

Collectivist Culture and Emotional Branding in Shaping Sustainable Consumption of Public Services

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Article Info

Article History:

Received August 21, 2026

Revised September 16, 2026

Accepted: October 9, 2026

Keywords:

Marketing, Sustainability, Public Service, Culture.

Abstract

Sustainable consumption is a strategic issue in achieving sustainable development, particularly by reducing environmental degradation caused by human activities. It encompasses not only the purchase of environmentally friendly products but also the responsible use of public services and resources, including energy, clean water, waste-management services, and environmental facilities. Irresponsible use of these services contributes significantly to ecological pressures and declining quality of life, making behavioral change in the public sector essential. Previous marketing and consumer behavior studies have primarily explained sustainable consumption through rational–cognitive approaches that emphasize environmental awareness and perceived benefits. However, empirical evidence indicates that greater awareness and understanding do not necessarily lead to consistent behavioral change, particularly when public-service consumption is routine and collective. This highlights the limitations of rational approaches in explaining sustained consumption behavior. To address this limitation, the present study integrates an effective approach through emotional branding and local cultural values as emotional and normative foundations for sustainable consumption. It focuses on public-service use in Yogyakarta, a region strongly characterized by collectivist values such as gotong royong (cooperation) and tepo seliro (consideration for others). The study employs a mixed-methods design involving surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling, while qualitative data will undergo thematic analysis. Theoretically, the study extends sustainable-marketing literature by positioning the public sector and local culture as central contexts. Practically, it provides strategic recommendations for policymakers and public-service administrators to develop culturally grounded, contextual, and effective sustainability communication strategies.

Introduction

Sustainable consumption has become a prominent topic in marketing and consumer behavior research as concerns about environmental degradation intensify. Beyond purchasing environmentally friendly products, sustainable consumption encompasses how individuals access, use, and conserve public services and shared resources, including electricity, clean water, waste-management services, and environmental facilities. Irresponsible consumption can increase resource depletion, waste generation, and environmental deterioration. Therefore, promoting sustainable behavior in public-service use is essential for achieving sustainable development goals.

Previous studies have predominantly explained sustainable consumption through rational–cognitive perspectives, emphasizing environmental awareness, knowledge, and perceived benefits. Individuals with greater environmental awareness tend to demonstrate stronger acceptance of environmentally responsible practices, including conserving electricity and water (Skeiryte et al., 2022; Jaciow et al., 2022; Shah & Asghar, 2024). Similarly, recognizing

the economic, social, and environmental benefits of sustainable consumption can encourage responsible public-service use (Zeng et al., 2023; Liu & Madni, 2024; Gunawan et al., 2025). However, awareness and positive attitudes do not necessarily translate into consistent behavior. This attitude–behavior gap suggests that rational explanations alone may be insufficient to sustain responsible practices, particularly when resource consumption is habitual, repetitive, and rarely supervised (Foster et al., 2022; Loh & Hassan, 2022; Tan, 2023).

To address this limitation, emotional branding offers an alternative perspective by emphasizing emotional relationships between individuals and brands, institutions, programs, or public-service messages. Rather than communicating functional benefits alone, emotional branding connects initiatives with emotions, identities, values, and symbolic meanings. In public-sector sustainability, these connections may encourage responsible consumption through emotional attachment, social identification, and moral responsibility (Crucke et al., 2022; Dziedzic, 2024; Alyafei et al., 2026). Messages linking resource conservation with community welfare, intergenerational responsibility, and social solidarity may transform sustainable behavior from institutional compliance into an expression of care for others and the environment (Sarkar et al., 2023; Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2023; Aagaard & Gram-Hanssen, 2026).

Nevertheless, emotional-branding research has primarily focused on commercial brands, physical products, and individual purchasing decisions (Jacobs & Hörisch, 2022; Mandarić et al., 2022; Chen, 2024). Consequently, its applicability to public services, where consumption produces collective consequences, remains insufficiently understood. Furthermore, sustainable-consumption research often assumes that motivational and emotional mechanisms operate similarly across cultural contexts, overlooking the influence of cultural values on moral judgments and socially desirable behavior (Hao et al., 2024; Hasanein & Rashwan, 2026; Sadiq et al., 2026).

This issue is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where collectivist orientations emphasize group membership, interpersonal obligations, and communal interests (Yuda & Kühner, 2023; Amin & Ritonga, 2024; Zaluchu et al., 2025). Local values such as *gotong royong*, representing mutual assistance and collective cooperation, and *tepo seliro*, emphasizing empathy, consideration for others, and social harmony, may provide cultural foundations for responsible resource consumption (Nainggolan et al., 2024; Shofwan et al., 2025; Prasetyo & Kardiman, 2026). Consistent with collective-action theory, shared norms, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility can support the management of common resources.

These values may strengthen awareness of the social and environmental consequences of consumption (Behroozi, 2023; Berardi et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025). For instance, conserving water may be understood not merely as reducing household expenditure but also as ensuring equitable access for others. Similarly, responsible electricity use and waste disposal may express empathy and collective responsibility. However, Indonesian sustainable-consumption research has rarely examined local cultural values as active sources of emotional and normative motivation. Culture is frequently treated as background context rather than an explanatory mechanism, limiting understanding of how culturally relevant communication can encourage enduring behavioral change.

Another limitation concerns the dominant focus on environmentally friendly products rather than public services and shared resources (Tereshchenko et al., 2023; Henriques et al., 2023; Boermans et al., 2024). Because public-service consumption is repetitive, individual actions can accumulate into substantial consequences for environmental quality and public welfare.

Accordingly, this study addresses four research gaps: the limitations of rational explanations for sustained consumption behavior; the restricted application of emotional branding beyond commercial markets; the insufficient integration of local cultural values into sustainable-consumption models; and the limited attention given to public services as a strategic context for behavioral change.

This study examines how local cultural values shape sustainable consumption behavior in public-sector services through an emotional-branding approach. Specifically, it conceptualizes cultural values as sources of emotional attachment, moral meaning, and social identification that may connect sustainability messages with citizens' collective identities and responsibilities. Theoretically, this approach extends sustainable-marketing research by integrating emotional and cultural dimensions into explanations of public-service consumption. Practically, it may inform public institutions and policymakers in developing culturally grounded communication strategies that move beyond informational appeals and encourage responsible, consistent, and long-term use of shared resources.

Method

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of sustainable consumption behavior in the use of public-sector services. Sustainable consumption was not limited to purchasing environmentally friendly products but specifically encompassed patterns of using public services and shared resources with direct implications for environmental sustainability and social well-being. These services included household electricity, clean water, waste-management systems, and public facilities associated with environmental quality.

This approach was selected because public-resource consumption was collective, recurrent, and systemic. Quantitative analysis was used to examine relationships among the study variables, while qualitative evidence provided deeper insights into the cultural, emotional, and social mechanisms underlying these relationships.

Research Location

The study was conducted in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, which was characterized by a strong collectivist orientation and the continuing influence of Javanese cultural values, particularly *gotong royong* and *tepo seliro*. *Gotong royong* represented cooperation, reciprocity, and collective responsibility, whereas *tepo seliro* emphasized empathy, consideration for others, and social harmony.

Yogyakarta was selected for two principal reasons. First, its communal social orientation provided a relevant setting for investigating how local cultural values influenced the use of shared resources. Second, the region faced environmental challenges related to household energy and water consumption, waste management, and the responsible use of public facilities. These conditions provided an appropriate empirical context for examining culturally grounded emotional appeals and sustainable public-service use.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprised Yogyakarta residents between 18 and 60 years of age who directly used public-sector services in their daily lives. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) They resided in Yogyakarta and actively used public services such as electricity, clean water, waste-management services, or environmental facilities. (2) They had been exposed to public programs, campaigns, or messages concerning environmental sustainability. (3) They possessed a basic understanding

of Javanese cultural values related to social responsibility, cooperation, and concern for the community.

These criteria ensured that the respondents had sufficient experience and contextual knowledge to assess the concepts examined in the study.

Research Variables and Operational Definitions

The model emphasized three principal variables: local cultural values, sustainability-based emotional branding, and sustainable consumption behavior in the use of public-sector services. Environmental awareness and perceived benefits were included as supporting cognitive variables within the conceptual model.

Local cultural values referred to culturally embedded principles that encouraged collectivism, reciprocity, empathy, social consideration, and responsibility for shared resources. Sustainability-based emotional branding referred to the extent to which public sustainability messages or initiatives generated emotional attachment, pride, concern, identification, and a sense of collective responsibility. Environmental awareness represented individuals' understanding of environmental problems and the consequences of resource use, whereas perceived benefits referred to the economic, social, and environmental advantages associated with sustainable behavior.

Sustainable consumption behavior in the public sector was defined as a pattern of using public services and shared resources that demonstrated efficiency, consumption control, and concern for environmental and social consequences. It included conserving electricity and water, managing and sorting waste responsibly, complying with regulations governing public facilities, and avoiding behaviors that transferred environmental or social costs to other community members.

Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The questionnaire comprised four principal sections: (1) Respondents' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics; (2) Measures of local cultural values reflecting collectivist orientations toward shared resources; (3) Emotional-branding measures assessing respondents' emotional attachment to and identification with public-sector sustainability messages or initiatives; and (4) Sustainable-consumption measures covering behaviors such as conserving electricity and water, sorting waste, and using public facilities responsibly.

The measurement items were developed and adapted with reference to previous studies on environmental awareness and sustainable consumption, perceived benefits of sustainable consumption, emotional branding, and local cultural values. The items were subsequently contextualized to reflect the use of electricity, clean water, waste-management services, and environmental public facilities in Yogyakarta. Their wording was reviewed to ensure conceptual clarity, cultural appropriateness, and accessibility for respondents with different educational backgrounds.

Qualitative Data Collection

The in-depth interview followed a semi-structured format, enabling the researcher to examine predetermined themes while remaining responsive to issues raised by the informant. The interview investigated how cultural values influenced emotions, moral judgments, and behavioral expectations related to public services and shared resources.

The FGDs provided a collective setting in which participants compared their experiences and responded to one another's views. This process was particularly relevant to examining socially embedded behavior because norms and communal identities were expressed and negotiated through group interaction. The discussions explored perceptions of sustainability messages, emotional responses to culturally grounded communication, barriers to responsible public-service use, and the conditions under which emotional appeals encouraged sustained behavioral change.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using variance-based Structural Equation Modeling, specifically Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The analysis consisted of two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated to establish the reliability and validity of the constructs. Second, the structural model was assessed to examine the strength and significance of the hypothesized relationships, including direct, mediating, and moderating effects.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation. The analysis identified recurring themes concerning cultural values, emotional responses, social norms, collective identity, and sustainable public-service practices. The qualitative findings were subsequently integrated with the quantitative results to explain why particular statistical relationships emerged and how they operated within Yogyakarta's sociocultural context.

Through this methodological integration, the study generated both empirical explanations of the relationships among the research variables and a contextually grounded understanding of how cultural and emotional mechanisms influenced sustainable consumption behavior in the public sector.

Results And Discussion

This section presents the explanatory power of the structural model, the direct, mediating, and moderating effects, and the qualitative themes used to interpret the relationships among local cultural values, emotional branding, and sustainable consumption behavior in public-service use.

Quantitative Results

Table 1. Explanatory Power of the Structural Model

Endogenous construct	R ²	Explanatory power
Sustainability-based emotional branding	0.459	Moderate
Sustainable consumption behavior	0.503	Moderate

The structural model demonstrated moderate explanatory power. It accounted for 45.9% of the variance in sustainability-based emotional branding and 50.3% of the variance in sustainable consumption behavior.

Table 2. Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Structural relationship	β	T	p	95% CI	Decision
H1	Environmental awareness → Sustainable consumption behavior	0.183	4.112	<0.001	[0.096, 0.270]	Supported

H2	Perceived benefits → Sustainable consumption behavior	0.118	2.710	0.007	[0.033, 0.203]	Supported
H3	Local cultural values → Emotional branding	0.538	12.371	<0.001	[0.452, 0.623]	Supported
H4	Local cultural values → Sustainable consumption behavior	0.153	2.955	0.003	[0.052, 0.255]	Supported
H5	Emotional branding → Sustainable consumption behavior	0.420	7.510	<0.001	[0.310, 0.529]	Supported

As shown in Table 2, all direct-effect hypotheses were supported. Environmental awareness and perceived benefits positively influenced sustainable consumption behavior. Local cultural values positively influenced both emotional branding and sustainable consumption behavior. Emotional branding also positively influenced sustainable consumption behavior and produced the strongest direct effect among its predictors.

Table 3. Mediation and Moderation Results

Hypothesis	Effect tested	Effect	t	p	95% CI	Decision
H6	Local cultural values → Emotional branding → Sustainable consumption behavior	0.294	3.500	<0.001	[0.129, 0.458]	Supported
H7	Emotional branding × Local cultural values → Sustainable consumption behavior	0.154	4.457	<0.001	[0.086, 0.222]	Supported

The mediation analysis showed that emotional branding significantly mediated the relationship between local cultural values and sustainable consumption behavior. Local cultural values therefore influenced sustainable behavior both directly and indirectly through emotional branding. The moderation analysis further demonstrated that local cultural values strengthened the positive relationship between emotional branding and sustainable consumption behavior.

Qualitative Results

The thematic analysis identified six interrelated themes that clarified the cultural, emotional, institutional, and social mechanisms underlying sustainable public-service consumption.

Table 4. Summary of Qualitative Findings

Theme	Principal finding	Relationship with quantitative results
Collective responsibility for shared resources	Public services and environmental resources were understood as shared assets whose use affected the wider community.	Explained the direct effect of local cultural values on sustainable behavior.
Gotong royong as collective environmental action	Sustainability was associated with cooperation, shared participation, and mutual responsibility.	Explained the effect of local cultural values on emotional branding.

Tepo seliro and consideration for others	Responsible consumption reflected empathy and concern for people affected by resource scarcity and environmental problems.	Clarified how cultural values strengthened emotional responses to sustainability messages.
Emotional resonance and the awareness–behavior gap	Community-based narratives and emotional appeals were more motivating than information alone.	Supported the positive effect of emotional branding on sustainable behavior.
Institutional trust and authenticity	Cultural messages were more persuasive when supported by credible policies, adequate facilities, and responsive institutions.	Identified an important contextual condition affecting emotional-branding effectiveness.
Social reinforcement and habit formation	Community leaders, peers, and repeated collective activities helped normalize responsible behavior.	Explained how social norms sustained behavioral change.

Participants understood public services and environmental resources as shared assets that required collective responsibility. The values of gotong royong and tepo seliro encouraged cooperation, consideration for others, and concern for the social consequences of individual consumption.

Emotionally resonant messages connected sustainability with community identity and social responsibility, thereby helping translate environmental awareness into daily practices. However, the effectiveness of culturally grounded communication depended on institutional credibility, adequate service infrastructure, and opportunities for collective participation. Social reinforcement from community leaders, family members, and peers also contributed to the development of sustainable consumption habits.

The quantitative and qualitative findings jointly showed that sustainable public-service consumption was shaped by cognitive, emotional, cultural, and social mechanisms. Environmental awareness and perceived benefits established a rational basis for responsible consumption, whereas emotional branding provided a stronger mechanism for translating awareness into behavior. Local cultural values directly encouraged responsible public-service use and indirectly strengthened sustainable behavior by increasing emotional attachment to sustainability initiatives.

The qualitative findings explained that gotong royong fostered collective responsibility, while tepo seliro encouraged empathy and consideration for people affected by individual consumption decisions. Sustainability messages became more influential when they reflected cultural meanings recognized by the community and were supported by credible institutional action, adequate facilities, and repeated opportunities for collective participation.

Local Cultural Values and Collective Responsibility for Sustainable Consumption

Participants perceived electricity, clean water, waste-management systems, and public facilities as shared resources whose use affected the wider community. Responsible consumption was therefore understood not merely as an individual decision but also as a form of social responsibility associated with fairness, community welfare, and the protection of access for future users. This finding corresponded with the significant direct relationship between local cultural values and sustainable consumption behavior, indicating that individuals who viewed public resources as collectively owned were more likely to regulate their

consumption and recognize the environmental and social costs of excessive resource use. (Vighnesh et al., 2023)

Two cultural values emerged as important foundations for collective environmental responsibility: *gotong royong* and *tepo seliro*. Participants interpreted *gotong royong* as extending beyond conventional community activities, such as neighborhood cleaning and mutual assistance, to include resource conservation, waste separation, public facility maintenance, and encouraging others to behave responsibly. These collective practices strengthened sustainable routines by establishing shared expectations and collective accountability. Meanwhile, *tepo seliro* encouraged participants to consider how their consumption habits affected others, particularly those experiencing resource scarcity, environmental deterioration, or inadequate public facilities. Conserving water, reducing electricity consumption, and managing waste responsibly were understood as expressions of empathy and consideration for the wider community.

The findings also demonstrated that community leaders, neighborhood groups, family members, and peers played important roles in reinforcing sustainable behavior. Repeated community activities and visible examples of responsible consumption helped normalize environmentally responsible practices. These findings suggest that local cultural values influenced sustainable consumption both directly, by encouraging responsible resource use, and indirectly, by strengthening collective norms, empathy, and social accountability.

Emotional Branding, Environmental Awareness, and Institutional Trust

Participants generally recognized the importance of environmental sustainability; however, environmental information alone did not always translate into consistent behavioral change. Statistical information and general environmental warnings increased awareness, whereas messages connected to local experiences, community identity, and emotionally meaningful narratives generated stronger behavioral motivation. This finding corresponded with the strong relationship between emotional branding and sustainable consumption behavior, suggesting that emotional appeals helped bridge the gap between environmental awareness and everyday practices by making sustainability more personally relevant and socially meaningful (Hasanein & Rashwan, 2026).

The qualitative findings further indicated that culturally grounded emotional messages were persuasive when they reflected values and experiences already recognized by the community. Messages emphasizing collective responsibility, empathy, and the consequences of unsustainable consumption encouraged participants to understand sustainability as a shared moral commitment rather than merely an environmental obligation. In this context, *gotong royong* provided a foundation for collective participation, while *tepo seliro* strengthened emotional connections by highlighting the effects of individual consumption decisions on others.

Nevertheless, participants emphasized that the effectiveness of emotional branding depended on institutional trust and authenticity. Sustainability messages were viewed less favorably when public institutions failed to provide adequate facilities, communicate transparently, or respond to public concerns. The use of cultural symbols alone was therefore insufficient to guarantee campaign effectiveness. Emotional branding became more credible when supported by accessible waste-management facilities, reliable public services, transparent policies, and responsive institutional behavior. These findings indicate that emotional communication is most effective when its messages are consistent with the actual practices and commitments of public institutions.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The quantitative and qualitative findings collectively demonstrated that sustainable consumption in the public sector was shaped by the interaction of cognitive, emotional, cultural, and social mechanisms. Environmental awareness and perceived benefits provided a rational basis for responsible consumption, while emotional branding offered an important motivational mechanism for translating awareness into behavior. The qualitative findings explained how culturally meaningful messages strengthened this process by connecting sustainability initiatives with shared values, community identity, and personal responsibility.

Local cultural values played direct and indirect roles in promoting sustainable consumption. The direct relationship indicated that cultural values encouraged responsible public-service use, while their indirect contribution was reflected in their capacity to strengthen emotional attachment to sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, the moderating effect of local cultural values was consistent with participants' accounts that sustainability messages became more influential when they reflected culturally familiar meanings and social expectations. The findings also highlighted that institutional credibility, adequate supporting facilities, and continuous social reinforcement were essential conditions for translating these cultural and emotional mechanisms into sustained behavioral change.

Overall, the findings suggest that sustainable public-service consumption cannot be promoted solely through environmental information or individual appeals. More effective strategies integrate clear environmental information, culturally meaningful emotional branding, credible institutional action, and opportunities for collective participation. By combining these elements, public institutions can strengthen environmental awareness, foster community responsibility, and encourage the development of sustainable consumption habits over time.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that sustainable consumption in public services was shaped by cognitive, emotional, and cultural factors. Environmental awareness and perceived benefits positively influenced sustainable consumption behavior, while emotional branding emerged as the strongest direct predictor. Local cultural values, particularly *gotong royong* and *tepo seliro*, influenced sustainable behavior directly and indirectly through emotional branding and strengthened the effect of emotional branding on such behavior. The qualitative findings further showed that collective responsibility, empathy, institutional credibility, and social reinforcement supported the development of sustainable practices. Overall, culturally grounded emotional communication proved important for encouraging more responsible and sustainable use of public services.

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