

## Designing Vegan Leather Based Coffee Grounds Merchandise as an Effort to Optimize Green Brand Awareness in Work Unusual

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### ABSTRACT

The growth of coffee shops in the city of Bandung encourages brand competition that not only focuses on product quality but also on the ability to convey sustainability values to consumers. Work Unusual is a coffee shop that has implemented environmentally friendly practices, but the level of consumer green brand awareness is still relatively low due to the limitations of the communication media used. This research aims to design sustainable merchandise as a physical communication medium to optimize green brand awareness at Work Unusual. The method used is design thinking with the stages of empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and testing. The design focuses on the development of merchandise in the form of laptop sleeves made of vegan leather based on coffee grounds with the application of interlocking and quilting techniques. The results of the research are in the form of a laptop sleeve prototype that has functional, aesthetic, and sustainability values, and is considered capable of nonverbally representing Work Unusual's environmental commitment. The conclusion of the study shows that sustainable merchandise design has the potential to be an effective visual communication strategy in supporting the optimization of green brand awareness in sustainability-based coffee shops.

**Keywords:** Green Brand Awareness; Sustainable Merchandise; Vegan Leather Coffee Grounds; Design Thinking; Sustainable Coffee Shop

### INTRODUCTION

Several studies have examined green communication strategies and the role of merchandise in building brand awareness. Fatemi et al. (2023) found that the effectiveness of green value communication depends on the consistency of the medium and its relevance to the consumer experience. D'Itria et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of integrating green values from the early stages of the design process. Wu et al. (2022) highlighted the potential of merchandise as an environmentally valuable communication medium, while still focusing on material aspects. Roggeveen et al. (2021) found that products with utility value and meaningful design can strengthen brand memory through repeated use. Kamleitner and Marckhgott (2021) introduced the concept of silent persuasion, where incidental use of merchandise can shape consumer perceptions without explicit verbal messages. In Indonesia, Diyah Winarni (2024) examined green brand awareness, while Putri et al. (2022) examined the influence of sustainable marketing on brand image in coffee shops. However, these studies are still partial because they have not simultaneously integrated aspects of green brand awareness, sustainable merchandise design, and the use of coffee grounds-based vegan leather in a single coffee shop context. This research aims to fill this gap by designing a laptop sleeve made of vegan leather from coffee grounds as a strategic physical communication medium in optimizing environmentally friendly brand awareness at Work Unusual.

The development of the coffee industry globally shows very rapid growth in line with the changing lifestyle of urban people, who make coffee shops not only a place to consume drinks but also workspaces, social spaces, and spaces for identity expression. However, the growth of this industry also brings serious environmental consequences, ranging from an increase in single-use packaging waste and high energy consumption to organic waste in the form of coffee grounds that have not been optimally managed (Gupta et al., 2022; H.-W. Jang & Lee, 2019; Kuchta, 2024; Marwan et al., 2024; Moresi & Cimini, 2025). At the global level, sustainability issues are a major concern in the hospitality and food service industry, including coffee shops, as consumer awareness of the environmental impact of daily consumption activities increases (Damico et al., 2022). In this context, green brand awareness has emerged as an important concept that reflects the extent to which consumers are able to recognize and remember brands as entities that have concern and commitment to the environment (Diyah Winarni, 2024). However, although sustainability practices are increasingly being adopted by brands, not all of these efforts are effectively perceived and understood by consumers.

One of the main factors causing low green brand awareness is the limitation of sustainability communication strategies implemented by brands. Many coffee shop industry players have implemented environmentally friendly practices operationally, such as reducing single-use plastics, using recycled materials, and managing waste, but these values are often not communicated consistently and contextually to consumers (Putri et al., 2022). The communication media used tend to focus on digital platforms, especially social media, which are temporary and depend on fluctuating audience attention (Briukhanova, 2021). In addition, sustainability messages are often delivered verbally or textually without the support of physical media that consumers can interact with directly. Another factor that also has an effect is the lack of use of brand support products, such as merchandise, as a means of communicating sustainability values, so that the message to be conveyed is not deeply internalized in the consumer experience (Kamleitner & Marckhgott, 2021). The limitations of sustainability communication have an impact on the low level of consumer awareness of the environmental commitments of a brand. Consumers tend to judge coffee shops only based on product quality, price, and spatial atmosphere, without realizing the sustainability values that have been applied in brand operations (H.-W. Jang & Lee, 2019; Y. J. Jang et al., 2015). This condition causes the environmentally friendly practices that have been carried out to not provide significant added value to brand image and consumer loyalty (Fatemi et al., 2023). In addition, low green brand awareness also hinders the formation of emotional relationships between consumers and brands, because consumers do not have a complete understanding of the values and philosophy they carry (Butt et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2017; Panda et al., 2020; Papista & Dimitriadis, 2019). In the long run, this has the potential to reduce brand competitiveness amid increasing consumer preference for sustainability-oriented products and services (Ko & Jeon, 2024).

Green brand awareness in this study is understood as the ability of consumers to recognize, remember, and associate a brand with its environmentally friendly attributes (Diyah Winarni, 2024). This awareness is not only formed through claims or promotional messages, but also through consumers' direct experiences of the physical and symbolic attributes that represent sustainability values. One of the media that has strong potential in building green brand awareness is merchandise, because it is tangible, has utility value, and allows repeated interactions between consumers and brands (Roggeveen et al., 2021). Merchandise that is

designed sustainably, both in terms of materials and production processes, can function as a nonverbal communication medium that conveys sustainability messages implicitly through everyday use. In the context of this study, the design of coffee grounds-based vegan leather merchandise with interlocking and quilting techniques is positioned as a design strategy that integrates aspects of function, aesthetics, and sustainability simultaneously.

The novelty of this research lies in the integrative approach between sustainable merchandise design and the optimization of green brand awareness in the context of coffee shops. Different from previous research that has highlighted sustainability branding from a purely visual marketing or communication perspective (Fatemi et al., 2023; D'Itria et al., 2024), this study places merchandise products as a physical communication medium that is specifically designed through the exploration of coffee grounds-based vegan leather materials and the application of fabric manipulation techniques in the form of interlocking and quilting. This innovation not only presents an alternative environmentally friendly material that is relevant to the coffee industry but also prioritizes the design process as a sustainability narrative that can be directly experienced by users. Thus, this research makes a new contribution to the realm of sustainable product design that functions strategically as a brand communication tool.

The urgency of this research becomes even stronger when associated with the existing condition of Work Unusual as a coffee shop that has implemented various sustainability practices but has not been able to communicate these values optimally to consumers. Observational data and questionnaires show that most consumers are not yet aware of the sustainability commitments carried out by Work Unusual, even though these practices have become part of its daily operations. This condition confirms the gap between sustainability implementation and consumer perception. Without the right communication strategy, sustainability efforts risk becoming mere internal practices that do not have a significant impact on brand image and awareness. Therefore, a design approach is needed that is able to bridge this gap through relevant, contextual, and sustainable media.

The urgency of this research is based on several important factors. First, the rise of consumer awareness of environmental issues is driving coffee shops to not only implement environmentally friendly practices operationally but also effectively communicate these values to differentiate themselves amid increasingly fierce industry competition. Second, field data show that although Work Unusual has implemented various green practices such as reducing single-use plastics, managing waste, and collaborating with coffee waste processors, consumers' green brand awareness remains relatively low, with 74.4% of respondents unaware of these efforts. This situation confirms a mismatch between consumer expectations and perceptions that needs to be addressed immediately. Third, the limited availability of physical communication media that consumers can interact with directly prevents consumers from effectively internalizing the intended values in their daily experiences. The digital media currently used are temporary and highly dependent on fluctuating audience attention. Fourth, the use of merchandise as a means of communicating brand value is still suboptimal, as previously produced products do not reflect transferable value in terms of materials or design concepts. Fifth, the Work Unusual consumer base, dominated by creative workers and students whose primary activities involve work, requires a communication approach that is not explicit but integrated with their daily routines. Therefore, this research urgently seeks to devise design

solutions capable of bridging this gap through sustainable merchandise that is functional, aesthetic, and aligned with brand identity.

Based on these problems, this study aims to analyze the existing conditions of Work Unusual in communicating sustainability values to consumers and to identify the factors causing low green brand awareness. In addition, this research aims to design merchandise in the form of fashion accessories based on coffee grounds-based vegan leather with the application of interlocking and quilting techniques as a physical communication medium that represents sustainability values. Through a design thinking approach, this research also aims to produce a merchandise prototype that is functional, aesthetic, in line with the Work Unusual identity, and has the potential to support the optimization of green brand awareness.

This research is expected to provide theoretical, practical, and social benefits. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of sustainable design studies, especially in the context of the use of waste-based alternative materials and the application of fabric manipulation techniques as a brand communication strategy. Practically, the research results are expected to be a design solution for Work Unusual in developing physical communication media that are able to convey sustainability values more effectively and sustainably. For design practitioners and the hospitality industry, this research can serve as a reference in integrating sustainability into merchandise product design. Socially, this research is expected to increase consumer awareness of the importance of responsible consumption behavior and encourage the adoption of sustainable practices in daily life.

This research also has theoretical implications for the development of sustainable design and green branding studies, particularly in strengthening the understanding that green brand awareness is formed not only through promotional claims but also through consumers' direct experiences with the brand's physical and symbolic attributes. These findings expand the concept of silent persuasion proposed by Kamleitner and Marckhgott (2021) by demonstrating that sustainably designed merchandise can function as a nonverbal communication medium that shapes consumer perceptions through repeated use in daily activities. Practically, this research implies the need for sustainable coffee shops to develop merchandise as an integral part of their brand communication strategy, not simply as a promotional add-on. For Work Unusual, the results of this study provide a concrete design solution in the form of a laptop sleeve made from vegan leather derived from coffee grounds that can be implemented as a medium for communicating sustainability values while strengthening brand identity. For design practitioners and the hospitality industry, this research provides guidance on integrating waste-based alternative materials and sustainable design techniques into products that have brand communication value. For future researchers, this study opens opportunities to test the effectiveness of design solutions longitudinally, develop variations of other merchandise products, and explore their influence on brand loyalty and consumer purchasing decisions in a sustainable manner. This research also has implications for creative industry policy to encourage the adoption of sustainable design practices that are not only environmentally friendly but also able to strengthen brand competitiveness in an increasingly competitive market.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a design thinking approach as the main strategy for formulating solutions to the problem of low green brand awareness. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding context, perceptions, and user experience, as well as on designing solution-oriented outcomes that are relevant to field conditions. The research is not directed at hypothesis testing, but rather at exploring problems and developing design solutions that are oriented to user needs.

The research was conducted at Work Unusual, a sustainability-based coffee shop in the city of Bandung, during the period 2024–2025. The research subjects include internal Work Unusual stakeholders and active consumers who interact directly with the coffee shop's space and services. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires involving 78 respondents, and documentation of the design process. The research focus includes continuous brand communication, merchandise design, and user experience as the basis for formulating solutions.

The research process is carried out through the stages of design thinking, namely empathize to understand consumer behavior and perceptions, define to formulate the main problem, ideate to explore design ideas, prototype to realize solutions in the form of merchandise made of coffee grounds-based vegan leather, and testing to evaluate the suitability of the design with the brand identity and its potential to support green brand awareness. Data analysis is conducted qualitatively and descriptively, maintaining data validity through triangulation of sources and methods.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research employs a design thinking approach as the main strategy for formulating solutions to the problem of low green brand awareness. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding context, perceptions, and user experience, as well as on designing solution-oriented outcomes that are relevant to field conditions. The research is not directed at hypothesis testing, but rather at exploring problems and developing design solutions that are oriented to user needs.

The research was carried out at Work Unusual, a sustainability-based coffee shop located on Jl. Buah Batu No. 90, Bandung City. The research object was chosen based on the characteristics of Work Unusual as a workspace and social space that integrates environmentally friendly practices in its operations but has not been able to communicate sustainability values optimally to consumers. In general, Work Unusual targets the urban user segment consisting of students, creative workers, freelancers, and remote workers with an age range of 18–40 years, who have high mobility and a tendency toward an environmentally conscious lifestyle.

The user profile of Work Unusual shows the dominance of work and study activities, which positions this coffee shop as both a productivity space and a social space. This character is an important context in the research, because the communication media used to convey sustainability values must align with consumers' main activities in order to be accepted and used repeatedly. Therefore, the results of the study focus on mapping the existing conditions of green brand awareness, consumer needs for physical communication media, and the development of sustainable merchandise as a design solution.

The results of the study show that the level of green brand awareness among Work Unusual consumers is still relatively low, even though the brand has implemented various sustainability practices in its operations. Based on the results of the first phase of the questionnaire involving 78 respondents, 74.4% of respondents did not know that Work Unusual has specific initiatives to support environmental sustainability, while only 25.6% stated that they knew or were aware of the sustainability practices carried out by the brand.

These findings indicate a gap between sustainability implementation and consumer perception. Consumers tend to view Work Unusual as a coffee shop with a comfortable atmosphere and adequate work facilities, but do not strongly associate it with an eco-friendly identity. This condition aligns with the concept of green brand awareness, which emphasizes that consumer awareness depends not only on internal brand practices but also on the extent to which these values can be recognized and remembered through direct experience (Diyah Winarni, 2024).

In addition, 57.7% of respondents stated that they had never seen communication media that explicitly or implicitly conveyed sustainability messages at Work Unusual. This reinforces the finding that existing communication media have not been able to function as a strong reinforcement of green brand associations in consumers' minds.

Based on field observations and interviews with Work Unusual's internal parties, several main factors causing low green brand awareness were identified. The first factor is the limitation of physical communication media that can be directly interacted with by consumers. So far, sustainability communication has mostly been conveyed through digital media and verbal narratives, which are temporary and not always noticed by consumers.

The second factor is the suboptimal use of brand support products, such as merchandise, as a means of value communication. Work Unusual previously only produced merchandise in the form of drinking bottles with brand logos, but these products are not sustainable in design and are less popular with consumers. The merchandise is unable to represent sustainability values visually or materially, thus failing to build strong brand associations.

The third factor is the character of Work Unusual consumers, who tend to focus on work activities. In this condition, explicit sustainability messages or direct promotions are less effective, because consumers are not in a mode of receiving marketing messages. This shows the need for nonverbal communication media integrated with consumers' daily activities, in line with the concept of silent persuasion through physical objects that are used regularly (Kamleitner & Marckhgott, 2021).

The results of the second phase of the questionnaire show that the majority of consumers are interested in merchandise that reflects sustainability values. A total of 54.1% of respondents stated that they were quite interested, 32.8% were very interested, and only 13.1% were not interested in sustainable merchandise. These findings indicate a strong opportunity to develop merchandise as a medium for communicating sustainability values.

The most popular type of merchandise is laptop sleeves (63.3%), followed by tote bags (20%), drinking bottles (10%), and apparel. The main reason for choosing a laptop sleeve is its high functional value and frequency of use in consumers' daily activities. These findings reinforce the assumption that merchandise with real utility is more likely to be used repeatedly and provide sustained brand exposure (Roggeveen et al., 2021).

Material experiments were carried out to assess the feasibility of coffee-grounds-based vegan leather as the main merchandise material. The test results show that this material has sufficiently good characteristics for non-structural fashion accessory applications. Tensile tests showed that the strength of the material is within a range comparable to that of animal leather, while elasticity tests indicated adequate flexibility for products such as laptop sleeves.

However, the friction and moisture tests show that the material has limitations under heavy abrasion and humid conditions, so its use needs to be adapted to the product context. These findings are an important basis for determining merchandise types that are not exposed to extreme stress and excessive water.

The experiment results show that the interlocking technique is effective for connecting modules of vegan leather material without adding adhesive or metal components. This technique allows efficient material utilization, especially when sheet sizes are limited. However, interlocking patterns with excessive locking produce excessive thickness and complicate subsequent sewing processes.

Quilting experiments show that the primary function of stitching is more effective as structural reinforcement than as a visual texturing technique. The embossed effect of quilting on the surface of vegan leather is not very dominant, so this technique is used functionally to add cushioning and stability to the product.

Based on all the findings, laptop sleeves were chosen as the main merchandise product. The products are designed in a landscape orientation, using coffee-grounds-based vegan leather as the main material, combined with interlocking and quilting techniques. The design is kept simple to suit the character of the material and user needs.

The results of the joint evaluation with Work Unusual show that the product is considered consistent with the brand identity and the sustainability values implemented. Vegan leather made from coffee grounds is seen as relevant to the coffee shop context and reinforces the sustainability narrative. In addition, the design is considered functional and relevant to consumer activities.

Trials with three visitors showed that the product was able to create initial awareness of Work Unusual's sustainability commitments. Respondents stated that, after learning about the material and product concept, they better understood that Work Unusual is a brand that cares about the environment. Although there was feedback related to preferences for a more masculine design, in general the product was considered suitable to be implemented as merchandise.

Overall, the results of the study show that low green brand awareness at Work Unusual is caused by limitations in physical communication media that can convey sustainability values contextually. The design of coffee-grounds-based vegan leather merchandise using interlocking and quilting techniques has proven to have potential as a relevant, functional, and consumer-aligned nonverbal communication medium. The resulting laptop sleeve products are able to represent sustainability values in a concrete way and have the potential to support the optimization of green brand awareness.

### **The Urgency of Research in the Context of Green Brand Awareness in Sustainable Coffee Shops**

This research is motivated by the urgency of increasing sustainability issues in the coffee shop industry, which is not only related to operational aspects, but also to the way the

value of sustainability is communicated and perceived by consumers. The results show that although Work Unusual has implemented various environmentally friendly practices, such as reducing single-use plastics, waste management, and collaborating with coffee waste processors, the level of consumer green brand awareness is still relatively low. These findings confirm that the implementation of sustainability technically does not automatically shape green brand awareness in consumers' minds. This is in line with the view that green brand awareness is the initial stage in the cognitive process of consumers who are highly dependent on the ability of brands to communicate environmentally friendly attributes consistently and easily recognizable (Diyah Winarni, 2024).

The urgency of this research is even stronger when it is associated with changes in urban consumer behavior that is increasingly selective towards brands that have social and environmental values. However, without the right communication medium, sustainability values have the potential to become "hidden values" that do not make a significant contribution to the brand's image and competitiveness. Therefore, this research is not only important for Work Unusual specifically, but also relevant for other sustainable coffee shops facing similar challenges.

### **The Causes of Low Green Brand Awareness: The Gap between Practice and Perception**

Based on the results of the study, the main cause of low green brand awareness in Work Unusual lies in the gap between the sustainability practices that have been implemented and the consumer's perception of these practices. Questionnaire data showed that more than 70% of respondents were unaware of any sustainability initiatives implemented by Work Unusual. These findings indicate that consumers have not been able to associate brands with environmentally friendly attributes, which are the main indicators of green brand awareness (Diyah Winarni, 2024).

One of the dominant causes is the limited communication media used. Social media as the main channel of sustainability communication is temporary in nature and highly dependent on audience attention. In the context of coffee shops as a workspace, consumers tend to focus on productivity activities so that they are less responsive to promotional or educational messages that are explicit. This condition reinforces the finding that sustainability communication requires a more refined and integrated approach in the user experience (Kamleitner & Marckhgott, 2021).

Additionally, the absence of strategically designed merchandise leads to a loss of brand opportunities to build sustainable associations through physical objects. Merchandise that has previously been produced by Work Unusual does not represent the value of sustainability in terms of both materials and design concepts, so it is not able to function as a brand communication medium. This shows that not all merchandise has strategic value in building brand awareness; its effectiveness is largely determined by the suitability between functions, design, materials, and brand narratives (Roggeveen et al., 2021).

### **Merchandise as an Experiential Nonverbal Communication Solution**

The results of the study show that merchandise has great potential as a solution to sustainability communication problems in Work Unusual. The findings of the second phase of the questionnaire show the high interest of consumers in merchandise that has utility value and reflects sustainability. Laptop sleeves emerged as the main choice because they are relevant to the dominant activity of consumers, namely working and doing tasks.

In this context, merchandise serves as a nonverbal communication medium that works through the experience of everyday use. When consumers use a laptop sleeve made of vegan leather coffee grounds, they not only interact with the product functionally, but also with the sustainability narrative inherent in the material and the manufacturing process. This approach is in line with the concept of silent persuasion, where physical objects used regularly can shape consumer perceptions and attitudes towards brands without explicit verbal messages (Kamleitner & Marckhgott, 2021).

These findings reinforce the view that green brand awareness is more effectively built through direct experience than through promotional claims alone. Sustainably designed merchandise allows consumers to "experience" the value of sustainability, rather than just knowing it, so that green brand associations are formed more deeply.

### **The Role of Vegan Leather Coffee Grounds in the Sustainability Narrative**

The use of vegan leather based on coffee grounds as the main material for merchandise has an important role in building an authentic sustainability narrative. The results of material experiments show that vegan leather has characteristics that are quite feasible for non-structural fashion accessory applications, such as laptop sleeves. In addition to supporting the principle of sustainability through the use of coffee waste, this material also has a strong contextual connection with the coffee shop industry.

This interconnectedness is a significant added value, because materials not only function as physical elements, but also as a symbol of the transformation of waste into products with useful value. This is in line with the principle of sustainable design which emphasizes the responsible use of resources and the creation of products with lower environmental impact (McLennan, 2006). Thus, the vegan leather material of coffee grounds not only supports the environmental aspect, but also strengthens Work Unusual's identity as a sustainable coffee shop.

However, the results of the study also show the limitations of the material, such as sensitivity to heavy friction and moisture. These findings are an important basis in determining the right type of product so that materials are used optimally. The selection of laptop sleeves as a merchandise product shows the suitability between the material character and the function of the product, so that the risk of damage can be minimized.

### **Interlocking and Quilting Techniques as a Sustainable Design Strategy**

The application of interlocking and quilting techniques in merchandise design makes a significant contribution to the design value and sustainability of the product. The results of the experiment showed that the interlocking technique was effective in connecting material modules without the need for adhesives or additional components, thus supporting the principles of material efficiency and sustainable design. This technique also allows for the utilization of small-sized sheets of material, which is relevant when working with waste-based materials.

Meanwhile, quilting techniques function more dominantly as a reinforcement of the structure and cushioning of the product than as a decorative element. The results of the experiment showed that the visual effect of quilting on the surface of vegan leather was not very prominent, so its application was focused on the protective function. This approach is in line with the character of Quiet Artistry Consumer, which values the honesty of material and function over excessive ornamentation (ITF, 2025–2026).

The combination of these two techniques results in products with strong value of craftsmanship, while reinforcing the sustainability narrative through a measurable and responsible design process. This shows that design techniques not only play a role in the aesthetic aspect, but also in implicitly conveying the values and philosophy of the brand.

### **The Impact of Sustainable Merchandise Implementation on Green Brand Awareness**

The results of evaluation and testing show that the merchandise designed has a positive impact on consumer perception of Work Unusual. Product test respondents stated that after knowing the material and design concept of the laptop sleeve, they became more aware that Work Unusual is a brand that cares about the environment. These findings show that sustainable merchandise is able to form an initial awareness that becomes the foundation for the formation of consumer attitudes and behaviors in the future.

From a branding perspective, this impact is very important because green brand awareness plays a role as a prerequisite for the formation of consumer trust and loyalty to sustainable brands (Fatemi et al., 2023). With sustainable merchandise, Work Unusual not only strengthens the brand image, but also creates differentiation opportunities in the midst of increasingly fierce coffee shop competition.

In addition, sustainable merchandise has the potential to expand brand exposure to public spaces outside of coffee shops. Laptop sleeves used by consumers in various locations function as a repetitive passive promotional medium, thereby strengthening brand memory (Keller, 2009). This impact cannot be achieved through digital communication media alone.

### **Comparison of Research Findings with Previous and Novelty Research**

When compared to previous research, the findings of this study show a more integrative approach between product design and brand communication. Previous research has highlighted sustainability branding more from the perspective of marketing strategies or visual communication (Fatemi et al., 2023; Schäfer & Löwer, 2020), as well as the role of designers in translating sustainability values into products (D'Itria et al., 2024). However, this study adds a new dimension by positioning merchandise as a physical communication medium that is contextually designed and based on user experience.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of vegan leather materials based on coffee grounds, interlocking and quilting techniques, and the context of the coffee shop as a workspace. This approach shows that merchandising design does not only function as an additional product, but as a strategic instrument in building green brand awareness. Thus, this study expands the scope of sustainable design studies from mere material efficiency to the role of design as a medium of value communication.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications of Research Findings**

Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce the concept that green brand awareness is formed through direct interaction of consumers with physical and symbolic attributes of the brand, not just through promotional messages. These findings support the literature that emphasizes the importance of multisensory experiences in building brand awareness and memory (Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Roggeveen et al., 2021).

Practically, this research has direct implications for hospitality industry players, especially sustainable coffee shops. Sustainable merchandise can be used as an effective and relevant communication strategy, especially for brands that target the urban consumer segment and creative workers. In addition, this research provides guidance for designers in integrating

alternative materials and sustainable design techniques into products that have brand communication value.

Overall, this discussion shows that the research was conducted in response to the gap between sustainability practices and consumer perceptions. The main cause of the problem is the limited communication media that is able to convey the value of sustainability contextually. The design of merchandise based on vegan leather coffee grounds with interlocking and quilting techniques emerged as a relevant and impactful design solution. The implementation of this solution has the potential to increase green brand awareness, strengthen brand identity, and create a more meaningful relationship between consumers and Work Unusual. Thus, this study affirms the strategic role of sustainable product design as a brand communication medium in an era of increasing environmental awareness.

## CONCLUSION

This research aims to respond to the low green brand awareness at Work Unusual even though the coffee shop has implemented sustainability practices in its operations. Using the design thinking method, this research focuses on efforts to bridge the gap between sustainability implementation and consumer perception through designing solutions that are relevant to user activities. The results of the study show that the main problem does not lie in the absence of sustainability practices, but in the limitations of physical communication media that are able to convey these values contextually. Through the stages of empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and testing, this research produced merchandise in the form of a laptop sleeve made of coffee-grounds-based vegan leather with the application of interlocking and quilting techniques. The product has been shown to have the potential to be an effective nonverbal communication medium because it is able to represent sustainability values in a tangible way, is in harmony with consumer activities, and is consistent with Work Unusual's identity as a sustainability-based coffee shop. The contribution of this research lies in strengthening the role of design thinking in sustainable product design as a strategic instrument for forming green brand awareness, by positioning merchandise as an experience medium, not merely a promotional tool. The limitations of this study are that quantitative measurement of the long-term impact of the design has not been carried out and the aspect of mass production has not been examined. Further research is suggested to test the effectiveness of design solutions longitudinally and to develop product variations so that this approach can be applied more widely in the sustainable hospitality industry.

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