse focuses on technological solutions such as renewable energy and green infrastructure, growing evidence highlights the decisive role of consumer behavior in shaping climate outcomes (White et al., 2019). Accordingly, brands have emerged as key actors in influencing environmentally responsible consumption.

In emerging markets such as Vietnam, where urbanization and digital transformation are accelerating, the role of brands in promoting sustainable behavior remains underexplored. The convergence of ESG branding, artificial intelligence (AI), and consumer loyalty offers significant potential for advancing climate-resilient development. However, limited research has examined how AI-driven branding can effectively build sustainable brand loyalty aligned with climate goals.

This study develops a conceptual framework integrating stakeholder theory and green consumer behavior to explain how ESG-aligned brand values, supported by AI-enabled personalization, drive sustainable consumption and long-term loyalty. Using Vietnam's smartphone retail sector as an illustrative context, brand loyalty is reconceptualized as a behavioral mechanism contributing to climate resilience.

Specifically, the study aims to propose, empirically test, and contextualize an AI-enhanced ESG branding framework while examining the roles of trust, engagement, and personalization in shaping pro-environmental consumer behavior.

2. Literature review & theoretical foundations

2.1. Brand Loyalty in the context of sustainability

Brand loyalty is a fundamental determinant of marketing success, reflected in both repeat purchase behavior and psychological attachment to a brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In sustainability contexts, loyalty extends beyond transactional dimensions to encompass value congruence, emotional bonds, and shared ethical commitments between consumers and brands (Nguyen et al., 2020). Consumers are more likely to remain loyal to brands perceived as environmentally responsible and authentically committed to sustainability (Chen, 2010; Hur et al., 2013). However, the impact of sustainability values on loyalty remains complex and context-dependent, particularly in emerging markets where

* *Thuongmai University; email: truong.vx@tmu.edu.vn*

green awareness is still evolving.

2.2. Green trust and ESG-oriented branding

Green trust refers to consumers' confidence in the sincerity and performance of a brand's environmental claims (Chen & Chang, 2013). It plays a mediating role between ESG branding and consumer loyalty by reducing skepticism and concerns about greenwashing. The rise of ESG-branded products reflects increasing consumer demand for responsible business practices and corporate engagement in environmental and social issues (Fatemi et al., 2018). Empirical evidence confirms that ESG initiatives enhance trust, brand credibility, and consumer retention (He & Harris, 2020). However, existing models largely overlook the role of data-driven personalization, through which AI can significantly strengthen the effectiveness of ESG-based strategies.

2.3. Artificial intelligence in branding and consumer engagement

Emerging AI models, including machine learning, predictive analytics, and natural language processing, are transforming the customer engagement and brand interaction landscape (Davenport, 2020). AI enables brands to process consumer data, predict consumers' desires, and personalize communication at the moment, leading to increased satisfaction and loyalty (Chatterjee et al., 2022). In sustainability-related contexts, AI could be used, for example, by helping to segment 'green' customers, identify 'climate-aware' consumers, and develop loyalty schemes to reward sustainable behaviors. However, the application of AI in sustainability-oriented branding is embryonic, both in the theoretical and practical sense, especially in digitally immature or ESG infrastructure-deprived markets.

2.4. Theoretical foundations: Stakeholder theory and green consumer behavior

This study draws on stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which posits that firms are responsible not only to shareholders but also to broader stakeholders, including consumers, communities, and the environment. Within this perspective, ESG-oriented branding serves as a strategic approach that embeds environmental stewardship into stakeholder value creation. At the same time, green consumer behavior theory (Peattie, 2010; White et al., 2019) explains the psychological drivers of sustainable consumption, including environmental attitudes, perceived control, and social norms.

Together, these frameworks suggest that when brands credibly signal ESG values and leverage AI-driven personalization to engage consumers, they can build green trust, foster engagement, and cultivate long-term loyalty that supports climate-resilient development.

2.5. Research gap and contribution

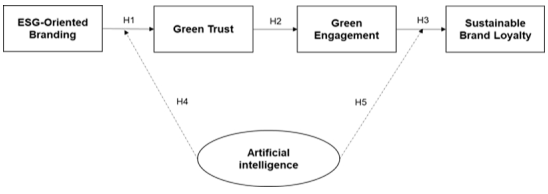
Although prior research acknowledges the growing importance of sustainability in branding and the increasing role of AI in marketing, limited attention has been given to their intersection in shaping brand loyalty for climate adaptation. In particular, the potential of AI-enabled personalization to enhance ESG communication and stimulate green consumer engagement remains underexplored, especially in emerging markets where climate and digitalization challenges co-evolve. This study addresses this gap by integrating ESG branding, green trust, AI analytics, and brand loyalty into a unified framework, offering a new theoretical perspective on how brands can foster behavioral climate resilience.

3. Conceptual framework and propositions

To explain how ESG-oriented branding and artificial intelligence jointly drive sustainable brand loyalty in climate-resilient development, this study proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 1) comprising four core constructs: ESG-oriented brand values, green trust, green consumer engagement, and sustainable brand loyalty.

Artificial intelligence functions as a capability enabler, linking these constructs through personalized, segmented, and predictive consumer engagement approaches.

Figure 1. Proposed framework: AI-Driven Sustainable Brand Loyalty for Climate-Resilient Development



Source: Authors' elaboration based on stakeholder theory and green consumer behavior.

ESG-oriented branding signals a brand's environmental and social responsibility through credible and authentic communication, thereby strengthening green trust by reducing consumer skepticism and reinforcing perceived legitimacy (He & Harris, 2020; Chen & Chang, 2013). In markets where greenwashing may weaken consumer confidence, trust becomes especially important because it shapes whether consumers genuinely believe that a firm is committed to environmental stewardship.

Green trust, in turn, promotes stronger consumer engagement at both the emotional and behavioral levels. When consumers believe a brand's sustainability claims, they are more likely to participate in its green initiatives, support its ecological values, and develop deeper cognitive and emotional attachment to the brand (Suki, 2016). Such engagement then contributes to sustainable brand loyalty, expressed not only through repeat purchases but also through advocacy, resistance to competing offers, and long-term commitment (Hur et al., 2013). In the context of climate resilience, this form of loyalty extends beyond transactional outcomes, as loyal consumers are more likely to adopt and maintain green consumption practices encouraged by the brand in line with sustainable development objectives.

Artificial intelligence can further strengthen this mechanism by enabling personalized consumer experiences, optimized message delivery, and loyalty programs aligned with sustainable behavior (Davenport et al., 2020; Chatterjee et al., 2022). Through AI-driven recommendations, behavioral targeting, and feedback systems, brands can improve the relevance and credibility of ESG communication and reinforce consumer responses to sustainability initiatives. Accordingly, AI is expected to strengthen both the relationship between ESG-oriented branding and green trust, and the relationship between green consumer engagement and sustainable brand loyalty.

H1: ESG-oriented branding positively affects green trust.

H2: Green trust positively affects green consumer engagement.

H3: Green consumer engagement positively affects sustainable brand loyalty.

H4: AI-powered personalization positively moderates the relationship between ESG-oriented branding and green trust.

H5: AI-driven targeting and feedback positively moderate the relationship between green consumer engagement and sustainable brand loyalty.

4. Methodology and research implications

4.1. Research design and data collection

This study employed a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire to collect cross-sectional data from consumers in Vietnam's smartphone retail sector. A total of 420 valid responses were obtained through a mixed-mode approach, combining online distribution via Google Forms and offline intercept surveys at major retail outlets in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang. To enhance representativeness, stratified sampling was applied based on age, gender, and geographic location. Screening questions ensured that all respondents had purchased a smartphone within the past 12 months, with ineligible responses excluded. The combination of online and offline methods helped mitigate digital access bias while capturing diverse consumer perspectives across regions and demographic groups.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents (Summary)

Category	Value	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18 - 24	108	25.71
	25 - 34	167	39.76
	35 - 44	79	18.81
	45+	66	15.71
Gender	Female	205	48.81
	Male	203	48.33
	Other / Prefer not to say	12	2.86
Region	Danang	57	16.33
	Hanoi	152	43.55
	Ho Chi Minh city	140	40.11

Source: Authors' compilation from survey data

To ensure measurement validity, all constructs were adapted from established scales in prior studies. Minor wording adjustments were made to fit the context of Vietnam's smartphone retail sector.

Table 2. Measurement constructs and sources

Construct	No. of items	Source
ESG-oriented branding	3	He & Harris (2020); Fatemi et al. (2018)
Green trust	3	Chen & Chang (2013)
Green engagement	4 items (one item removed during analysis)	Hollebeek et al. (2014)
Sustainable brand loyalty	3	Hur et al. (2013);
AI enablement	4	Chatterjee et al. (2022);

4.2. Measurement model evaluation

Outer loading results show that most indicators exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability (Hair et al., 2021). Items for AI enablement, brand loyalty, ESG branding, and green trust exhibit strong loadings ranging from approximately 0.72 to 0.91, supporting convergent validity and internal consistency. For green engagement, three indicators (GE1, GE2, GE4) meet the acceptable threshold (> 0.70), while GE3 records a lower loading (0.624). Although above the minimum level of 0.60, this value is suboptimal and may weaken AVE and composite reliability. Accordingly, GE3 was removed to improve measurement quality and ensure adequate convergent validity, consistent with PLS-SEM best practices.

Table 3. Outer loadings after measurement refinement

Construct	AI	BL	ESG	GE	GT	AI x GE	AI x ESG
AI1	0.763						
AI2	0.882						
AI3	0.816						
AI4	0.774						
BL1		0.746					
BL2		0.798					
BL3		0.807					
ESG1			0.896				
ESG2			0.833				

Construct	AI	BL	ESG	GE	GT	AI x GE	AI x ESG
ESG3			0.810				
GE1				0.775			
GE2				0.910			
GE4				0.773			
GT1					0.851		
GT2					0.883		
GT3					0.762		
AI x ESG							1.000
AI x GE						1.000	

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS 4.0, n = 420, bootstrap = 5,000 subsamples

To ensure the robustness of the revised measurement model, particularly after excluding GE3, we assessed the reliability and convergent validity of each construct using standard indicators. The summary of these metrics is provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
AI	0.811	0.817	0.888	0.725
BL	0.671	0.680	0.820	0.603
ESG	0.814	0.815	0.889	0.728
GE	0.681	0.685	0.824	0.610
GT	0.735	0.738	0.850	0.653

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS 4.0, n = 420, bootstrap = 5,000 subsamples

To assess internal consistency and convergent validity, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were examined. As reported in Table 4, all constructs demonstrate acceptable reliability and validity. Cronbach's Alpha ranges from 0.671 (BL) to 0.814 (ESG), indicating moderate to strong consistency, with BL remaining acceptable for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2017). Composite reliability values exceed 0.68, confirming satisfactory construct reliability. All AVE values are above the 0.50 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), ranging from 0.603 to 0.728, indicating adequate convergent validity. Overall, the measurement model is robust and suitable for subsequent structural analysis.

4.3. Structural model evaluation

The structural model was assessed using SmartPLS 4.0 with bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples; n = 420). As shown in Table 5, six of seven hypotheses are supported, confirming the robustness of the model.

Table 5. Path Coefficients: Mean, Standard Deviation, t-values, and p-values

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	P values
AI → BL	0.223	0.224	0.043	5.129	0.000
AI → GT	0.139	0.139	0.039	3.577	0.000
AI x ESG → GT	0.098	0.098	0.041	2.406	0.016
AI x GE → BL	0.068	0.072	0.048	1.423	0.155
ESG → GT	0.532	0.532	0.035	14.988	0.000
GE → BL	0.339	0.341	0.047	7.254	0.000
GT → GE	0.410	0.411	0.042	9.719	0.000

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS 4.0, n = 420, bootstrap = 5,000 subsamples

AI enablement has significant positive effects on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.223$, $t = 5.129$, $p < 0.001$) and green trust ($\beta = 0.139$, $t = 3.577$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting its role in enhancing both cognitive and behavioral aspects of sustainable brand perception. ESG-oriented branding also shows a strong impact on green trust ($\beta = 0.532$, $t = 14.988$, $p < 0.001$), reinforcing the importance of value-based positioning. The sequential relationships from green trust to green engagement ($\beta = 0.410$, $t = 9.719$, $p < 0.001$) and from engagement to brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.339$, $t = 7.254$, $p < 0.001$) are supported, indicating the role of engagement in translating trust into loyalty. The interaction between AI and ESG branding significantly enhances green trust ($\beta = 0.098$, $t = 2.406$, $p = 0.016$), whereas the interaction between AI and green engagement on brand loyalty is not significant ($\beta = 0.068$, $t = 1.423$, $p = 0.155$), suggesting context-dependent effects.

Overall, the findings confirm that AI, ESG values, trust, and engagement jointly drive sustainable brand loyalty in the digital era.

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination (R^2) and Effect Size (f^2) Summary

Endogenous Variable	R^2	R^2 Adjusted	Predictor	f^2
GT (Green Trust)	0.301	0.296	ESG	0.403
			AI	0.027
			AI × ESG	0.013
GE (Green Engagement)	0.168	0.166	GT	0.202
BL (Brand Loyalty)	0.221	0.215	GE	0.134
			AI	0.057
			AI × GE	0.007

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS 4.0, n = 420, bootstrap = 5,000 subsamples

The model's explanatory power was assessed using R^2 and adjusted R^2 values. As shown in Table 6, the model explains 30.1% of the variance in Green Trust (GT), 16.8% in Green Engagement (GE), and 22.1% in Brand Loyalty (BL), indicating moderate explanatory power (Hair et al., 2021). Effect size (f^2) results highlight the relative importance of predictors. ESG-oriented branding has a large effect on GT ($f^2 = 0.403$), confirming its central role in trust formation, while the moderating effect of AI on this relationship is small ($f^2 = 0.013$). For GE, green trust shows a moderate effect ($f^2 = 0.202$), reinforcing the trust–engagement link. Brand loyalty is primarily driven by green engagement ($f^2 = 0.134$), followed by AI ($f^2 = 0.057$), whereas the interaction between AI and engagement is negligible ($f^2 = 0.007$).

Overall, the results underscore the importance of ESG branding and green trust in driving engagement and loyalty, alongside the emerging but nuanced role of AI.

4.4. Research implications

The findings provide several theoretical implications for sustainable brand loyalty and technology-enabled green marketing. Firstly, the significant impact of ESG-oriented branding on Green Trust (GT) ($\beta = 0.532$, $p <$

0.001) underscores the central role of sustainability in trust formation. This reinforces stakeholder theory and confirms that consumers expect brands to contribute to environmental and social well-being (White et al., 2019; Kumar & Christodoulopoulou, 2014). Secondly, the sequential path from GT to Green Engagement (GE) ($\beta = 0.410$, $p < 0.001$) and from GE to Brand Loyalty (BL) ($\beta = 0.339$, $p < 0.001$) supports a process-based loyalty mechanism in which trust drives engagement, leading to long-term loyalty. This finding extends prior consumer–brand relationship frameworks in sustainability contexts (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Thirdly, the direct effects of AI on BL ($\beta = 0.223$, $p < 0.001$) and GT ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < 0.001$) highlight its role as both a trust enabler and loyalty driver, rather than merely a technical tool (Davenport et al., 2020). Fourthly, AI significantly moderates the relationship between ESG-oriented branding and green trust ($\beta = 0.098$, $p = 0.016$), although the effect size remains small ($f^2 = 0.013$), indicating that AI enhances trust only when it is meaningfully integrated into ESG communication. In contrast, the moderating effect of AI on the relationship between green engagement and brand loyalty is not statistically significant ($p = 0.155$), suggesting potential limitations in the effectiveness of AI-enhanced engagement. Finally, the model demonstrates moderate explanatory power, explaining 30.1% of the variance in green trust, 16.8% in green engagement, and 22.1% in brand loyalty.

Overall, these findings validate key theoretical relationships and extend loyalty frameworks by incorporating ESG and AI dynamics in sustainable consumer research.

5. Practical and policy implications

5.1. Managerial implications for retail and technology brands

The findings of this study provide meaningful guidance for retail, consumer electronics, and digital ecosystem firms aiming to strengthen sustainable brand loyalty in the context of climate-resilient development. Three strategic areas emerge as particularly relevant:

5.1.1. Embed ESG values into brand DNA

Brand DNA refers to the underlying values, purpose, and behavioral principles that define a brand's identity and long-term positioning. Embedding ESG values into this core requires more than short-term campaigns; it demands an integrated approach whereby sustainability is reflected across operations, product design, supply chains, and brand communications. This authentic alignment fosters *green trust*, a critical enabler of sustainable consumer commitment. For retail and smartphone brands, this may involve sourcing responsibly, adopting circular design practices, and transparently disclosing ESG performance to signal genuine climate concern.

5.1.2. Leverage AI for personalized sustainability engagement

AI-driven tools allow firms to analyze behavioral data to deliver real-time, personalized sustainability experiences. Retailers can classify customers by environmental profiles, recommend low-carbon product options, and incentivize eco-actions such as recycling or using energy-efficient devices. Personalized sustainability messages across platforms increase perceived relevance and reinforce brand-consumer connection. This study confirms that AI enhances both green trust and loyalty, validating the use of AI not just for operational efficiency, but also as a strategic tool in green branding.

5.1.3. Transitioning from transactional to behavioral loyalty

Traditional loyalty programs (often price-driven) are insufficient to drive long-term climate-aligned brand relationships. Instead, brands should nurture behavioral loyalty, incentivizing sustainable behaviors via gamified eco-challenges, digital rewards, and community-based recognition systems. Smartphone brands, for instance, can reward users for extending product life, engaging in take-back programs, or sharing sustainability stories. These experiences transform loyalty into a value-based bond, supporting broader environmental goals.

5.2. Policy implications for climate and branding strategy in Vietnam

This study provides implications for policymakers in developing national branding and environmental governance frameworks that promote sustainable consumption and climate-resilient development.

5.2.1. Integrating green loyalty into national brand strategy

Vietnam's national brand strategy should move beyond export competitiveness to incorporate sustainability as a core identity. Government agencies such as the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MOIT) and the Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) can integrate "green loyalty" mechanisms into initiatives like the Vietnam Value program by encouraging certified sustainable brands to adopt digital loyalty systems that reward climate-friendly behaviors. These mechanisms can function as soft-power tools to strengthen Vietnam's ESG-oriented brand image internationally.

5.2.2. Promoting AI adoption in ESG communications

To support the integration of AI in green marketing, relevant ministries and local agencies should provide regulatory guidance and fiscal incentives (e.g., tax reliefs, digital transformation grants) to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) adopt responsible AI in customer engagement. Public-private partnership platforms could be established to showcase best practices and provide open-source tools that enable AI-enhanced sustainability messaging, aligned with climate resilience goals.

5.2.3. Strengthening data governance and green digital infrastructure

As AI-enabled branding becomes more reliant on consumer data, policy makers must ensure the development of ethical data governance frameworks that protect consumer rights while supporting innovation. In parallel, investments in green digital infrastructure (e.g., energy-efficient data centers, ESG-compliant digital platforms) are needed to reduce the carbon footprint of digital brand ecosystems.

5.2.4. Mobilizing intermediary institutions and associations

Trade associations, green innovation hubs, and ESG-focused industry alliances (e.g., Vietnam Association for Supporting Industries or VCCI's Sustainable Business Council) can play a key role in scaling up the AI × ESG × Loyalty model. These institutions can offer toolkits, conduct training, and certify sustainable loyalty initiatives that align with SDGs, particularly Goal 12 (responsible consumption) and Goal 13 (climate action)

6. Conclusion and future research

6.1. Conclusion

This study contributes to climate-resilient development literature by proposing and empirically validating an AI-driven framework for sustainable brand loyalty. The model integrates ESG-oriented branding, green trust, consumer engagement, and artificial intelligence within stakeholder theory and green consumer behavior. It reframes brand loyalty as a strategic mechanism for fostering pro-environmental behavior in emerging markets. Empirical evidence from Vietnam's smartphone retail sector confirms the model's explanatory and predictive validity. ESG-oriented branding significantly enhances green trust, which subsequently drives engagement and long-term loyalty. Additionally, artificial intelligence emerges as both a direct driver of trust and loyalty and a moderator that strengthens the link between ESG communication and consumer perception, highlighting the synergistic role of sustainability and intelligent technology.

Theoretically, this study extends branding literature by incorporating AI-enabled dynamics into existing loyalty and sustainability frameworks. Practically, it provides actionable insights for firms and policymakers seeking to align branding strategies with climate resilience, ESG priorities, and digital transformation.

6.2. Future research directions

While this study provides a solid foundation, several directions merit further research. Future studies should extend the framework across industries such as fashion, food and beverage, and transportation to improve generalizability. Longitudinal approaches and behavioral data would offer deeper insights into the evolution of green loyalty over time. Further research should also examine consumer perceptions of AI-enabled sustainability, particularly regarding transparency, fairness, and data privacy. Comparative studies across emerging markets with different ESG awareness and digital conditions may reveal context-specific pathways. Incorporating a multistakeholder perspective, including NGOs, digital platforms, and green communities, would further enrich the model.

Overall, as economies move toward climate-resilient development, brands supported by ethical AI play an increasing role in shaping consumer behavior. ESG-driven loyalty, enhanced through personalization, offers a pathway to both competitive advantage and collective resilience, contributing to academic and practical advancements in emerging markets.

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