

From Sustainability Claims to Continued Patronage: Evidence from UNIQLO Consumers in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Manuscript type: Original research

Research aims: The fast-fashion industry faces increasing environmental scrutiny, particularly in Japan, where market contraction persists despite continued low-cost production. This study examines consumer repurchase intentions towards UNIQLO, a retailer transitioning towards sustainability, using an extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

Design/methodology/approach: Data were collected from 334 UNIQLO customers in Tokyo and Osaka and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The model tests environmental concern, perceived quality, brand communication, sustainable brand image and country-of-origin (Japan, USA and China) as predictors of repurchase intention, with attitude and brand trust as mediators.

Research findings: Environmental concern and perceived quality positively influence attitude, which subsequently increases repurchase intention. Brand trust also exerts a positive effect. However, brand communication and sustainable brand image do not significantly influence trust. Country-of-origin effects indicate that Japan and the USA positively influence trust, while China is non-significant. Mediation results support the roles of attitude and trust.

Theoretical contribution/originality: This study extends TPB to post-adoption behaviour in sustainable fast fashion, highlighting the central role of attitude and the importance of perceived quality and country-of-origin in shaping trust within the Japanese context.

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Practitioner/policy implications: Findings suggest integrating sustainability with product quality, strengthening transparent communication and managing country-of-origin perceptions strategically.

Research limitations: The study is limited to urban Japan, cross-sectional data and a single-brand focus.

Keywords: Sustainable fast-fashion, UNIQLO, repurchase intention, country-of-origin, Japan

JEL Classification: M31

1. Introduction

The fast-fashion industry has expanded rapidly in recent years, significantly shortening the life cycles of fashion trends and garments. However, the Japanese apparel market presents a notable paradox: while overall demand is declining, the supply of affordable clothing continues to increase (Assmann, 2018; Ichikawa, 2022). This trend promotes mass production and consumption, resulting in considerable environmental consequences, including high energy usage and shortened product lifespans (Centobelli, Abbate, Nadeem, & Garza-Reyes, 2022). Consequently, the fashion industry is increasingly recognised for its substantial environmental footprint, making it a pressing global concern (Hardcastle, 2024; Long, 2025; The Japan Times, 2026).

In response, sustainable fashion, defined as minimising environmental impact across a garment's lifecycle from production to disposal, has gained significant global attention (Arrigo, 2020; Earthday.org, 2025). Although consumers who recognise the benefits of environmentally friendly products are more likely to engage in repeat purchases, and such products are valued for their attributes (Chen & Chang, 2012; Zaremohzzabieh, Ismail, Ahrari, & Abu Samah, 2021), the translation of sustainability awareness into actual purchasing behaviour remains inconsistent in the Japanese context. A 2023 survey by Rakuten Insight highlights this disconnect, revealing that while approximately 50 per cent of consumers in their 20s report choosing sustainable fashion items, this figure drops to only 31 per cent among those in their 60s. Furthermore, when presented with a choice between a sustainable item and a "regular" item of identical design and price, 58 per cent of Japanese consumers still prefer the conventional option. This awareness-behaviour gap extends beyond purchasing decisions; despite widespread waste awareness, 67 per cent of consumers dispose of old clothes in general garbage, with only 25 per cent opting to sell items to thrift stores. These findings suggest

that existing literature may not adequately capture the structural, cultural, or economic barriers that prevent Japanese consumers from aligning their stated sustainability values with actual consumption and disposal practices.

Fast fashion is widely criticised for its negative environmental and social impacts across both production and consumption stages (Kozlowski, Searcy, & Bardecki, 2016; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Since its emergence in the late 1990s, the industry has normalised rapid production cycles and frequent disposal, contributing to issues such as carbon emissions and marine pollution (Wu, Zhou, Ding, Wu, & Wang, 2022). Major brands release new collections 12 to 24 times annually, accelerating trend turnover and generating substantial textile waste (Centobelli et al., 2022). In Japan, where fashion trends and appearance hold strong cultural significance, such consumption patterns often take precedence over environmental considerations (Assmann, 2018).

Despite growing awareness of sustainability, a clear attitude-behaviour gap persists. The Dentsu Sustainable Lifestyle Awareness Survey 2021 revealed that, although eco-friendly practices are increasingly recognised, many consumers prioritise maintaining their current lifestyle over long-term environmental protection (Dentsu Institute, 2022). Notably, 61.2 per cent of Japanese respondents prioritised their present lifestyle over environmental protection for future generations—the highest proportion among the 12 countries surveyed (namely Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam). Furthermore, while approximately 60 per cent of respondents expressed interest in sustainable fashion, only 4 per cent reported actively purchasing sustainable apparel (MOEJ, 2021). This disparity underscores the need to better understand consumer responses to sustainable fashion in Japan.

Against this backdrop, UNIQLO, a leading global fast-fashion retailer with over 2,000 stores worldwide, has initiated a transition towards sustainability. In 2019, the brand announced its vision to develop a sustainable business model through innovative manufacturing technologies that enhance quality of life while minimising environmental harm (Danziger, 2021; UNIQLO, 2022a). Its initiatives include sustainable supply chains, extended garment lifecycles, and circular value creation (UNIQLO, 2022b). However, research on sustainable apparel consumption in Japan remains limited, particularly regarding repurchase intentions towards established fast-fashion brands undergoing sustainability transitions

(Dhir, Talwar, Sadiq, Sakashita, & Kaur, 2021; Khare & Sadachar, 2017).

This study addresses that gap by examining Japanese consumers' repurchase intentions towards UNIQLO through an extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) framework. Existing sustainable fashion research has relied heavily on TPB or modest extensions of it, typically incorporating isolated variables such as environmental concern, mindful consumption, or knowledge to predict initial purchase intentions (Campian & Iancu, 2026; Sharma, Arya, Bisht, & Kumar, 2025). This narrow focus has largely overlooked post-purchase behaviour, particularly repurchase intention – a notable gap given that fast fashion is built on repeated buying cycles (Magwegwe & Shaik, 2024). Equally, whilst previous studies demonstrate that green brand positioning, knowledge, and image shape consumer choices, these drivers tend to be examined in isolation or within non-fast fashion contexts, rather than the volatile, trend-driven environments where fast fashion operates (Lee, Kim, & Son, 2025; Vishnoi, Mathur, Agarwal, Virmani, & Jagtap, 2025).

Within fast fashion specifically, perceived sustainability efforts have been found to foster brand trust, which subsequently shapes purchase intentions (Neumann, Martinez, & Martinez, 2020). Yet no study has systematically examined how environmental concern, perceived quality, brand communication, sustainable brand image, and country-of-origin jointly influence brand trust and attitude within a single unified framework. The simultaneous integration of interpersonal and value-oriented factors, brand-level signals, and dual mediators—sustainable brand trust and attitude—in predicting repurchase intention remains a clear gap in the literature. This study addresses that gap through an extended TPB framework, bringing these constructs together in the context of sustainable fast fashion.

The findings contribute to both theory and practice. Theoretically, this study extends TPB to sustainable fast-fashion contexts within Asian markets, where consumer knowledge of sustainable products remains underdeveloped (Joshi & Rahman, 2019; McKinsey & Company, 2024). Practically, it offers actionable insights for international brands entering Japan, particularly regarding country-of-origin perceptions and the role of transparent sustainability communication. Identifying the key drivers of repurchase intention will ultimately support more effective strategies in an increasingly sustainability-conscious marketplace.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical background

2.1.1 *An extension of the theory of planned behaviour*

Sustainability has become increasingly central to contemporary marketing, compelling fast-fashion firms to adopt ecologically responsible branding strategies (Sharma, Aswal, & Paul, 2023; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2021). To understand consumer responses to these strategies, researchers frequently look to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Proposed by Ajzen (1991), TPB posits that human action is driven by three core determinants: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Together, these constructs shape behavioural intention. Crucially, Ajzen (1991) noted that the TPB is not a closed framework; it can be extended by refining existing variables or incorporating additional constructs to address specific theoretical or empirical gaps.

Consequently, TPB has been widely applied to green and sustainable consumption (Choi & Johnson, 2019; Leclercq-Machado et al., 2022), where environmental awareness consistently influences consumer purchase preferences (Akehurst, Afonso, & Martins Gonçalves, 2012). Extended TPB frameworks have successfully explained behavioural intentions across diverse sectors, including tourism (Kim & Lee, 2019), organic food consumption (Rabbanee, Afroz, & Naser, 2020; Yazdanpanah & Forouzani, 2015), and green fashion and cosmetics (Bong Ko & Jin, 2017; Hsu, Chang, & Yansritakul, 2017; Kumar, Garg, & Singh, 2022). For instance, Kumar et al. (2022) demonstrated that a positive attitude significantly drives the intentions of green consumers. Despite these empirical advances, two distinct gaps remain in the literature. First, limited research has examined repurchase intention within the TPB framework (Kim & Lee, 2019; Rabbanee et al., 2020), particularly regarding sustainable apparel. Second, empirical studies focusing on the Japanese market remain scarce.

Addressing these gaps, the present study adopts an extended TPB framework to propose that consumers' repurchase intentions towards UNIQLO are primarily shaped by their attitudes and brand trust. Specifically, this study extends the traditional TPB model by integrating the antecedent of attitude towards sustainable apparel alongside brand trust. Within behavioural theory, attitude is recognised as a primary psychological mechanism driving human action (Yuriev, Dahmen, Paillé, Boiral, & Guillaumie, 2020), indicating that fostering a favourable attitude towards brands is an effective

strategy for influencing long-term behaviour. In parallel, brand trust is vital for enhancing consumer confidence in decision-making, signalling a brand's credibility, transparency, and consistency in meeting consumer needs (Neumann et al., 2020). However, within sustainable fashion, only a few studies have explored the exact pathways through which consumers develop the favourable attitudes and brand trust that facilitate repeat purchases. To bridge this gap, our study introduces a single, unified framework to systematically examine how five key predictors – environmental concern, perceived quality, brand communication, sustainable brand image, and country-of-origin – jointly shape brand trust and attitude, ultimately driving the repurchase intentions of sustainable fashion consumers.

2.1.2 Repurchase intention and transparency in sustainability

Repurchase intention (RI) is a critical dimension of green behaviour and refers to consumers' willingness to repeatedly purchase from a particular brand (Woo & Kim, 2019; Wu, Wu, Lee, & Lee, 2015). Unlike new customers, who tend to compare alternatives across brands, repeat customers are more likely to rely on established preferences, having already validated the product's benefits (Chen, Mandler, & Meyer-Waarden, 2021; Milaković, 2021). In highly competitive markets, understanding and fostering RI is essential for sustaining profitability and long-term customer relationships.

RI in sustainable consumption has been examined across sectors such as food, cosmetics, and energy (Chiu, Wang, Fang, & Huang, 2012; Follows & Jobber, 2000; Xu, Wei, Zheng, Sun, & Tang, 2022). However, attitude alone is insufficient to explain RI; factors such as transparency and trust play equally important roles (Hashish, Abdou, Mohamed, Elenain, & Salama, 2022). RI is more likely to increase when consumers develop trust and emotional attachment, particularly when they value environmentally friendly materials or artisanal production processes (Chen et al., 2021). In this regard, transparent branding and effective image-building are essential for fostering brand trust and strengthening RI, especially for sustainable brands (Tian, Siddik, & Masukujjaman, 2022). Furthermore, country-of-origin (COO) image has been shown to influence both consumer trust and behavioural intention towards green products (Jiménez & San Martín, 2010; Lee, 2020).

2.2 Conceptualisation and hypothesis development

2.2.1 Environmental concern and attitude

Environmental concern (EC) refers to individuals' awareness of environmental issues and their willingness to address them (Cerri, Testa, & Rizzi, 2018). Ethical decision-making involves recognising consequences and accepting responsibility, often leading to more altruistic behaviour (Cerri et al., 2018). Rational action theories suggest that favourable attitudes enhance behavioural intention and facilitate action (Kumar et al., 2022). Within environmental contexts, EC has been widely recognised as a key driver of pro-environmental attitudes (Kumar et al., 2022). It is considered fundamental in shaping environmental attitudes, as greater knowledge and awareness promote positive evaluations of sustainable actions (Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen, Lobo, & Vu, 2019). Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that EC positively influences attitudes towards sustainability (Chen, Wu, & Jiang, 2022; Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012; Ng, Ho, & Sia, 2020). Given the significant environmental impact of fast fashion (Razzaq, Ansari, Razzaq, & Awan, 2018), a positive relationship between EC and attitude toward brands promoting sustainable fashion consumption is anticipated.

H₁: Environmental concern positively influences attitude towards a sustainable brand.

2.2.2 Perceived quality of sustainable brand and attitude

Perceived quality (PQ) refers to consumers' evaluation of a product's overall excellence or superiority relative to alternatives (Nam, Dong, & Lee, 2017). It encompasses not only functional attributes but also perceived reliability and brand-related cues. In apparel contexts, PQ is inherently multidimensional, including garment quality, brand attributes, and durability (Nam et al., 2017). Consumers who perceive brands as environmentally responsible tend to develop more favourable evaluations and purchasing tendencies (Alamsyah, Othman, Bakri, Udjaja, & Aryanto, 2021). Importantly, actual usage experience often shapes these perceptions more strongly than promotional efforts (Lai & Cheng, 2016). PQ in a sustainable context therefore reflects not only product performance but also consumers' expectations of environmental responsibility. When products are perceived as safe, reliable, and environmentally beneficial, positive attitudes are more likely to emerge (Liao, Wu, & Pham, 2020). Prior studies confirm a positive relationship between PQ and attitudes towards sustainable apparel (Nam et al., 2017; Wang, Zaman, & Alvi, 2022), therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₂: Perceived quality positively influences attitude towards a sustainable brand.

2.2.3 Brand communication and sustainable brand trust

Brand communication (BC) encompasses the activities through which firms convey their identity and values to consumers, thereby shaping brand perceptions (Dressler & Paunovic, 2021). Effective communication integrates multiple channels, including advertising, digital platforms, and experiential marketing, to build a coherent brand image and reputation (Cambier & Poncin, 2020). Transparent and consistent communication is particularly critical for sustainable brands, as it enhances credibility and fosters trust (Batra & Keller, 2016; Sohaib, Safeer, & Majeed, 2022). Both one-way and interactive communication strategies have been shown to strengthen brand trust (Guerreiro & Pacheco, 2021). By clearly articulating sustainability commitments, firms can reduce uncertainty and build long-term consumer relationships. Prior research consistently highlights the positive role of BC in developing brand trust (Cambier & Poncin, 2020; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Šerić, Ozretić Došen, & Škare, 2020). Therefore, we surmise that:

H₃: Brand communication positively influences sustainable brand trust.

2.2.4 Sustainable brand image and sustainable brand trust

Sustainable brand image (SBI) refers to consumers' perceptions of a brand's commitment to sustainability embedded within its core values and operations (Chen, 2010). It reflects how organisations integrate environmental and social responsibility into their brand identity (Van Riel & Fombrum, 2007). SBI is closely linked to green marketing initiatives and corporate social responsibility, both of which shape consumer perceptions (Wu, Jin, Montfort, & Hua, 2021; Yu, Han, Ding, & He, 2021). A favourable brand image enhances competitiveness and strengthens market positioning (Lee & Chen, 2019). Transparency plays a crucial role in reinforcing this image, as consumers increasingly expect clear evidence of environmental responsibility (Wu et al., 2021). Positive brand image and reputation are therefore important antecedents of trust (Yu et al., 2021).

H₄: Sustainable brand image positively influences sustainable brand trust

2.2.5 Country-of-origin of sustainable brand and sustainable brand trust

In line with consumer ethnocentrism theory, consumers may exhibit a preference for domestic products over foreign alternatives, as they tend to evaluate domestic offerings more favourably and may perceive the purchase of foreign products as less appropriate in certain contexts (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Netemeyer, Durvasula, & Lichtenstein, 1991; Baber, 2024). This tendency can be further explained by the country-of-origin (COO) effect, which suggests that product evaluations are influenced by the country associated with the brand, with domestic origins often evoking stronger familiarity, trust, and national identity (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004).

These effects may be particularly salient in markets such as Japan, where domestic brands are closely associated with quality perceptions and cultural identity. As a well-established Japanese brand, UNIQLO may benefit from such ethnocentric and COO-based evaluations, which can strengthen favourable consumer responses and, ultimately, encourage continued patronage of its sustainable fast-fashion offerings.

COO refers to the country with which a brand is associated and plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase decisions (Hoang, Ho, Tran, & Le, 2022). Prior research suggests that COO influences perceptions of brand legitimacy and credibility, which in turn affect brand trust (Suter, Munjal, Borini, & Floriani, 2021). In addition, COO and brand image have been shown to jointly shape customer-brand relationships (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Palihawadana, 2011). Consumers often rely on COO cues, particularly when product attributes are difficult to evaluate, using such cues as heuristics to infer quality and trustworthiness (Bhattacharya & Sharma, 2022).

However, COO effects are not uniformly positive. Negative country-of-origin effects have been documented in contexts where geopolitical tensions and historical events shape consumer perceptions. For instance, prior studies have identified negative origin effects for Chinese brands operating in Japan (Yang, 2019). Earlier incidents, such as the 2007–2008 frozen gyoza contamination case, have also contributed to lingering negative perceptions associated with Chinese products in Japan (Nakano, 2015). More recently, diplomatic frictions between Japan and China have disrupted cross-border consumption patterns and influenced consumer sentiment towards foreign products (Davis, 2026). These examples highlight

how macro-level and historical factors may reinforce negative country associations, thereby affecting brand trust.

Given these contrasting effects, this study examines the role of COO across three key country contexts – Japan, the USA, and China – in shaping sustainable brand trust. Japan is often associated with high product quality and reliability (Sato, 2016), while the USA is linked to innovation and leadership in sustainability initiatives (Paton, 2022). In contrast, China presents a more complex image shaped by both economic prominence (Statista, 2022) and negative country associations (Unger, 1990; Economy, 2020). Based on these considerations, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_{5(J)}: Country-of-origin (Japan) positively influences sustainable brand trust.

H_{5(U)}: Country-of-origin (USA) positively influences sustainable brand trust.

H_{5(C)}: Country-of-origin (China) negatively influences sustainable brand trust.

2.2.6 Attitude towards sustainable brand and repurchase intention

Attitude (ATT) represents a relatively permanent overall evaluation ranging from unfavourable to favourable (Yuriev et al., 2020). Consumer attitudes and willingness to pay for sustainable products are positively correlated (Yuriev et al., 2020). ATT emerges from evaluating advantages and disadvantages, influenced by interpersonal factors including experience, psychological needs, and motivation. ATT is an important predictor of behavioural intentions. Sustainable attitudes focus on environmental protection, resource conservation, and degradation reduction (Casaló & Escario, 2018). Environmental degradation relates to human intention, making ATT toward the environment important for predicting behavioural intention (Debora Indriani, Rahayu, & Hadiwidjojo, 2019). Positive attitudes toward environmentally friendly brands correlate significantly with purchase intention (Chen & Chai, 2010). Panda et al. (2020) found that positive brand attitudes influence willingness to spend more on organic goods. In sustainable fashion, attitudes toward sustainable brands and behavioural intention show a significantly positive association (Dhir et al., 2021), thereby repurchase intention is assumed to be highly influenced by consumer attitudes.

H₆: Attitude towards a sustainable brand positively influences repurchase intention.

2.2.7 Sustainable brand trust and repurchase intention

Sustainable brand trust (SBT) reflects consumers' confidence in a brand's honesty, transparency, and ability to meet expectations (Neumann et al., 2020). Trust becomes particularly important in sustainability contexts, where consumers seek credible and consistent information. Transparent communication and reliable brand practices enhance trust and foster long-term customer relationships (Reck, Castagna, Shuqair, & Pinto, 2022). Trust has been shown to directly and indirectly influence repurchase intention across various service and retail settings (Agustin & Singh, 2005; Suhartanto, Kartikasari, Hapsari, Budianto, Najib, & Astor, 2021). It represents consumers' expectations of consistent product quality and brand reliability (Tao, Lin, & Khan, 2022).

H₇: Sustainable brand trust positively influences repurchase intention.

2.2.8 Mediation role of attitude towards sustainable brand

Beyond direct effects, the relationship between psychological factors and repurchase intention is likely to be mediated by intervening variables (Rabbanee et al., 2020). This study examines ATT mediation between EC-RI and PQ-RI relationships. Few studies examine repurchase intention using TPB compared to purchase intention (Lam, Lau, & Cheung, 2016), but attitude mediation enables examination (Rabbanee et al., 2020). Environmental consideration plays an important role in ethical consumption (Kushwah, Dhir, & Sagar, 2019) and sustainable fashion (Kumar et al., 2022). Studies found attitudes mediate between EC and sustainable behavioural intention (Chen & Tung, 2014; Lam et al., 2016; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). Perceived quality is important in fashion, with few studies showing attitude mediation between perception and behavioural intention (Kim, Ham, Yang, & Choi, 2013; Yu & Lee, 2019).

H_{1a}: Attitude mediates the environmental concern effect on repurchase intention.

H_{2a}: Attitude mediates the perceived quality effect on repurchase intention.

2.2.9 Mediation role of sustainable brand trust

Brands must make activities visible as consumers become more information-sensitive. Transparent disclosure is the shortest route to gaining trust (Situmorang, Indriani, Simatupang, & Soesanto, 2021). Trust drives repurchase intention and assesses customer repurchase intention (Lam et al., 2016). For sustainable brands,

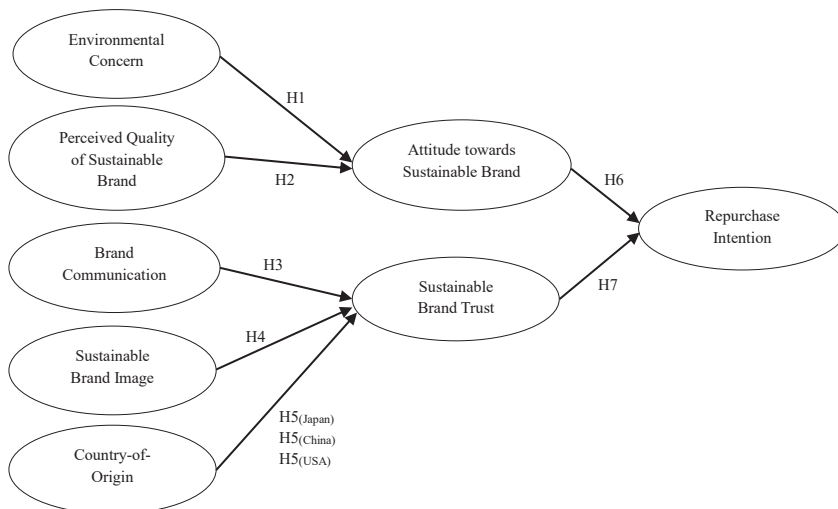
transparent branding and image-building are highly relevant for trust and repurchase intentions (Tian et al., 2022). Country image also influences trust and repurchase intention (Lee, 2020). Existing studies propose that trust mediates between marketing activity and repurchase intention (Han, Yu, Chua, Lee, & Kim, 2019; Suhartanto et al., 2021; Xu, Wei, Zheng, Sun, & Tang, 2022). Trust mediates between brand image and purchase intention (Fianto, Hadiwidjojo, Aisjah, & Solimun, 2014; Lee & Chen, 2019; Yu et al., 2021). Country-of-origin information influences consumer purchasing behaviour (Suter et al., 2021), with trust mediating between COO and behavioural intention in green products (Lee, 2020) and fashion (Sharma & Jain, 2019). Figure 1 presents our research framework.

H_{3a} : Sustainable brand trust mediates the brand communication effect on repurchase intention.

H_{4a} : Sustainable brand trust mediates the sustainable brand image effect on repurchase intention.

H_{5a} : Sustainable brand trust mediates country-of-origin effect [Japan (J); China (C); USA (U)] on repurchase intention.

Figure 1: Research Framework



3. Methods

3.1 *Research design and survey instrument*

This study investigates the factors influencing Japanese consumers' repurchase intention towards UNIQLO's sustainable fast-fashion apparel using a survey method. The target population comprises UNIQLO buyers aged 18 years or older residing in the urban areas of Tokyo and Osaka. These locations were selected as consumption patterns are known to differ between urban and rural contexts, with urban consumers generally exhibiting higher awareness of market trends and social issues due to greater access to information and exposure to diverse consumption environments (Oliveira et al., 2020). Notably, Japan is a highly urbanised society, with a significant proportion of its population residing in metropolitan areas, reinforcing the relevance of urban consumption contexts for behavioural research.

Tokyo, widely regarded as a global fashion capital, attracts consumers who are highly engaged with fashion trends. This is consistent with the broader development of fashion culture and scholarship in Japan, which reflects the country's strong engagement with fashion as both a cultural and industrial domain (Fujishima & Sakura, 2018). In contrast, Osaka represents a key commercial and retail centre within Japan. Major metropolitan areas such as Tokyo and Osaka dominate the country's fashion and retail markets due to their concentration of affluent consumers and extensive shopping infrastructure (Ken Research, 2023). The strong presence of fashion retail activity and consumer demand in these cities makes them particularly suitable for examining apparel-related consumption behaviour. The inclusion of both Tokyo and Osaka, therefore, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of repurchase behaviour within major metropolitan consumer markets in Japan.

The questionnaire comprised four sections adapted from validated scales in prior research. Section A included screening questions to confirm eligibility: age ≥ 18 years, UNIQLO purchase within the previous four months, and residence in Tokyo or Osaka. Section B assessed respondent familiarity with UNIQLO's sustainability transition. Section C contained the main constructs measured on seven-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Section D captured demographic information (age, gender, income, education). Eight constructs were measured using items from established studies: Environmental Concern (EC; 4 items; Maichum, Parichatnon, & Peng, 2016), Perceived Quality (PQ; 4

items; Tseng & Hung, 2013), Brand Communication (BC; 5 items; Zubair, 2014), Sustainable Brand Image (SBI; 4 items; Chen, 2010), Country-of-origin (COO; 5 items × 3 countries; Kim, Chun, & Ko, 2017), Attitude toward Sustainable Brand (ATT; 6 items; Nam et al., 2017), Sustainable Brand Trust (SBT; 4 items; Chen & Chang, 2012), and Repurchase Intention (RI; 3 items; Han & Ryu, 2012). The COO construct required respondents to answer identical items for Japan, USA, and China separately.

Given Japan's relatively low English proficiency ranking (Education First, 2018; Nippon.com, 2025a), the questionnaire was translated from English to Japanese using Brislin's (1970) back-translation method to ensure semantic equivalence. Both the English and Japanese versions were reviewed by bilingual experts, including a marketing researcher, and pretested with a senior UNIQLO employee and 10 participants of actual UNIQLO customers, to verify contextual appropriateness and clarity (Hunt, Sparkman, & Wilcox, 1982). Minor wording adjustments were made based on their feedback. Subsequently, a pilot test involving 28 confirmed UNIQLO purchasers from Tokyo and Osaka was conducted to assess the reliability of the measurement instrument. All constructs exceeded the recommended thresholds for composite reliability (CR > 0.70) and average variance extracted (AVE > 0.50) (Hair, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2017), indicating adequate and satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

Consistent with the study objectives, the research targeted UNIQLO buyers residing exclusively in Tokyo and Osaka. Judgmental (purposive) sampling is highly suitable, as it is most effective when only a limited number of population members possess the required qualities (Sarker & Al-Muuaalemi, 2022). Given that judgmental sampling relies on the researcher's discretion, three inclusion criteria were established to enhance validity: (1) age 18 years or older; (2) purchase of UNIQLO apparel within the last four months; and (3) residence in Tokyo or Osaka. Respondents failing to meet these requirements were excluded from analysis.

The survey was conducted ethically with voluntary participation. An online questionnaire was distributed via LINE and Instagram to individuals aged 18 or older who had purchased UNIQLO products within the preceding four months. We used Google Forms to develop an online survey questionnaire, which was pretested with three participants to ensure content clarity, logical flow, smooth transitions

between sections, and the proper functioning of mandatory response settings. The mandatory response feature prevented missing values, thereby ensuring a complete dataset for SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2017). The use of an online survey was deemed appropriate for two key reasons. First, it aligns with UNIQLO's highly digitalised consumer base, mirroring their digital habits and strengthening external validity (Digital Marketing for Asia, 2026). Second, LINE and Instagram reflect Japan's distinct social media landscape – LINE holds near-universal adult penetration whilst Instagram dominates fashion-conscious urban audiences – providing a representative sample that traditional survey methods cannot efficiently capture (Nippon.com, 2025b). Out of 415 initial respondents, 71 were excluded for failing to meet geographical or brand criteria, yielding 344 valid responses. Sample size adequacy was confirmed using G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), with parameters set at $f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80, and nine predictors, yielding a minimum requirement of 166 responses. The final sample size of 334 exceeded this threshold and met recommended requirements for SEM analysis (Wolf, Harrington, Clark, & Miller, 2013).

The survey of 334 Japanese respondents revealed a predominantly young adult demographic, with the largest groups aged 26–35 (24.3 per cent) and over 55 (25.4 per cent), and a near-even gender split (50.3 per cent male, 49.7 per cent female). While 72.8 per cent of participants identified UNIQLO as the most sustainable brand, a striking 84.4 per cent were unaware of UNIQLO's official shift to a sustainable fast-fashion model announced in December 2021. Regarding purchasing habits, most respondents bought UNIQLO apparel infrequently (32.0 per cent every six months, 31.4 per cent annually), and 94.0 per cent purchased sustainable apparel fewer than three times in 2022, suggesting a significant gap between brand perception and actual sustainable consumption behaviour. Education levels were relatively high, with 53.3 per cent holding bachelor's degrees, while income distribution was varied, though nearly a quarter earned under JPY 150,000 monthly (refer to Table 1). These statistics highlight a critical disconnect where consumers view UNIQLO favourably regarding sustainability, yet remain largely uninformed about its specific strategic shifts and engage in limited sustainable purchasing overall.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

Measure	n	Per cent (%)	Measure	n	Per cent (%)
Age			Gender		
18-25	26	7.8	Male	168	50.3
26-35	81	24.3	Female	166	49.7
36-45	73	21.9	Income		
46-55	69	20.7	JPY0 - 149,999	83	24.9
> 55	85	25.4	JPY150,000 - 199,999	36	10.8
Education			JPY200,000 - 249,999	41	12.3
Junior high school or below	4	1.2	JPY250,000 - 299,999	35	10.5
Secondary school or below	78	23.4	JPY300,000 - 349,999	31	9.3
Associate degree	48	14.4	JPY350,000 - and above	66	19.8
Bachelor's degree	178	53.3	Prefer not to disclose	42	12.6
Master's degree	23	6.9	The most sustainable brand		
PhD	3	0.9	UNIQLO	243	72.8
Purchase behaviour of UNIQLO			ZARA	13	3.9
More than once a month	8	2.4	H&M	22	6.6
More than once every two months	36	10.8	GAP	20	6.0
More than once every three-four month	78	23.4	Others	36	10.8
More than once every six months	107	32.0	Purchase behaviour of sustainable apparel in 2022		
More than once a year	105	31.4	Less than 3 times	314	94.0
Did you know that UNIQLO has shifted to a sustainable fast-fashion brand?			3-6 times	18	5.4
YES	52	15.6	7-10 times	0	0.0
NO	282	84.4	More than 10 times	2	0.6

Note: *n=334; Rate: MYR 1=JPY 40.32 (12 March 2026)

4. Findings

4.1 Common method bias (CMB)

Common method bias (CMB) arises when the observed variance is attributable to the measurement method rather than the underlying constructs (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). To mitigate and assess CMB, both procedural and statistical remedies were applied in line with Podsakoff et al. (2003). First, several procedural measures were implemented. Measurement items were carefully adapted from single established sources for each construct to ensure consistency (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). Clear and concise wording was used to minimise ambiguity, and the survey was administered anonymously to reduce social desirability bias and encourage honest responses. Second, a statistical assessment was conducted using the measured latent marker variable (MLMV) approach (Chin, Thatcher, Wright, & Steel, 2013; Jordan & Troth, 2019). A five-item scale of theoretically unrelated marker variables – reflecting personality traits (e.g., “tends to be quiet”, “is full of energy”) – was included in the questionnaire. The differences in R² values between the marker variable model and the baseline model (refer to Table 2) ranged from 0.3 per cent to 3.2 per cent, which is well below the recommended threshold of 10 per cent (Chin et al., 2013; Oliveira & Handfield, 2019). These findings suggest that CMB is unlikely to pose a significant threat to the validity of the results, thereby supporting the robustness and reliability of the PLS-SEM estimates (Sarker, Mohd-Any, & Kamarulzaman, 2021).

Table 2: Assessment of Common Method Variance Testing

	R square	After CMV	Per centage of Changes
RI	0.660	0.672	1.8
ATT	0.516	0.533	3.2
SBT	0.686	0.688	0.3

Note: Attitude Towards Sustainable Brand (ATT), Sustainable Brand Trust (SBT) and Repurchase Intention (RI)

4.2 Measurement model assessment

The measurement model was assessed using reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity following the standard guideline in Hair et al. (2017). Construct reliability was established as both composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach’s alpha (CA) were above

0.70. Besides, all factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017), with values ranging from 0.789 to 0.967. No items were removed as all constructs demonstrated adequate internal consistency. AVE values ranged from 0.701 to 0.925, all above the minimum requirement of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017), confirming both scale reliability and convergent validity across all constructs (Table 3). Next, discriminant validity was examined using the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019; Henseler et al., 2014). All HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating distinct constructs. Additionally, 95 per cent confidence intervals from bootstrapping analysis did not contain zero (Hair et al., 2017), further supporting discriminant validity between all reflective constructs (Table 4).

Table 3: Reliability and Convergent Validity Assessment

Constructs	Items	Factor Loading	CR	CA	AVE
ATT	ATT1	0.923	0.974	0.975	0.886
	ATT2	0.951			
	ATT 3	0.942			
	ATT 4	0.950			
	ATT 5	0.932			
	ATT 6	0.949			
BC	BC1	0.867	0.909	0.911	0.734
	BC 2	0.869			
	BC 3	0.827			
	BC 4	0.901			
	BC 5	0.817			
COO_J	COOJ_1	0.932	0.965	0.966	0.878
	COOJ_2	0.948			
	COOJ_3	0.941			
	COOJ_4	0.933			
	COOJ_5	0.932			
COO_C	COOC_1	0.956	0.965	0.966	0.878
	COOC_2	0.954			
	COOC_3	0.948			
	COOC_4	0.964			
	COOC_5	0.967			
COOU	COOU_1	0.943	0.973	0.974	0.904
	COOU_2	0.961			

Constructs	Items	Factor Loading	CR	CA	AVE
COO_U	COOU_3	0.949			
	COOU_4	0.952			
	COOU_5	0.949			
EC	EC1	0.823	0.857	0.864	0.701
	EC2	0.789			
	EC3	0.873			
	EC4	0.860			
PQ	PQ1	0.842	0.885	0.887	0.743
	PQ2	0.870			
	PQ3	0.843			
	PQ4	0.893			
RI	RI1	0.960	0.959	0.96	0.925
	RI2	0.963			
	RI3	0.961			
SBT	SBT1	0.945	0.969	0.969	0.914
	SBT2	0.959			
	SBT3	0.964			
	SBT4	0.957			
SBI	SBI1	0.917	0.902	0.904	0.836
	SBI2	0.900			
	SBI3	0.922			
	SBI4	0.921			

Note: CR= Composite Reliability, CA=Cronbach's Alpha, AVE= Average Variance Extracted, Environmental Concern (EC), Perceived Quality of Sustainable Brand (PQ), Brand Communication (BC), Sustainable Brand Image (SBI), Country-of-Origin Japan (COO_J), Country-of-Origin China (COO_C), Country-of-Origin USA (COO_U), Attitude Towards Sustainable Brand (ATT), Sustainable Brand Trust (SBT), Repurchase Intention (RI)

Table 4: Discriminant validity assessment using the HTMT ratio

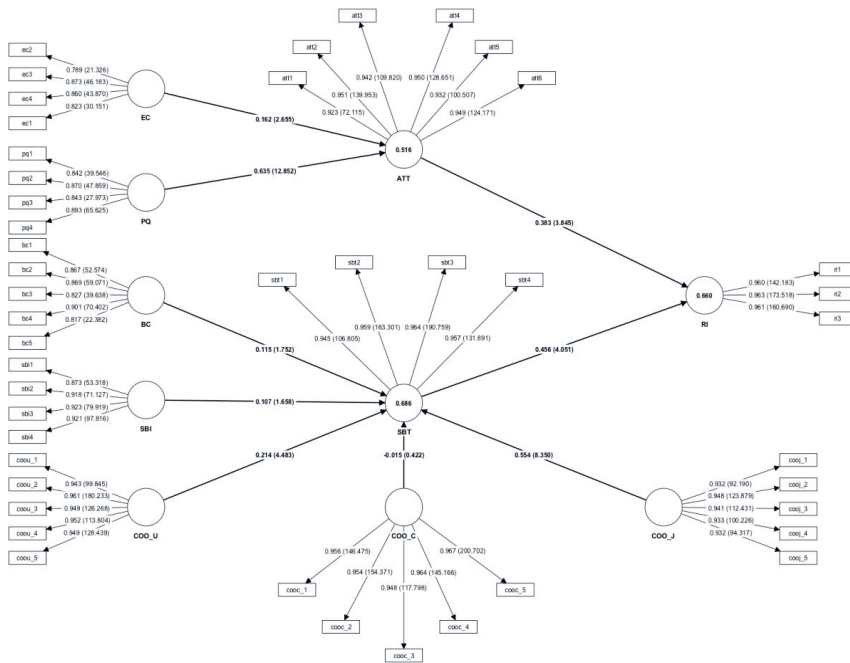
	ATT	BC	COO_C	COO_J	COO_U	EC	PQ	RI	SBT	SBI
ATT										
BC	0.601 [0.476; 0.704]									
COO_C	0.336 [0.224; 0.437]	0.294 [0.164; 0.411]								
COO_J	0.779 [0.685; 0.842]	0.496 [0.359; 0.613]	0.348 [0.238; 0.450]							
COO_U	0.630 [0.544; 0.700]	0.426 [0.306; 0.534]	0.562 [0.458; 0.648]	0.626 [0.528; 0.705]						
EC	0.466 [0.325; 0.587]	0.374 [0.233; 0.505]	0.081 [0.034; 0.103]	0.302 [0.146; 0.456]	0.113 [0.040; 0.239]					
PQ	0.755 [0.528; 0.748]	0.650 [0.528; 0.748]	0.327 [0.201; 0.437]	0.770 [0.678; 0.844]	0.531 [0.420; 0.628]	0.479 [0.311; 0.628]				
RI	0.808 [0.746; 0.858]	0.580 [0.454; 0.682]	0.368 [0.263; 0.460]	0.707 [0.459; 0.651]	0.563 [0.459; 0.651]	0.394 [0.249; 0.525]	0.720 [0.627; 0.790]			
SBT	0.808 [0.857; 0.928]	0.573 [0.443; 0.685]	0.363 [0.256; 0.459]	0.810 [0.720; 0.865]	0.654 [0.574; 0.721]	0.332 [0.181; 0.467]	0.792 [0.718; 0.850]	0.820 [0.732; 0.881]		
SBI	0.808 [0.457; 0.700]	0.862 [0.763; 0.929]	0.317 [0.194; 0.427]	0.509 [0.379; 0.619]	0.467 [0.354; 0.571]	0.290 [0.137; 0.434]	0.589 [0.450; 0.703]	0.544 [0.407; 0.662]	0.585 [0.454; 0.692]	

Note: Numbers in brackets represent the 95 per cent Bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) confidence intervals obtained from a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. Code: Environmental Concern (EC), Perceived Quality of Sustainable Brand (PQ), Brand Communication (BC), Sustainable Brand Image (SBI), Country-of-Origin Japan (COO_J), Country-of-Origin China (COO_C), Country-of-Origin USA (COO_U), Attitude Towards Sustainable Brand (ATT), Sustainable Brand Trust (SBT), Repurchase Intention (RI)

4.3 Structural model analysis

The structural model (Figure 2) was evaluated using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples following the procedures recommended by Hair et al. (2017). Path coefficients were considered significant when $p < 0.05$ and when the 95 per cent bias-corrected and accelerated confidence intervals (BCa CI) did not include zero. Multicollinearity was assessed using the variance inflation factor (VIF). All VIF values were below the recommended threshold of 5.0 (range: 1.213–4.303), suggesting that multicollinearity was not a concern in the model (Hair et al., 2011; Kock & Lynn, 2012). Effect sizes (f^2) were interpreted as small (≥ 0.02), medium (≥ 0.15), or large (≥ 0.35) following Cohen (1990). In addition, predictive relevance ($Q^2 > 0$) and explained variance (R^2) were assessed in accordance with Hair et al. (2017).

Figure 2: PLS-SEM Assessment



4.3.1 Direct hypotheses

Environmental concern (EC) and perceived quality (PQ) jointly explained 51.3 per cent of the variance in attitude (ATT) ($R^2 = 0.513$, $Q^2 = 0.500$). EC exerted a positive and significant effect on ATT ($\beta = 0.162$, $p = 0.008$, 95 per cent BCa CI [0.041, 0.279], $t = 2.655$), supporting H1. PQ demonstrated a substantially stronger positive effect ($\beta = 0.635$, $p < 0.01$, 95 per cent BCa CI [0.530, 0.724], $t = 12.852$), supporting H2. The effect size for EC was small ($f^2 = 0.055$), whereas PQ showed a large effect ($f^2 = 0.687$), indicating that perceived quality is the dominant predictor of attitude.

Five predictors collectively explained 68.1 per cent of the variance in sustainable brand trust (SBT) ($R^2 = 0.681$, $Q^2 = 0.667$). However, the effects of brand communication (BC \rightarrow SBT: $\beta = 0.115$, $p = 0.080$, $t = 1.752$) and sustainable brand image (SBI \rightarrow SBT: $\beta = 0.107$, $p = 0.097$, $t = 1.658$) were not statistically significant. Although both t-values exceed the threshold of 1.645, the corresponding confidence intervals (BCa CI) include zero, indicating that the effects are not robust. Therefore, H3 and H4 are rejected.

The influence of country-of-origin on SBT varied considerably. Japan exhibited a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.554$, $p < 0.01$, 95 per cent BCa CI [0.412, 0.672], $t = 8.350$, $f^2 = 0.553$), supporting H5 (Japan). Similarly, the USA showed a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < 0.01$, 95 per cent BCa CI [0.117, 0.309], $t = 4.483$, $f^2 = 0.071$), supporting H5 (USA). In contrast, China had no significant influence on SBT ($\beta = -0.015$, $p = 0.673$, $t = 0.422$), resulting in the rejection of H5 (China).

Attitude and sustainable brand trust together explained 65.8 per cent of the variance in repurchase intention (RI) ($R^2 = 0.658$, $Q^2 = 0.541$). Both ATT ($\beta = 0.352$, $p < 0.01$, 95 per cent BCa CI [0.206, 0.597], $t = 3.845$, $f^2 = 0.102$) and SBT ($\beta = 0.456$, $p < 0.01$, 95 per cent BCa CI [0.206, 0.652], $t = 4.051$, $f^2 = 0.145$) had significant positive effects on RI, supporting H6 and H7. Notably, SBT exerted a stronger influence than ATT.

4.3.2 Mediation hypotheses

The mediation analysis indicates that attitude significantly mediates the relationship between environmental concern and repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.062$, $p = 0.019$, 95 per cent BCa CI [0.020, 0.125], $t = 2.346$), supporting H1a. A similar indirect effect was found for perceived quality, with PQ influencing repurchase intention through attitude ($\beta = 0.243$, $p < 0.01$, 95 per cent BCa CI [0.125, 0.399], $t = 3.484$), supporting H2a. In contrast, sustainable brand trust did

not mediate the relationships between brand communication and repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.052$, $p = 0.102$, $t = 1.636$) or between sustainable brand image and repurchase intention ($\beta = 0.049$, $p = 0.169$, $t = 1.376$), leading to the rejection of H3a and H4a. Regarding country-of-origin effects, sustainable brand trust significantly mediated the relationships for Japan ($\beta = 0.253$, $p < 0.01$, 95 per cent BCa CI [0.123, 0.389], $t = 3.682$) and the USA ($\beta = 0.098$, $p < 0.01$, 95% BCa CI [0.049, 0.161], $t = 3.435$), supporting H5a (Japan) and H5a (USA). However, no significant mediation effect was observed for China ($\beta = -0.007$, $p = 0.679$, $t = 0.414$), resulting in the rejection of H5a (China). Structural model results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Structural Model Assessment

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Dev	BC 95 per cent UL	BC 95 per cent LL	T values	P values	Supported	VIF	R ²	F	Q ²
Direct relationships												
H1	EC → ATT	0.162	0.061	0.041	0.279	2.655	*0.008	Yes	1.213	0.513	0.045	0.500
H2	PQ → ATT	0.635	0.049	0.530	0.724	12.852	**<0.01	Yes	1.213		0.687	
H3	BC → SBT	0.115	0.066	-0.011	0.249	1.752	0.080	No	2.797	0.681	0.015	0.667
H4	SBI → SBT	0.107	0.064	-0.015	0.234	1.658	0.097	No	2.911		0.012	
H5 (J)	COO_J → SBT	0.554	0.066	0.412	0.672	8.350	**<0.01	Yes	1.770		0.553	
H5 (C)	COO_C → SBT	-0.015	0.037	-0.087	0.055	0.422	0.673	No	1.442		0.001	
H5 (U)	COO_U → SBT	0.214	0.048	0.117	0.309	4.483	**<0.01	Yes	2.059		0.071	
H6	ATT → RI	0.352	0.100	0.206	0.597	3.845	**<0.01	Yes	4.227	0.658	0.102	0.541
H7	SBT → RI	0.456	0.113	0.206	0.652	4.051	**<0.01	Yes	4.303		0.145	
Mediation relationships												
H1a	EC → ATT → RI	0.062	0.026	0.020	0.125	2.346	*0.019	Yes				
H2a	PQ → ATT → RI	0.243	0.070	0.125	0.399	3.484	**<0.01	Yes				
H3a	BC → SBT → RI	0.052	0.032	0.000	0.126	1.636	0.102	No				
H4a	SCI → SBT → RI	0.049	0.035	-0.002	0.139	1.376	0.169	No				
H5a(J)	COO_J → SBT → RI	0.253	0.069	0.123	0.389	3.682	**<0.01	Yes				
H5a(C)	COO_CHN → SBT → RI	-0.007	0.017	-0.041	0.029	0.414	0.679	No				
H5a(U)	COO_USA → SBT → RI	0.098	0.028	0.049	0.161	3.435	**<0.01	Yes				

Note: BC, bias-corrected; LL, lower limit; UL, upper limit; Bootstrap based on n, 5,000 resample (single-tailed); **p<0.01; *p<0.05, Environmental Concern (EC), Perceived Quality of Sustainable Brand (PQ), Brand Communication (BC), Sustainable Brand Image (SBI), Country-of-Origin Japan (COO_J), Country-of-Origin China (COO_C), Country-of-Origin USA (COO_U), Attitude Towards Sustainable Brand (ATT), Sustainable Brand Trust (SBT), Repurchase Intention (RI)

5. Discussion and implications of the study

5.1 Discussion of findings

This study extends the Theory of Planned Behaviour to examine Japanese consumers' repurchase intentions towards UNIQLO following its transition towards a sustainable fast-fashion model. The findings provide nuanced insights into the interplay between psychological drivers, brand transparency, and country-of-origin (COO) effects within the sustainable apparel context.

5.1.1 *The primacy of perceived value and attitude formation*

Consistent with the extended TPB framework, environmental concern (EC) and perceived quality (PQ) emerged as key antecedents of attitude. Notably, PQ exerted a substantially stronger influence than EC, suggesting that sustainability alone is insufficient to shape favourable attitudes unless accompanied by tangible product value. This aligns with rational action perspectives (Kumar et al., 2022; Nam et al., 2017), indicating that Japanese consumers evaluate sustainable fashion through a pragmatic lens. In other words, sustainability must coexist with product durability, functionality, and aesthetic appeal. This finding reinforces prior studies (Chen & Chang, 2012; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2021), which highlight that perceived benefits are central to repeat purchasing behaviour.

Furthermore, attitude fully mediated the relationships between EC/PQ and repurchase intention, underscoring its pivotal role as a psychological gateway. This extends existing TPB applications in sustainable consumption (Chen & Tung, 2014; Rabbanee et al., 2020) by demonstrating that, in post-adoption contexts, attitude bridges the gap between abstract environmental concerns and actual behavioural outcomes. The result corroborates earlier research indicating that psychological alignment is critical in shaping repurchase intention (Akehurst et al., 2012; Casaló & Escario, 2018).

5.1.2 *The transparency gap in brand communication and trust formation*

Contrary to expectations, brand communication (BC) and sustainable brand image (SBI) did not significantly influence sustainable brand trust (SBT). This finding reveals a critical "transparency gap" between corporate sustainability efforts and consumer perceptions. Despite extensive initiatives - such as long-standing campaigns promoting responsible consumption - a substantial proportion of respondents remained unaware of the brand's sustainability transition. This

suggests that existing communication strategies may lack clarity, reach, or credibility.

In the fast-fashion context, where concerns over greenwashing are prevalent (Acuti, Pizzetti, & Dolnicar, 2022; White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019), generic or promotional messaging may be perceived as superficial. As noted by Garbarino and Lee (2003), inconsistencies or insufficient information can erode cognitive trust. While brand communication is intended to shape identity and image (Batra & Keller, 2016; Grace & O’Cass, 2005), the absence of concrete and verifiable sustainability evidence limits its effectiveness in building trust. Thus, the findings challenge the assumption that visibility alone is sufficient; instead, credibility and transparency emerge as decisive factors.

Importantly, sustainable brand trust was found to significantly influence repurchase intention, confirming its role as a key behavioural driver. This is consistent with prior research suggesting that trust enhances confidence in brand performance and reliability (Urde, Greyser, & Balmer, 2007; Jin & Sung, 2009). However, the inability of BC and SBI to generate trust indicates that current sustainability communication may not adequately translate into meaningful consumer perceptions.

5.1.3 The asymmetric influence of country-of-origin

The study further highlights the strong and uneven influence of COO on brand trust. Products associated with Japan and the USA significantly enhanced trust, whereas China showed no meaningful effect. The strong impact of Japan reflects deeply embedded cultural perceptions of domestic quality, reliability, and craftsmanship. Similarly, the positive effect of the USA may be attributed to its perceived leadership in sustainability and innovation.

In contrast, the absence of a positive effect for China likely reflects enduring historical and socio-political influences, including past product safety incidents and geopolitical tensions. These findings underscore the importance of contextual and cultural factors in shaping consumer trust. They also validate the extension of TPB by incorporating COO as a critical external variable, particularly in Asian markets where national identity and historical narratives strongly influence brand evaluations.

5.2 *Implications of the study*

5.2.1 *Theoretical*

This study makes three key contributions to the literature on sustainable consumption. *First*, although the Theory of Planned Behaviour has been widely applied to general green consumption, its application to repurchase intention in the fast-fashion sector remains limited, with prior extensions typically adding only one or two isolated variables and focusing on initial purchase rather than post-adoption behaviour. By extending TPB to include interpersonal factors (environmental concern and perceived quality) alongside trust mechanisms, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of consumer behaviour in sustainable fast fashion. Notably, the findings demonstrate that, in the post-adoption stage, attitude serves as a critical mediating mechanism that links abstract environmental concerns to concrete repurchase behaviour. Notably, our findings demonstrate that, in the post-adoption stage, attitude serves as a critical mediating pathway through which abstract environmental concerns translate into concrete repurchase intentions, while perceived quality emerges as a significant driver of both attitude and trust, indicating that consumers do not trade off quality for sustainability but rather expect both. *Second*, the study addresses a contextual gap by focusing on the Japanese market, which remains underexplored in sustainable consumption research, where cultural values such as heightened quality consciousness, service orientation, and strong domestic product preferences shape consumer evaluations in distinctive ways. Our findings challenge the assumed universality of Western-centric TPB models by revealing that perceived product quality and country-of-origin (specifically, preference for domestic brands) exert stronger influences on sustainable brand trust formation than generic sustainability messaging, calling for greater contextual sensitivity in theory development. *Third*, by identifying the non-significant effects of brand communication and sustainable brand image on trust, this study refines signalling theory within the context of sustainable fast fashion. Contrary to theoretical expectations, our findings show that in markets saturated with sustainability claims - where consumer scepticism regarding greenwashing is prevalent - the mere presence of sustainability communication is insufficient to build credible signals; instead, communication must be transparent, specific, verifiable, and contextually meaningful to overcome scepticism. This insight contributes to the growing literature on greenwashing and brand authenticity by specifying the boundary

conditions under which sustainability signals are perceived as credible, suggesting that sustainable brand image, when not backed by substantive and demonstrable practices, may be dismissed as performative and thereby fail to generate the trust that signalling theories would predict.

5.2.2 Managerial and marketing

The findings offer several important implications for practitioners, particularly international brands operating in Japan. First, sustainability should not be positioned as a standalone attribute. Instead, brands should integrate sustainability with core product value by emphasising how environmentally responsible practices enhance durability, functionality, and overall quality. For example, UNIQLO and similar retailers could adopt positioning strategies that highlight longevity and craftsmanship, aligning sustainability with consumers' expectations of high-quality products. Second, the low level of consumer awareness regarding sustainability initiatives indicates a gap in communication effectiveness. Brands should move beyond broad or symbolic messaging and instead provide clear, verifiable, and detailed information - such as supply chain transparency, carbon footprint disclosures, and third-party certifications. Communication strategies should prioritise education and clarity, enabling consumers to understand both the processes and the impact of sustainability efforts. Third, country-of-origin perceptions must be strategically managed. Brands associated with Japan or the USA can leverage positive origin cues to strengthen trust and credibility. In contrast, brands with production links to China may need to mitigate potential negative perceptions by emphasising adherence to international quality standards, transparency, and local partnerships. Finally, given the strong influence of perceived quality, marketing strategies should target consumer segments that prioritise product longevity and value rather than price alone. These consumers are more likely to translate environmental concern into actual repurchase behaviour when their expectations of quality and reliability are met.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the sample was geographically confined to urban areas (Tokyo and Osaka), where environmental awareness and access to information are typically higher. Future research could extend this work by

examining rural populations in Japan to assess whether the urban-rural divide influences sustainable repurchase intentions. Second, the cross-sectional design captures consumer perceptions at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies would provide deeper insights into how repurchase intentions evolve as sustainability initiatives mature, particularly in response to ongoing brand efforts by UNIQLO. Third, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, especially in relation to environmental concern. Future studies could incorporate behavioural data, such as actual purchase records or transaction histories, to enhance the validity of findings and better reflect real consumption patterns. Finally, this study focused on a single brand. While this approach offers depth, it may limit generalisability. Future research could adopt a comparative perspective by examining multiple fast-fashion brands, such as GU and H&M, to better understand brand-specific and competitive dynamics within the Japanese market.

6. Conclusion

As the fashion industry faces mounting pressure to embrace sustainability, understanding the drivers of repurchase intention has become increasingly critical. This study demonstrates that, for Japanese consumers, sustainable repurchase behaviour is not driven by environmental concern alone, but by the interplay of perceived quality, trust, and country-of-origin perceptions. Although UNIQLO benefits from a strong domestic brand image, its transition towards sustainability has yet to be fully internalised by consumers, largely due to gaps in communication and transparency. The findings suggest that sustainability initiatives must be clearly articulated and credibly demonstrated to translate awareness into action. By aligning sustainability with product quality and effectively leveraging positive country-of-origin associations, fast-fashion brands can bridge the gap between consumer intention and actual behaviour. In doing so, they can not only enhance customer loyalty but also secure a sustainable competitive advantage in an increasingly environmentally conscious marketplace.

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