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HOW THE LEVEL OF EDUCATION IMPACTS CONSUMERS WITH GREEN TRUST: AUTHENTICITY AND PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS ON FIRE PRODUCTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how brand authenticity, physical attractiveness, and green trust, depending on the level of education, influence consumer purchase decisions at Fore Coffee. The study employs a causal-comparative research approach, incorporating structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. We used purposive sampling as the sampling technique. This resulted in a sample size of 100 respondents. The study collected primary data by distributing an online questionnaire via Google Forms to respondents who met the study's criteria. The findings of the research indicate that the level of education and brand authenticity significantly influence both green trust and purchase decisions. Additionally, the physical attractiveness of the product impacts purchase decisions through the lens of green trust. The study concludes that the values of authenticity, the physical attractiveness of the product, and the consistency of transparent sustainability claims shape purchase decisions, with levels of education and green trust playing a crucial role.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fore is a coffee startup that focuses on environmental sustainability. Fore Coffee is an abbreviation of the word "forest," which means wood or jungle. We chose this name with the hope that the coffee shop will grow rapidly and strongly, bringing life to its surroundings, much like the characteristics of a forest. The company believes that the Fore coffee shop has the potential to develop quickly and robustly (Prayoga & Yasa, 2023). Fore's concept is highly innovative, showcasing three core values: futurism, environmental friendliness, and superior quality (Masdakaty, 2019).

Eco-friendliness is the main concept of Fore, which means the company uses materials that are environmentally friendly and do not harm the surrounding environment (Raziq, 2024). Fore Coffee aims to make a positive impact on nature and embraces the concept of FOREnvironment, FOREcosystem, and FOREarth—meaning

"from the earth, for the earth." Fore implements a green marketing strategy by using eco-friendly materials, as environmentally friendly products are increasingly appealing to customers and raise awareness about environmental issues (Ramadhani & Ariyanti, 2024; Ismail & Aldiansyah, 2024).

Fore's eco-friendly concept is evident in the packaging and cups they use (Rahmawati & Dermawan, 2024). Fore Coffee recycles all its drink packaging into useful items like plant pots or pencil holders. Fore Coffee's slogan, "From the Earth, For the Earth," aligns with the environmentally friendly and decomposable nature of its packaging, whether it's paper or plastic cups, enabling recycling to prevent pollution that harms the soil and environment (Saputra & Ariani, 2024).

In 2020, Fore's index started at 5.1%, followed by a significant increase in 2021, reaching 6.4%. This growth continued into 2022, albeit slightly, with the index reaching 6.5%. The peak growth occurred in 2023, where the Fore index reached 7.5%, indicating that the brand was becoming more popular and stronger in the coffee shop market. However, in 2024, the index saw a slight decrease to 6.9%, although this figure was still higher than at the start of the period in 2020. According to the data obtained, Fore ranked fourth as a favorite local coffee shop with 21%, supported by a graph showing a decline in Fore Coffee's percentage in 2024 at 6.9%. Several factors contribute to the decline in the Fore brand index. According to research by Morhart et al. (2015), brand authenticity significantly influences consumer perceptions of sustainability values embraced by a brand. Consumers tend to lose trust when a brand appears more focused on commercial expansion rather than maintaining the authentic values that underpin it (Napoli et al., 2014; Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018; Safeer & Liu, 2023). Furthermore, research by Kim and Lee (2020) demonstrated that the physical appeal of a product, including packaging design and functionality, contributes to consumer perceptions of quality and loyalty. Additionally, green trust acts as an intervening variable that bridges the influence of brand authenticity and physical appeal on consumer decision-making (Chen, 2010; Ha et al., 2022; Dangaiso, 2024). The absence of transparency and tangible evidence in sustainability claims can erode green trust (Garg, 2015). These studies emphasize that the success of green marketing strategies depends not only on sustainability implementation but also on consistent efforts to strengthen consumer trust in sustainability values.

Additionally, the composition of the education level influences customer satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2013; Mırzagolı & Memarıan, 2015). Consumers officially recognize education as their final level of education. The higher a person's level of education, the higher their desires and expectations. Higher-educated consumers tend to have more complex needs due to their increased knowledge (Engelbertink & Van Hullebusch, 2013; Feng et al., 2021). Therefore, they require more comprehensive and high-quality services to ensure their satisfaction. Furthermore, an individual's level of education and experience directly influences their perceptions. A person's level of education will affect the values they embrace, their way of thinking, their perspective, their opinions, and even their perceptions of a product (Ozuem et al., 2021; Reddy et al., 2023). Knowledge

is the outcome of human perception, which encompasses not only knowledge but also the ability to comprehend, apply, analyze, summarize, and evaluate a specific object.

Therefore, based on several concepts, the purpose of this research is to analyze how brand authenticity, physical attractiveness, and green trust, depending on the level of education, influence consumer purchase decisions.

2. METHOD

This study explores causal relationships, often referred to as a causal-comparative study. This research identifies independent variables, which are the influencing factors, and dependent variables, which are the factors under influence. The researcher employs purposive sampling as the sampling technique, selecting potential respondents based on pre-established criteria. The researcher chose this method to ensure the study aligns with specific criteria based on respondent characteristics, specifically targeting Fore customers from various educational backgrounds in Makassar who have made a minimum of five purchases at Fore coffee shops. This resulted in a sample size of 100 respondents. We collected the primary data for this study by distributing an online questionnaire via Google Forms to respondents who met the study's criteria. This research measures all variables using a Likert scale. This scale has five response levels: a score of 5 for strongly agree, a score of 4 for agree, a score of 3 for neutral, a score of 2 for disagreement, and a score of 1 for strongly disagreement.

The Smart-PLS software assists in performing inferential statistical analysis in this study using structural equation modeling (SEM). We conduct validity and reliability tests for each statement item associated with the examined variables prior to the analysis. Following the completion of the data analysis, we discuss the results and draw conclusions based on the analysis findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In the model evaluation process, this study employs convergent validity analysis using the structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. This analysis compares the actual factor loadings with the standard factor loadings. An indicator is considered to meet the criteria for convergent validity if its outer loading exceeds 0.70.

Next, we assess discriminant validity using the average variance extracted (AVE) method, requiring each indicator to have an AVE value greater than 0.5 for validity. Additionally, if the composite reliability value exceeds 0.70, we categorize a variable as meeting composite reliability. Finally, Cronbach's Alpha value determines a variable's reliability, with a value exceeding 0.70 considered adequate (Forero, 2024).

These tests are essential in determining whether the model and its measurements are valid and reliable, ensuring that the results of the study accurately reflect the relationships between the variables involved as presented in Figure 1 below.

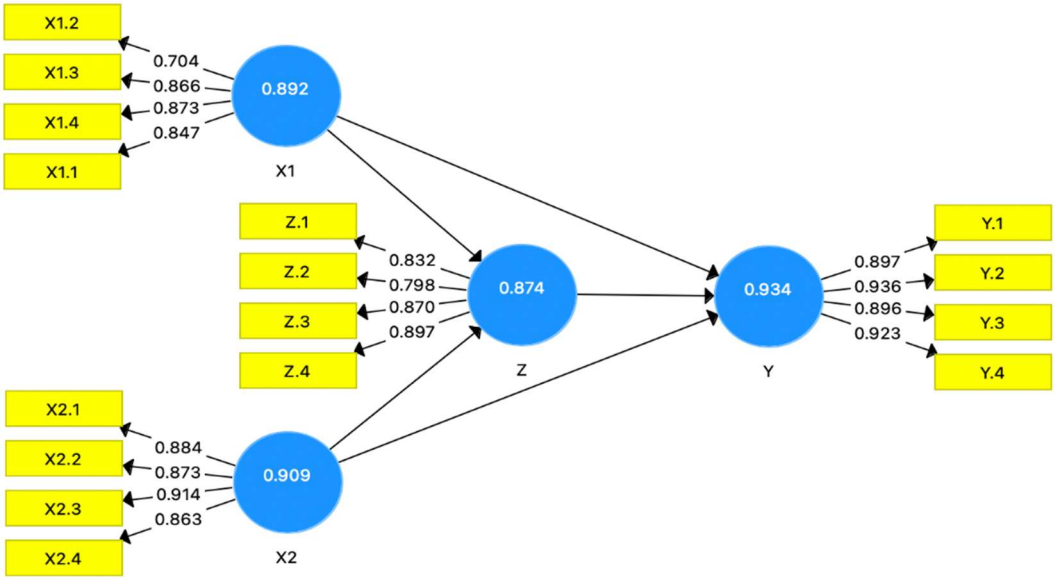

Figure 1. Outer Model

Figure 1 displays the results of the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis. The loading factor values for all variables are greater than 0.70, which means that each indicator makes a big difference to its own construct. We applied the average variance extracted (AVE) method to assess discriminant validity. Each indicator is considered valid if its AVE value exceeds 0.5. This validity indicates that the variables are capable of explaining more than half of the variance in their respective indicators. Moreover, we evaluated the variables' reliability using the composite reliability, classifying a variable as reliable if its composite reliability surpasses 0.70. Additionally, we employed Cronbach's Alpha to measure internal consistency, classifying a variable as reliable if its Cronbach's Alpha value exceeds 0.70. The test results validate the model's strong validity and reliability, guaranteeing the analysis's robustness and the accuracy of the tested relationships. Table 1 below presents the results of discriminant validity using the average variance extracted (AVE) method.

Table 1. Discriminant Validity Using AVE Method

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Authenticity	0.852	0.895	0.681
Physical Attractiveness	0.906	0.934	0.781
Green Trust	0.933	0.953	0.834
Purchase Decision (Level Education)	0.871	0.912	0.722

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables in Table 2 are greater than 0.5, which means that the model is convergent. The variables are authenticity, physical attractiveness, purchase decision (level of education), and green trust. Furthermore, the data also show that the composite reliability values for all variables are greater than 0.7, suggesting excellent internal consistency. Additionally, the

Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables are also above 0.7, further reinforcing the reliability of the constructs.

Subsequently, the model evaluation is conducted using the coefficient of determination (R^2), the goodness of fit test, and hypothesis testing (direct effect and indirect effect). SmartPLS performs bootstrapping tests to evaluate the inner model. Gramatica (2007); Aguirre-Urreta & Rönkkö (2018) suggests paralleling the inner model testing with the bootstrapping method to produce more accurate estimates. The visualization in Figure 2 below displays the results of this bootstrapping process.

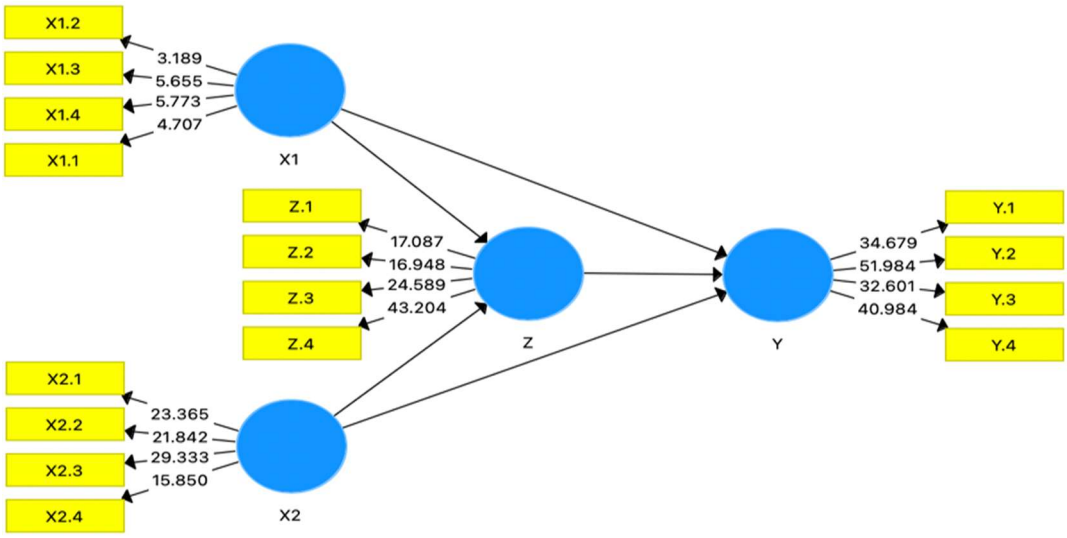

Figure 2. Outer Model

We use the coefficient of determination (R-squared) to measure the influence of other variables on the dependent variable. The R2 value for the influence of the authenticity and physical attractiveness variables on the purchase decision is 0.687, which is considered good value. Next, we use R2 to assess the impact of authenticity and physical attractiveness on green trust, finding a weak value of 0.303.

The Q-square value determines the assessment of goodness of fitness. The Q-square value is conceptually like the coefficient of determination (R-squared) in regression analysis, where the higher the Q-square, the better the model fits the data. The calculation results for the Q-square are as follows:

Q Square =1-(1-R2 1) x (1 - R2 2)
=1-(1-0,687) x (1-0,303)
=1-(0.313×0.697)
=1-0.218161
=0.78

Based on the calculations above, the Q-square value obtained is 0.78, or 78%. This indicates that the research model can explain 78% of the variance in the research data, with factors outside the scope of this study accounting for the remaining 22%. We conducted the hypothesis testing for the direct and indirect effects. In this analysis, the t-statistic values obtained serve as the basis for determining the significance of

relationships. If the t-statistic value reaches or exceeds 1.96 (according to TINV's 0.05, the t-table value for a 5% significance level), the effect is considered significant. Tables 2 and 3 below present the results of the Hasil analysis's Direct Effect Testing and Mediation Testing.

Table 2. Direct Effect Testing

Variable Relationship	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Authenticity -> Purchase Decision (level education)	0.175	0.178	0.055	3.182	0.002
Authenticity -> Green Trust	0.280	0.29	0.090	3.111	0.004
Physical Attractiveness -> Purchase Decision (level education)	0.120	0.122	0.060	2.300	0.045
Physical Attractiveness -> Green Trust	0.310	0.305	0.115	2.696	0.009
Green Trust -> Purchase Decision (level education)	0.814	0.812	0.053	15.378	0.000

Table 3. Mediation Testing

Variable Relationship	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Authenticity -> Green Trust -> Purchase Decision (level education)	0.180	0.198	0.09	2.111	0.035
Physical Attractiveness -> Green Trust -> Purchase Decision (level education)	0.221	0.243	0.08	3.456	0.001

Discussion

Authenticity has a significant effect on a purchase decision, with a t-statistic value of 3.182 (greater than the critical value of 1.96) and a p-value of 0.002 (less than 0.05). Brands perceived as authentic, like Fore Coffee, have successfully cultivated an emotional connection with their customers, thereby increasing consumer motivation to purchase their products. This authenticity fosters trust and loyalty, in line with the theories of Napoli et al. (2014). In a competitive market, authenticity provides an important differentiation value (Majeed et al., 2022). When consumers associate a brand with authentic values, they tend to be more loyal and emotionally engaged. Fore Coffee's marketing strategy, which highlights its unique identity, such as its sustainability and innovation concepts, plays a strategic role in strengthening consumer purchase decisions.

The analysis shows that authenticity has a significant effect on green trust, with a t-statistic value of 3.111 (greater than the critical value of 1.96) and a p-value of 0.004 (less than 0.05). Consumers who associate Fore Coffee with sustainability values exhibit a high level of trust in the brand's products and practices. However, failure to maintain consistency in applying sustainability values or transparency in claims may weaken green trust, as demonstrated by Fore's index decline in 2024. Nekmahmud et al.'s (2022)

research bolsters these findings by demonstrating the potential of social media to enhance the perception of brand authenticity. Research has proven that effective communication about authentic values enhances green trust, thereby positively impacting green product purchase decisions. Additionally, Morhart et al. (2015) revealed that consumers respond positively to brands that reflect sustainability values through transparent production processes and commitment to environmental issues, which ultimately strengthens consumer loyalty.

Physical attractiveness has a significant effect on purchase decisions, with a t-statistic value of 2.300 (greater than the critical value of 1.96) and a p-value of 0.045 (less than 0.05). Fore Coffee's packaging, designed with high aesthetics, environmental friendliness, and multifunctionality, attracts consumer attention, strengthens the brand's quality perception, and enhances purchase decisions. Reimann et al. (2010) support this finding by showing that the physical attractiveness of a product creates emotional involvement with consumers, which influences preferences and purchase decisions. Furthermore, Hu et al. (2022) discovered that consumers often use aesthetics as a quality indicator, especially in competitive markets. Fore Coffee's futuristic design, supporting sustainability, also adds to the visual appeal, further encouraging purchase.

The analysis shows that physical attractiveness has a significant effect on green trust, with a t-statistic value of 2.696 (greater than the critical value of 1.96) and a p-value of 0.009 (less than 0.05). Fore Coffee's packaging design and visual elements not only attract consumer attention but also reinforce the perception that the product aligns with sustainability values. The research by Kim and Lee (2020) supports this finding by showing that visually attractive product designs play a crucial role in building consumer trust in environmental values. Fore's multifunctional packaging, which doubles as a plant pot, not only creates a pleasant visual experience but also reinforces sustainability claims. Ding et al. (2024) emphasize that the aesthetics of eco-friendly products not only enhance consumer appeal but also their trust in sustainability claims.

Green Trust has a significant effect on the purchase decision (level of education), with a t-statistic value of 15.378 (greater than the critical value of 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05). The level of education for consumers' trust in sustainability claims plays an important role in driving purchase decisions (level education). Consumers who feel that the brand's products and practices are consistent with sustainability values tend to be more loyal and motivated to purchase. Fore Coffee's sustainability initiatives, such as the use of recyclable packaging and the slogan "From Earth to Earth," strengthen consumer green trust. According to Alyahia et al. (2024), transparent communication and consistent eco-friendly practices often build green trust. Moreover, green trust becomes a crucial factor in consumer purchase decisions when a product can create an emotional connection through sustainability values (Li et al., 2021; Amin & Tarun, 2021).

Additionally, authenticity has a significant effect on purchase decisions through green trust, with a t-statistic value of 2.111 (greater than the critical value of 1.96) and a p-value of 0.035 (less than 0.05). Consumers perceive that the authentic values upheld by Fore Coffee, such as transparency in the use of quality ingredients and commitment

to sustainability, foster trust in their products. Huang & Guo (2021) suggest that brand authenticity is crucial in building consumer loyalty in the F&B sector, especially when the brand consistently communicates sustainability values. An authentic narrative about sustainability, such as transparency about sourcing materials and positive environmental impact, strengthens green trust, which ultimately influences purchase decisions. In the case of Fore Coffee, eco-friendly programs, such as reducing single-use plastics and supporting local farmers, reinforce positive consumer perceptions. Furthermore, Nygaard (2024) confirms that consumer trust in sustainability increases when brands provide tangible evidence of implementation, such as transparent reporting or third-party certification. This study supports the finding that consumers are more likely to trust and remain loyal to brands that genuinely prioritize authenticity and sustainability.

The analysis results reveal that physical attractiveness has a significant influence on purchase decisions through green trust, with a t-statistic value of 3.556 (exceeding the critical threshold of 1.96) and a p-value of 0.001 (less than 0.05). This indicates that physical appeal, whether in product design or brand presentation, plays a crucial role in fostering green trust (trust in sustainability aspects). This trust, in turn, motivates consumers to make purchase decisions based on their level of education. These findings underscore the importance of visual branding that integrates aesthetics with sustainability messaging. Previous research supports this conclusion; Reimann et al. (2010) demonstrated that the physical attractiveness of a product can enhance consumers' emotional engagement, thereby contributing to increased trust and consumer preference.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that brand authenticity and physical attractiveness significantly influence consumer purchase decisions at Fore Coffee from various educational backgrounds, with green trust acting as an important mediator. A higher level of education for consumers is more likely to choose products they perceive as authentic and physically appealing, as well as those that have transparent sustainability claims.

Therefore, Fore Coffee must continue to maintain and strengthen its authentic sustainability values while ensuring the attractiveness of its product design to build and sustain consumer trust. Moreover, industry players can utilize the study's results to evaluate consumer satisfaction across diverse educational backgrounds. We also aim to conduct research on a broader scale.

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