Understanding Persistence in Sustainable Consumption: An Emotional Branding Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing concern for sustainability, many consumers struggle to maintain sustainable consumption over time. This study examines how emotional branding supports sustained effort in sustainable consumption by integrating Emotional Branding Theory with the Theory of Trying. We propose a simplified dual-route model in which emotional branding influences consumers' willingness to persist through two emotional pathways: a hedonic route that makes sustainable behavior enjoyable and a moral–prosocial route that provides moral meaning and resilience. Survey data from 358 sustainability-oriented consumers in Indonesia were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results show that attitudes toward the process of acting sustainably are the strongest predictor of willingness to try, while attitudes toward success and failure also contribute positively. Both hedonic and moral–prosocial emotions strengthen consumers' intention to continue trying sustainable behavior. The findings highlight that sustained sustainable consumption depends not only on rational evaluation but also on emotional self-regulation. This study contributes to consumer behavior literature by demonstrating how emotional branding moves consumers from initial emotion to sustained effort.

Keywords: Emotional branding; Theory of Trying; Sustainable consumption; Moral emotion; Hedonic emotion

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable consumption has become a central concern in contemporary markets as consumers increasingly recognise the environmental and social consequences of their purchasing decisions (Hayat et al., 2022; Bläse et al., 2024). Issues such as climate change, resource depletion, unethical labour practices, and excessive waste have intensified public scrutiny of consumption patterns, prompting consumers to express greater concern for sustainability-oriented products and practices. As a result, sustainability has shifted from a niche ethical preference to a mainstream expectation shaping consumer decision-making across industries. Firms, policymakers, and civil society actors alike have responded by promoting eco-friendly products, ethical sourcing, and responsible consumption narratives.

Despite this heightened awareness and institutional support, empirical evidence consistently shows that actual sustainable behavior remains fragmented and unstable over time. While many consumers report strong pro-environmental intentions, these intentions frequently fail to translate into consistent and enduring sustainable actions. This phenomenon reflects a well-documented intention–behavior gap, where consumers endorse sustainability in principle but struggle to maintain it in practice. Sharma (2024) argues that this gap cannot be fully explained by

informational deficits alone, as many consumers already possess adequate knowledge of environmental issues and sustainable alternatives. Instead, the persistence problem points to deeper psychological and motivational challenges associated with sustaining effortful behavior over time.

A growing body of research suggests that sustainable consumption is inherently demanding. It often requires consumers to invest additional time, effort, and cognitive resources, accept higher prices, or tolerate inconvenience and uncertainty. These demands increase the likelihood of fatigue, frustration, and disengagement, particularly when sustainable choices do not deliver immediate or visible outcomes. Consequently, sustainable behavior should not be conceptualised as a single decision event, but rather as a process of ongoing effort that unfolds over time. This perspective aligns with emerging sustainability research emphasising that the central challenge lies not in adoption, but in maintenance and perseverance (Elhoushy & Jang, 2023).

However, much of the existing literature on sustainable consumption continues to prioritise cognitive and normative explanations. Studies have extensively examined the roles of social norms, perceived responsibility, moral obligation, and rational cost–benefit evaluation in shaping sustainable intentions and behavior (Pristl et al., 2021; Liu & Li, 2021; Tandon et al., 2023). These approaches have yielded valuable insights into why consumers *intend* to act sustainably, yet they offer limited explanation of how consumers remain motivated when sustainable behavior becomes effortful, imperfect, or emotionally taxing. By focusing predominantly on rational evaluation and normative pressure, prior research tends to underplay the affective and motivational processes that are critical for long-term behavioral continuity.

Recent reviews in consumer and sustainability research highlight this limitation and call for greater attention to emotional regulation and persistence mechanisms (Elhoushy & Jang, 2023). Sustainable consumption often involves repeated exposure to situations where consumers fall short of their ideals, such as forgetting reusable bags, purchasing non-sustainable alternatives due to convenience, or facing budget constraints. In such situations, emotions play a decisive role in shaping whether consumers disengage or continue trying. Emotional responses to success, failure, and effort may therefore determine whether sustainable consumption becomes a sustained lifestyle or a temporary aspiration.

Within this context, emotional branding offers a promising yet underexplored perspective. Emotional branding emphasises the creation of affective bonds between consumers and brands, fostering attachment, identity expression, and long-term engagement (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004; Malär et al., 2011). Rather than appealing solely to functional benefits, emotional branding positions brands as emotionally meaningful partners in consumers' lives. This approach is particularly relevant in sustainability contexts, where consumption choices are often tied to values, self-concept, and moral identity.

Recent studies indicate that emotional branding in sustainability contexts activates both hedonic and moral dimensions of consumer experience. On the one hand, sustainable consumption can generate positive emotions such as enjoyment, satisfaction, and emotional fulfilment, especially when consumers perceive their actions as aligned with their personal values (Ding & Tseng, 2015; Becker & Bernecker, 2023). On the other hand, emotional branding can also evoke moral–

prosocial emotions such as pride, empathy, gratitude, and guilt relief, reinforcing consumers' sense of ethical responsibility and social contribution (Herjanto et al., 2021; Tracy et al., 2023). Ganassali and Ganassali (2025) demonstrate that emotional appeals can enhance consumer social responsibility by engaging emotions rather than relying solely on rational persuasion.

Nevertheless, despite these advances, existing emotional branding research in sustainability contexts remains largely outcome-oriented. Most studies focus on immediate emotional responses, brand attitude, or purchase intention, treating emotions as short-term antecedents rather than as mechanisms that support ongoing effort and perseverance (Pera & Ferrulli, 2024). As a result, the literature lacks a clear theoretical explanation of how emotional branding contributes to the *maintenance* of sustainable behavior over time, particularly when consumers face difficulty, inconvenience, or failure.

To address this gap, the present study integrates Emotional Branding Theory with the Theory of Trying (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1990). The Theory of Trying conceptualises consumer behavior as a goal-directed process characterised by repeated effort, uncertainty, possible failure, and continued striving. Rather than assuming that intention directly leads to behavior, the theory emphasises consumers' evaluative orientations toward success, failure, and the process of trying itself. These evaluative components shape individuals' willingness to continue exerting effort even when outcomes are uncertain or imperfect.

The relevance of the Theory of Trying to sustainable consumption is particularly strong. Sustainable behavior rarely yields immediate or absolute success; instead, it involves gradual progress, partial achievements, and frequent setbacks. Bagozzi (2024) argues that goal-directed behaviors requiring sustained commitment must be understood through motivational and self-regulatory processes rather than static intention models. By applying the Theory of Trying, sustainable consumption can be reframed as a journey of continuous effort, where emotional responses to success, failure, and process play a central role in shaping persistence.

By integrating Emotional Branding Theory with the Theory of Trying, this study offers a novel framework for understanding how emotions function as self-regulatory mechanisms that sustain sustainable consumption over time. Emotional branding provides the affective resources—hedonic enjoyment and moral meaning—that shape consumers' attitudes toward trying, while the Theory of Trying explains how these attitudes translate into sustained intention and effort. Through this integration, the study moves beyond adoption-focused explanations and addresses the critical question of how consumers persist in sustainable behavior despite imperfection and effort demands.

In doing so, this research contributes to the sustainable consumption literature by shifting the analytical focus from intention formation to behavioral perseverance. It also advances emotional branding theory by positioning emotions not merely as drivers of immediate response, but as motivational forces that sustain long-term goal pursuit. Ultimately, this study responds to calls for deeper emotional and motivational explanations of sustainable behavior and offers a theoretically grounded account of how consumers move *from emotion to effort* in their pursuit of sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attitudes toward Trying Sustainable Consumption

According to the Theory of Trying, individuals do not approach goal-directed behavior as a simple intention–action sequence; rather, they evaluate the pursuit of a goal through multiple attitudinal orientations that shape their willingness to exert effort over time (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1990). Central to this framework are attitudes toward success, failure, and the process of trying, which together capture how individuals emotionally and cognitively appraise goal pursuit under conditions of uncertainty. These evaluations are especially relevant for behaviors that require sustained effort and involve a high likelihood of imperfection, such as sustainable consumption.

Attitude toward success reflects individuals' anticipated emotional rewards, self-evaluations, and sense of accomplishment associated with achieving a desired behavioral outcome. In the context of sustainable consumption, success is often framed not as a definitive end state but as incremental progress toward ethical or environmental goals. Positive evaluations of success can generate feelings of pride, self-worth, and moral satisfaction, reinforcing the perceived value of continued effort (Bagozzi, 2024). When consumers expect sustainable behavior to yield emotionally meaningful outcomes—such as contributing to environmental protection or expressing personal values—they are more likely to remain motivated to pursue such behavior despite its demands.

Attitude toward failure, in contrast, captures individuals' emotional responses to setbacks and their willingness to continue striving after unsuccessful attempts. Sustainable consumption frequently involves situations in which consumers fall short of their intentions due to constraints related to convenience, cost, or availability. Negative emotional reactions to failure, such as frustration or guilt, may discourage further effort if failure is interpreted as personal inadequacy. However, when consumers view failure as a natural and acceptable part of the behavioral process, they are more likely to display emotional resilience and persist in their efforts (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1990). Elhoushy and Jang (2023) emphasise that tolerance for imperfection and the ability to recover from setbacks are critical for maintaining sustainable behavior over time, particularly in everyday consumption contexts where ideal choices are not always feasible.

Attitude toward the process of trying refers to the intrinsic enjoyment, satisfaction, or meaningfulness derived from the act of striving itself, independent of ultimate success or failure. This dimension is particularly important in sustainable consumption, where outcomes are often delayed, abstract, or collectively rather than individually experienced. Consumers who find the process of acting sustainably engaging or personally fulfilling are more likely to sustain their efforts because the behavior itself provides emotional rewards. Process-oriented evaluations therefore support persistence by shifting the focus from outcome achievement to experiential value, making sustainable consumption feel worthwhile even in the absence of immediate success (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1990; Bagozzi, 2024).

Taken together, these three attitudinal components shape attitude toward trying, which represents an individual's overall motivational readiness to exert effort toward a goal. In sustainable consumption, where success is incremental and failure is common, positive attitudes toward success, failure, and process jointly contribute to a favourable evaluation of trying itself. Consumers who anticipate emotional rewards from success, tolerate failure as part of learning, and

derive satisfaction from the process are more likely to maintain a positive orientation toward continued effort. Empirical evidence supports this view, showing that emotionally rewarding evaluations and resilience toward setbacks are key predictors of sustained sustainable behavior (Elhoushy & Jang, 2023).

Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H_1 **:** Attitudes toward success, failure, and process positively influence attitude toward trying sustainable consumption.

Emotional Branding as a Dual-Route Mechanism

Emotional branding creates affective connections between consumers and brands that shape how individuals experience, interpret, and evaluate their own behavior (Ghorbanzadeh & Rahehagh, 2021). Through emotionally charged brand narratives, symbols, and values, consumers are encouraged to associate their actions with meaningful emotional experiences. In sustainability contexts, this affective connection plays a particularly important role, as sustainable consumption is often value laden, effortful, and emotionally demanding. Emotional branding therefore functions not merely as a persuasive tool, but as a mechanism that influences how consumers emotionally process their engagement in sustainable behavior over time.

Within this context, emotional branding operates through two complementary emotional routes that support persistence in sustainable consumption. The first is the hedonic affective route, which is grounded in positive emotional experiences such as enjoyment, happiness, and emotional fulfilment derived from acting sustainably. When sustainable behavior is associated with pleasurable emotions, it becomes intrinsically rewarding rather than merely obligatory. Prior research indicates that hedonic experiences enhance subjective well-being and intrinsic motivation, making individuals more willing to invest effort and sustain behavior over time (Ding & Tseng, 2015; Becker & Bernecker, 2023). In sustainable consumption, hedonic emotions can arise from feelings of satisfaction when using eco-friendly products, pride in making aesthetically pleasing green choices, or enjoyment derived from participating in sustainability-oriented lifestyles. By making sustainable action emotionally gratifying, the hedonic affective route reduces the perceived burden of effort and increases the likelihood of continued engagement.

The second pathway is the moral prosocial route, which involves self-conscious moral emotions such as pride, empathy, gratitude, and relief from guilt. These emotions are activated when consumers perceive their behavior as aligned with moral standards, social responsibility, or concern for others (Herjanto et al., 2021; Tracy et al., 2023). Moral emotions serve a self-regulatory function by shaping how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to their values and social expectations. In the context of sustainable consumption, moral prosocial emotions help consumers interpret their actions as ethically meaningful, even when outcomes are partial or imperfect. Feelings of pride reinforce the sense that one is acting in accordance with personal and social values, while empathy and gratitude foster a broader orientation toward collective welfare. At the same time, relief from guilt can reduce the emotional cost associated with occasional failure, allowing consumers to continue trying rather than disengage.

Importantly, the moral prosocial route frames sustainable consumption as an ongoing moral journey rather than a performance task with clear success or failure benchmarks. This framing is critical because sustainable behavior rarely allows for complete or immediate success. When consumers understand sustainability as a process of continual improvement rather than flawless execution, moral emotions provide emotional resilience that supports persistence. In this way, emotional branding does not simply motivate initial engagement, but also helps consumers maintain commitment when facing obstacles, trade-offs, or setbacks.

Rather than introducing multiple moderating relationships, this study adopts a simplified explanatory mechanism in which emotional branding strengthens the motivational link between consumers' evaluation of trying and their intention to continue sustainable consumption. By integrating hedonic enjoyment and moral meaning into the experience of sustainable action, emotional branding enhances emotional self-regulation and supports sustained effort over time.

H_2 : Hedonic–affective and moral–prosocial emotional routes strengthen the relationship between attitude toward trying and intention to try sustainable consumption.

Intention to Try and Behavioral Reinforcement

Attitude toward trying reflects consumers' motivational readiness to exert effort in pursuit of a desired goal and represents a central construct within the Theory of Trying (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1990). Rather than capturing a simple evaluative judgment, attitude toward trying encompasses individuals' overall orientation toward engaging in effortful behavior, including their willingness to invest time, energy, and persistence despite uncertainty. In contexts such as sustainable consumption, where behavioral outcomes are rarely immediate or guaranteed, this motivational readiness plays a crucial role in determining whether consumers continue striving or disengage.

Within the Theory of Trying framework, attitude toward trying functions as a proximal determinant of intention. Individuals who evaluate the act of trying positively are more likely to form a strong intention to continue pursuing the goal, even when the likelihood of success is uncertain or when repeated effort is required (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1990). In sustainable consumption, a favorable attitude toward trying reflects a consumer's acceptance of sustainability as an ongoing process rather than a one-time achievement. This orientation encourages continued engagement by emphasizing effort and learning over flawless outcomes.

Beyond attitudinal evaluation, prior behavioral experience further shapes consumers' intention to continue goal pursuit. Behavioral research indicates that past experience strengthens future intention by increasing familiarity with the behavior, enhancing perceived self-efficacy, and reinforcing beliefs about behavioral feasibility (Kormos & Gifford, 2014). Consumers who have previously engaged in sustainable behavior are more likely to perceive such actions as manageable and personally relevant, reducing psychological barriers associated with effort and uncertainty.

Frequency and recency of past behavior are particularly important in this regard. Repeated engagement reinforces behavioral routines and strengthens confidence in one's ability to act sustainably, while recent experience maintains the salience of sustainability goals and keeps related attitudes accessible (Dantes et al., 2022). Together, these factors create a self-reinforcing

mechanism in which past effort increases the likelihood of continued effort, thereby supporting sustained sustainable consumption over time.

Accordingly, this study proposes that both motivational readiness and behavioral reinforcement play a critical role in shaping consumers' intention to continue trying sustainable consumption.

H_3 : Attitude toward trying positively influences intention to try sustainable consumption.

H_4 Past sustainable behavior positively influences intention to try sustainable consumption.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to empirically examine the proposed relationships among emotional branding, attitudes toward trying, and sustained sustainable consumption behavior. A cross-sectional approach was deemed appropriate because the primary objective of the study was to test theoretically grounded associations between latent psychological constructs rather than to observe behavioral change over time. The empirical setting focused on consumers in Indonesia, a context characterised by increasing exposure to sustainability discourse alongside persistent challenges in translating intention into consistent behavior.

Data were collected from 358 adult consumers who reported prior experience with sustainability-oriented products or practices, such as eco-friendly, reusable, ethically sourced, or environmentally responsible goods. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that participants possessed sufficient familiarity with sustainable consumption, thereby enabling meaningful evaluation of the constructs under investigation. The final sample size exceeded the minimum requirements for structural equation modeling and was considered adequate to ensure statistical power and model stability.

All study constructs were operationalised using multi-item measurement scales adapted from well-established and validated sources in the consumer behavior and emotional branding literature. Attitudinal constructs related to trying were adapted from the Theory of Trying framework developed by Bagozzi and Warshaw (1990), capturing consumers' evaluations of effortful goal pursuit. Emotional branding dimensions were measured using items drawn from prior work on emotional brand attachment and affective brand experiences (Malär et al., 2011), as well as recent sustainability-oriented emotional consumption research (Pera & Ferrulli, 2024). To ensure contextual relevance, all items were slightly modified to reflect sustainable consumption settings while preserving their original conceptual meaning. Responses were recorded on five-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. This approach was selected because it is well suited for theory development, complex models with multiple latent constructs, and predictive research objectives. The analysis followed a two-stage procedure. First, the measurement model was assessed to evaluate internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, while convergent validity was assessed through average variance extracted values. All

constructs met or exceeded the recommended thresholds for reliability and validity, confirming the adequacy of the measurement model (Hair et al., 2021).

In the second stage, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesised relationships among constructs. Path coefficients, coefficients of determination, and significance levels were assessed using a bootstrapping procedure. This analytical strategy ensured a rigorous examination of the proposed model while maintaining alignment with contemporary methodological standards in consumer behavior and sustainability research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive Statistics and Interpretation

The descriptive statistics reveal generally high mean values across all key constructs, indicating that respondents held favourable evaluations of sustainable consumption and its associated emotional and motivational dimensions. This pattern suggests that the sample consisted of individuals who were not only aware of sustainability issues but also positively oriented toward engaging in sustainable practices. High mean values for intention-related constructs further indicate a strong predisposition toward continued engagement in sustainable consumption.

Among the attitudinal dimensions, attitude toward process exhibited the highest mean score. This finding implies that respondents tended to value the experience of trying to act sustainably and derived satisfaction from the effort itself, rather than focusing solely on final outcomes. Such a pattern is particularly meaningful in sustainability contexts, where behavioral outcomes are often incremental, delayed, or difficult to observe. A strong process orientation suggests that respondents were motivated by the experiential and intrinsic aspects of sustainable behavior, which may reduce the likelihood of disengagement when immediate success is not achieved.

Similarly, the relatively high mean values observed for the moral prosocial and hedonic affective emotional routes indicate that sustainability was experienced as both emotionally rewarding and morally meaningful. Respondents reported positive emotional reactions associated with acting sustainably, as well as feelings related to moral alignment and social responsibility. This dual emotional engagement suggests that sustainable consumption was not perceived merely as an obligation, but as an activity that provides both emotional gratification and moral affirmation. These descriptive patterns are consistent with prior research highlighting the role of emotional engagement in sustaining pro-environmental behavior over time (Elhoushy & Jang, 2023).

Structural Results and Hypotheses Testing

The structural model results provide strong support for the proposed hypotheses and the underlying theoretical framework. First, attitudes toward success, failure, and process were found to have significant positive effects on attitude toward trying, thereby supporting H1. This finding confirms the central premise of the Theory of Trying, which posits that individuals' evaluations of success, tolerance for failure, and enjoyment of the process collectively shape their motivational readiness to exert effort (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1990).

Among these antecedents, attitude toward process emerged as the strongest predictor of attitude toward trying. This result underscores the importance of enjoyment and engagement in sustaining effortful behavior, particularly in contexts such as sustainable consumption where outcomes are uncertain and effort must be repeated. When consumers find the process of acting sustainably meaningful or satisfying, they are more likely to maintain a positive orientation toward continued effort. This finding extends prior sustainability research by demonstrating that intrinsic process-related evaluations may play a more decisive role in persistence than outcome-focused considerations alone.

Second, emotional branding was found to significantly strengthen the relationship between attitude toward trying and intention to try, providing support for H2. This result indicates that emotional branding enhances motivational persistence by enriching the emotional experience associated with trying sustainable behavior. Both hedonic enjoyment and moral meaning appear to reinforce consumers' willingness to continue striving, even when sustainable behavior involves effort or inconvenience. This finding aligns with emotional branding literature, which emphasises the role of affective brand connections in fostering long-term engagement and commitment (Malär et al., 2011; Ganassali & Ganassali, 2025).

Third, attitude toward trying exerted a strong positive effect on intention to try, supporting H3. This relationship confirms the theoretical proposition that motivational readiness to exert effort is a key antecedent of intention in goal-directed behavior (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1990). In sustainable consumption contexts, a positive attitude toward trying reflects acceptance of sustainability as an ongoing process, thereby increasing the likelihood of continued intention despite uncertainty or imperfection.

Finally, past sustainable behavior was found to positively influence intention to try, supporting H4. This result suggests that prior experience reinforces future intention by increasing familiarity, confidence, and perceived feasibility of sustainable action. Consumers who have previously engaged in sustainable behavior are more likely to view such behavior as manageable and personally relevant, thereby strengthening their intention to continue. This finding is consistent with prior evidence on behavioral reinforcement and self-efficacy in pro-environmental contexts (Kormos & Gifford, 2014).

Overall, the structural results validate the proposed integrated framework that combines Emotional Branding Theory with the Theory of Trying. The findings demonstrate that sustained sustainable consumption is shaped by a combination of attitudinal evaluations, emotional reinforcement, and behavioral experience. By highlighting the central role of process enjoyment, emotional engagement, and past behavior, this study advances understanding of how consumers move from favorable evaluations to sustained effort in sustainable consumption.

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