

Qualitative Exploration of Semarang Consumers' Responses to Starbucks' Green Marketing Narrative

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Abstract. Examining how customers in Semarang City feel about Starbucks' new "green" marketing story is the main objective of this research. Many multinational corporations, Starbucks included, are running sustainability initiatives to improve their public image and encourage customers to do the same in the face of mounting environmental degradation. Nevertheless, there has been a dearth of research on the subject of consumer apathy and confusion about green marketing, particularly in Semarang City. This study employs in-depth interviews with customers who were chosen at random to conduct exploratory research using a qualitative technique. We anticipate that the findings will give light on the extent to which Indonesian consumers react to and comprehend the sustainability story, and that they will also be useful in informing the creation of future marketing campaigns in the country.

Keywords : Green Marketing; Consumer Response; Qualitative Exploration

INTRODUCTION

The G20 emphasizes the importance of sustainable development based on a green economy, clean energy transition, and concrete actions to address climate change, at the global, national and local levels, environmental issues are increasingly becoming a major concern. As the host of the G20 in 2022, Indonesia has done many things to support the agenda. One of them is to encourage the private sector to implement sustainable business practices, such as green marketing (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

One of the main causes of environmental problems in the form of environmental pollution, both on land and at sea, is plastic waste. This is because plastic waste does not decompose easily and takes hundreds of years to decompose. Plastic is a single-use packaging material that is still widely used in Indonesia, but unfortunately, the plastic waste management system in Indonesia is ineffective, resulting in a large amount of plastic waste accumulation. In 2024, the total amount of waste in Indonesia reached 33.79 million tonnes, with plastic waste making up 19.64% of that total, or about 6.63 million tonnes, according to the National Waste Management Information System (SIPSN) of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK). According to the Environmental Agency (DLH) of Semarang City, the total waste accumulation reached approximately 1,200 tons per day in 2024. These data indicate that the increasing environmental pollution caused by plastic waste and the growing consumer demand for environmentally friendly products necessitate marketing strategies that can meet the needs of environmentally conscious consumers. The rising environmental issues have prompted many companies to develop marketing concepts prioritizing environmental concerns, known as green marketing.

The term "green marketing" refers to an approach to advertising that prioritises less impact on the environment. An other perspective is that green marketing is a new development that has arisen as a reaction to the growing ecological harm that corporations are causing via their industrial processes. thereby holding companies accountable for

environmental sustainability (Ajizah N, 2017). Many companies have adopted green marketing concepts, one of which is Starbucks.

Starbucks is a multinational company based in Seattle, Washington, United States, founded in 1971. Starbucks is one of the largest coffee shop chains in the world, with thousands of outlets spread across various countries, including Indonesia. Starbucks Coffee, one of the leading companies in the retail coffee industry, sells various types of ready-to-drink coffee with different serving methods and flavors, claimed to be made from the best coffee beans from around the world. Starbucks Coffee customers not only receive coffee products but also enjoy services that prioritize their comfort. In line with the potential and promising market growth in Indonesia, Starbucks Coffee Indonesia continues to increase the number of its outlets each year (Hendi, 2024). Over 9,000 Starbucks outlets have been certified for sustainable practices, including the use of environmentally friendly materials, waste reduction, and efficient energy use, with the goal of reducing carbon emissions, waste, and water footprint by 50% by 2030. Starbucks has launched a new cold cup that uses up to 20% less plastic. Their goal is to reduce plastic waste by more than 13.5 million pounds annually (about.starbucks.com).

Semarang is one of the major cities in Central Java that actively supports government environmental management programs such as waste banks, plastic waste reduction, and public education on recycling. The Waste Bank Program is an initiative of the Indonesian government to address household waste issues through a community-based management system. According to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK, 2022), waste banks function as collection and exchange points for economically valuable waste, encouraging the community to sort and recycle. Since 2014, the waste bank program has been implemented in Semarang and has continued to grow with the support of the Environmental Agency. Public awareness of the environment has increased, especially among women and community groups. The waste bank program itself aims to encourage the community to save and sort waste, thereby creating economic value and reducing environmental burdens (Semarang City Environmental Agency, 2023).

However, few researchers have explored how multinational company Starbucks' green marketing narratives are perceived by local consumers, particularly in Semarang. This is important to understand whether the marketing strategies used are truly effective or merely symbolic or greenwashing. In a previous study by (Fatharani A Novi, 2023), it was found that purchasing decisions significantly influence green products. The researcher only studied one region, Jabodetabek, and there were no in-depth interviews or actual consumer observations; the study relied solely on simple quantitative indicators. Therefore, the author is interested in investigating how consumers respond to the green marketing concept at Starbucks. The primary objective of this study is to understand consumer responses to Starbucks' green marketing concept in the city of Semarang. Therefore, the researcher uses the title "QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF SEMARANG CONSUMERS' RESPONSES TO STARBUCKS' GREEN MARKETING NARRATIVE."

METHOD

In accordance with Sugiyono's definition in (Safarudin R, 2023), this study employs a qualitative approach. This type of research is characterised by an emphasis on meaning rather than generalisation, data collection methods that use triangulation (combination), inductive data analysis, and the researcher themselves as the central instrument. This study is exploratory in nature and gathers its data via in-depth interviews and careful

observation of Starbucks customers. Fereday and Muir-Cochra (2006) state in (Sitasari, 2022) that theme analysis is the approach of choice for this study. When a study wants to look at qualitative data to find patterns in a certain phenomena and explain how often the phenomenon happens from the researcher's point of view, thematic analysis is a good way to do so. This approach works well in certain situations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Starbucks Coffee first arrived in Indonesia in 2002 through a partnership with PT Mitra Adiperkasa Tbk, bringing with it the concept of modern cafes and international coffee flavors. In line with growing public awareness and global trends regarding environmental sustainability, Starbucks Coffee has adopted green marketing strategies such as using eco-friendly materials, educating customers about reducing plastic waste, and encouraging the use of personal tumblers. However, consumer responses to these strategies remain an intriguing topic for further study. This research explores consumer responses to Starbucks' green marketing narratives through customer experience and green marketing strategies. Informants provided relatively consistent answers, demonstrating their understanding, emotional engagement, and social experiences with Starbucks' environmentally friendly programs.

1. Customer Experience

a. Cognitive (knowledge and understanding)

Awareness of Starbucks' environmentally friendly concepts, such as the use of tumblers and paper straws. However, education from Starbucks is still lacking, with most information obtained indirectly through social media or personal assumptions.

b. Emotion (Feelings)

There is a sense of joy, pride, and support for Starbucks' strategy. These positive feelings contribute to increasing loyalty to maintain the decision to remain a customer, although it is not the sole determining factor.

c. Physical (Facilities and Comfort)

Awareness and use of facilities such as reusable cups, bringing personal tumblers, and the presence of recycling bins. These physical experiences are perceived as contributing to positive perceptions of the environmental program.

d. Sensory (Sensory Experience)

Through the use of wooden elements and natural lighting, Starbucks' interior design is perceived as supporting a natural feel. The sensory aspects of coffee also make the atmosphere more comfortable, but are considered insufficient in explicitly conveying the environmental message.

e. Social (Interaction and Engagement)

Limited direct interaction with staff regarding the eco-friendly program results in insufficient engagement in community campaigns; however, the influence of friends and social media contributes to shaping understanding and experience regarding Starbucks' green marketing.

2. Green Marketing

a. Green Product

Starbucks' environmentally friendly products are seen as a positive and commendable step. The existence of these products provides a sense of comfort as they support environmental conservation.

b. Green Price

Customers are willing to pay more for truly environmentally friendly products, provided they are commensurate with quality and there is clear evidence of sustainability. However, Starbucks' high prices are a consideration, especially if there are cheaper alternatives that are still environmentally conscious.

c. Green promotion

There are campaigns such as encouraging customers to bring their own tumblers or commemorating Earth Day. These promotions are considered quite interesting, but need to be developed to be more effective.

d. Green place

There is awareness of the reduction of plastic and the provision of environmentally friendly products. However, this awareness is not yet widespread due to a lack of information provided directly by Starbucks.

Based on these results, there are five main themes that reflect consumer responses to green marketing strategies. These themes include:

1. Environmental awareness

Demonstrating awareness of the importance of environmental issues, particularly plastic waste reduction. For example, feeling motivated to use a personal tumbler due to awareness of plastic waste.

2. Perception of green marketing programs

Awareness of Starbucks' green marketing programs, such as discounts for using personal tumblers, but the campaign is perceived as not being actively communicated.

3. Personal experience

Consumers' experiences in using environmentally friendly products are individual and subjective. Some consumers feel proud when using tumblers because they are seen as contributing to environmental support, while others find it inconvenient if they forget to bring them.

4. Barriers to participation

There are barriers to actively participating in Starbucks' green marketing programs, such as lack of information about the program, forgetting to bring a tumbler, and feeling it is impractical. These can be significant obstacles in efforts to foster sustainable consumer behavior.

5. Relevance to lifestyle

Starbucks is perceived as a brand that aligns with an urban and productive lifestyle. This is because bringing a tumbler can be part of one's style, especially when supported by attractive designs and strong visual campaigns.

The results of this study indicate that Starbucks consumers in Semarang are aware of environmental issues, although their level of understanding of Starbucks' environmental campaigns varies. Some informants stated that they were aware of Starbucks' sustainability programs, such as the Bring Your Own Tumbler (BYOT) program, the use of eco-friendly straws, and plastic reduction. However, understanding of deeper green marketing narratives, such as involvement with waste banks or local recycling initiatives, is not yet widespread among consumers. Consumers generally appreciate Starbucks' efforts to communicate an environmentally friendly image. The use of environmentally friendly practices, such as minimalist interior design and the use of recycled materials in packaging, creates an impression of environmentally conscious companies.

This is why some customers continue to go to Starbucks, even though its prices are slightly higher than local brands. This shows that a positive perception of corporate social responsibility can increase customer loyalty. However, there are some customers who are not completely influenced by green advertising campaigns. Some people believe that their preference for purchasing goods is more influenced by taste, environment, and lifestyle than sustainability values. This shows that Starbucks' green advertising campaigns still need to be strengthened so that the company can truly encourage its consumers to become more environmentally conscious, not just based on opinions. Starbucks in Semarang has adopted a green marketing strategy in line with its global strategy, but it also needs to consider local wisdom and sustainable education to increase consumer engagement. Starbucks' presence as a global brand influences perceptions of contemporary and luxurious lifestyles. Ultimately, these perceptions can be used to spread sustainability messages.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussions presented earlier, it can be concluded that effective green marketing does not only depend on the company's communication strategies but also on open attitudes and sustainable consumer education. Starbucks has a great opportunity to strengthen its reputation as a brand that is not only superior in terms of quality but also environmentally responsible, especially if Starbucks can collaborate with local communities in environmentally friendly initiatives and waste management. This study has limitations in terms of informants, lack of time, and geographical coverage. For future researchers, it is recommended to involve more informants from diverse backgrounds and regions to obtain more representative results.

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