

Sustainability and territorial brand image: To what extent the sustainable territorial brand impacts eco-responsible behavior?

Auteur 1 : AIT ABDERRAHMAN Sara.
Auteur 2 : ALAOUI SOSSI Fatima Zohra.

Sara AIT ABDERRAHMAN, PhD student
Faculty of Economics and Management,
IBN TOFAIL University, Kenitra, Maroc
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0398-2369>

Fatima Zahra ALAOUI SOSSI, Professor head of the economics and Management department,
Faculty of Economics and Management,
IBN TOFAIL University, Kenitra, Maroc
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4373-5472>

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Abstract

This article analyzes how the integration of sustainability into a territorial brand influences citizens' perceptions and eco-friendly behaviors. Based on a literature review, the study introduces the concept of a "sustainable territorial brand" that merges place branding and sustainable development. A quantitative survey conducted among 120 residents of Rabat, designated a "green city" since 2010, shows that the sustainable territorial brand significantly strengthens citizens' commitment, values, trust, and attitudes. The main finding indicates that commitment is the strongest determinant of eco-responsible behavior, whereas trust has no direct effect. These results suggest that sustainable territorial branding can be an effective lever for mobilizing citizens toward environmental transition. Recommendations include reinforcing transparency and visibility around sustainability initiatives, encouraging citizen participation in local environmental actions, and designing communication strategies that highlight shared values and collective benefits.

Keywords: Sustainable territorial brand; brand image; civic commitment; trust; values; attitude; eco-responsible behavior; sustainability; territorial branding; Rabat.

Introduction

In a globalized and increasingly interconnected world, cities and territories must imperatively stand out by highlighting their unique characteristics in order to enhance their attractiveness and attract tourists, residents, and investors. In this regard, territorial branding serves as a strategic tool for differentiation and promotion. It reflects the ambition and vision of a territory (Pralhad and Hamel, 1989) and contributes to its economic development, political and cultural (Kavaratzis, 2005). According to Eshuis and al. (2014), territorial brands are symbolic constructions that give meaning to places and convey cultural associations, thus creating a coherent and differentiated mental imprint (Holt, 2004).

This footprint is based on several dimensions, with each territory highlighting certain strengths to stand out: tourism, heritage, governance, investments. (Anholt, 1990) or even infrastructure and urban management (Lynch, 1960). Added to these dimensions today is an unavoidable trend: sustainability. The triple bottom line model (Elkington, 1998) It proposes to evaluate performance not only in economic terms but also socially and environmentally, according to the logic of the "3Ps" (People, Planet, Profit). In the face of challenges related to climate change, resource depletion, and pollution, consumers now prioritize sustainable practices and products in their purchasing decisions.

This evolution has given rise to sustainable brands, initially developed in consumer goods and services, through two approaches: ecological marketing, focused on supply (Fisk, 1973; Henion & Kinnear, 1976; Henion, 1981), and green marketing, more oriented toward demand (Peattie, 1995). Green marketing is based on environmentally friendly practices and resource optimization, aiming to enhance consumer trust and loyalty. However, beyond supply, individuals' perception and Commitment appear essential to establishing a relationship based on shared values of environmental responsibility, which can promote social change (Webster, 1975; Kinnear, Taylor & Ahmed, 1974).

However, sustainability cannot rely solely on businesses: it requires a systemic approach involving all stakeholders of a territory. The territorial brand, as a vehicle for the ambition and vision of a territory, then becomes a powerful tool to highlight this commitment. Since the Rio Conference (1992), many cities have adopted sustainable development strategies to increase their attractiveness. Examples such as Copenhagen, aiming for carbon neutrality by 2025, or Vancouver, aspiring to become the greenest city in the world, illustrate this direction by investing in urban infrastructure, renewable energy, and sustainable resource management.

This article falls within this perspective and seeks to analyze the intersection between territorial brand image and sustainability. It explores the influence of a 'sustainable territorial brand' – a concept proposing eco-responsible values and behaviors for individuals. The aim is also to show

how this new approach can strengthen long-term trust and provide a lasting competitive advantage in an ever-changing environment. This contribution thus aims to enrich the scientific debate on sustainable development by introducing and illustrating the notion of a 'sustainable territorial brand,' a concept still scarcely present in the academic literature but carrying significant theoretical and practical potential, here by analogy with sustainable consumer brands – on perceptions, attitudes.

1. Literature review

The evolution of place branding strategies shows that territories, like companies, increasingly use territorial branding to differentiate themselves in a globalized competitive environment (Kavaratzis, 2005; Kotler & Gertner, 2002). The territorial brand image is built from mental associations— Both functional and abstract— That influence individuals' perceptions and behaviors (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). These associations shape loyalty and attachment to the territory, reflected in behaviors such as revisiting, recommending, or investing (Qu, Kim & Im, 2011; Cheng and al., 2014).

In this context, sustainability has emerged as a central dimension, both in the differentiation of companies and in the positioning of territories. Inspired by the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1998), It is based on the balance between economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Research has shown that integrating sustainability into the brand creates perceived added value, strengthens stakeholder trust, and promotes loyalty. (Montiel, 2008; Stern, 2007; Hui-Wen Chuah and al., 2020).

Research on the relationship between sustainability and commitment highlights that individuals' emotional attachment to a territory is strengthened when it is perceived as socially and environmentally responsible (Pegg and al., 2012; Lee, 2011). Commitment can be of a social nature – inclusion, solidarity – or environmental – resource preservation, impact reduction (Zgolli & Zaiem, 2018; He and al., 2018). This Commitment, in turn, influences individuals' attitudes, defined as cognitive predispositions guiding their behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The adoption of a positive environmental attitude constitutes a direct antecedent of eco-friendly practices. (Gautam, 2020; Schwartz, 1977).

The literature also distinguishes green trust – trust in the authenticity of ecological practices – from organizational trust, based on reputation and governance (Su and al., 2017; Hui-Wen Chuah and al., 2020). These two dimensions enhance the credibility of the territory and its ability to sustainably engage stakeholders. At the same time, research on perceived value and altruistic values (viedo-García and al., 2019; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2020) highlights the role of ethical and collective motivations in shaping responsible behaviors.

Finally, studies on eco-responsible behavior (Thøgersen, 1999; Stern, 2000) show that it results from a combination of personal values, social norms, and contextual influences. Territories play a key role here as vectors of social influence, by spreading sustainable practices through communication, regulation, and planning (Cialdini, 2007; Vandenberg, 2008). Environmental communication, when clear and accessible, promotes the adoption of new responsible behaviors (Burgess, Harrison & Filius, 1998).

Thus, the literature highlights that sustainable territorial branding influences eco-responsible behaviors through a set of mediators—associations, Commitment, attitudes, trust, and values—that form the foundation of a conceptual model integrating the specifics of territorial branding and sustainability challenges.

The development of our hypotheses, explanatory variables, and measurement items is directly grounded in the theoretical foundations identified in the literature review. The link between territorial brand image and functional/abstract associations is rooted in the works of Keller (1993) and Aaker (1991), who conceptualize brand image as the result of cognitive and symbolic associations; this framework guided the operationalization of our first hypotheses (H1–H2). The influence of attitudes, trust, values, and commitment on eco-responsible behavior (H3–H6) draws on seminal behavioral theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), the Value–Belief–Norm model (Schwartz, 1977), and prior research on environmental attitudes (Gautam, 2020; Pegg et al., 2012). The role of trust—green trust and organizational trust—was informed by studies on sustainable branding (Su et al., 2017; Hui-Wen Chuah et al., 2020). The inclusion of values as a mediating variable is supported by research emphasizing altruistic and collective motivations in sustainability (Viedo-García et al., 2019; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2020). Commitment was integrated following studies demonstrating its central role in civic engagement and pro-environmental behavior (He et al., 2018; Zgolli & Zaiem, 2018). The final hypothesis (H7), positing the link between eco-responsible behavior and loyalty, is grounded in the literature on destination loyalty and environmentally driven attachment (Qu et al., 2011; Cheng & Kuo, 2014). Measurement items were adapted from validated scales in previous empirical studies on sustainability, environmental attitudes, and place branding to ensure construct validity and conceptual coherence.

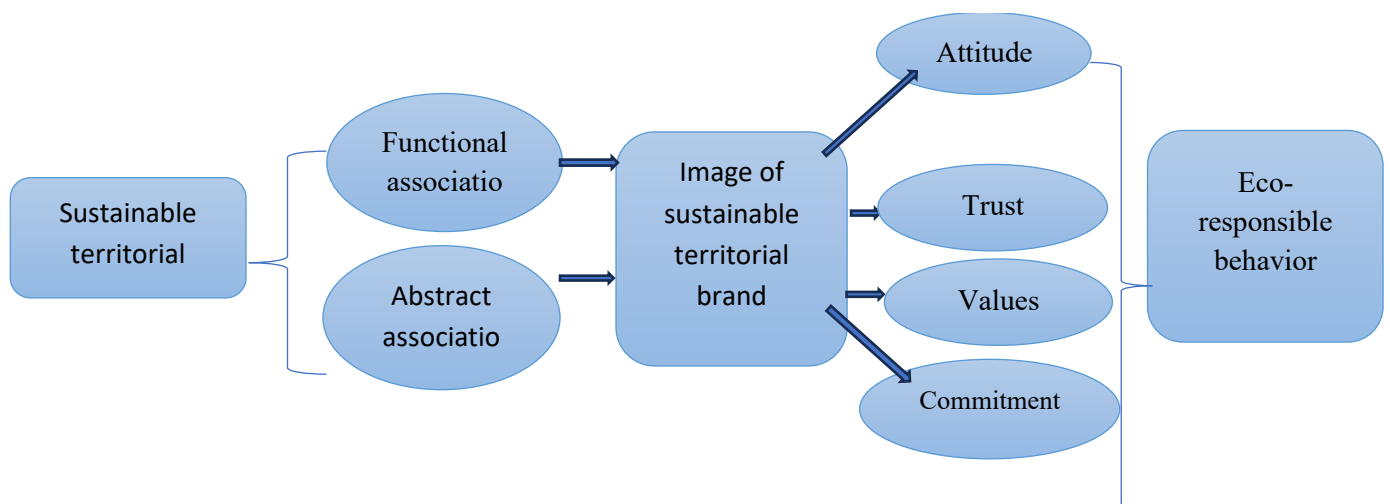
2. Research methodology

In line with the objectives of this study, we adopted a positivist epistemological position, which assumes that social phenomena can be observed, measured, and explained through causal relationships. This stance is coherent with our intention to examine the effects of the sustainable territorial brand on individual attitudes, trust, values, commitment, and eco-responsible behavior. Accordingly, the research follows a deductive reasoning approach, beginning with a conceptual

model derived from the literature and translating it into a set of hypotheses to be empirically tested. The choice of a quantitative methodology, operationalized through a structured questionnaire administered to residents of Rabat, allows for the collection of standardized data and enables the statistical validation of the proposed relationships using PLS-SEM. This approach is therefore justified by its ability to assess the magnitude and significance of causal effects, to generalize findings to the broader population, and to ensure methodological rigor in evaluating the influence of the sustainable territorial brand.

In order to validate the on the observation and measurement of facts. The methodology selected is deductive in nature and relies on the administration of a questionnaire, allowing us to test the formulated hypotheses and compare the theoretical results with empirical data. Conceptual model derived from the literature review, we chose to adopt a positivist stance based on the contributions from the literature, we have developed a conceptual model aimed at analyzing the influence of integrating the sustainability dimension into the territorial brand, which we propose to term the 'sustainable territorial brand.' This model posits that the image of this brand is shaped by functional associations and abstract associations, as identified in the first part. The objective is then to examine how this image helps influence individuals' eco-responsible behavior through its mediating effects on attitude, trust, values, and Commitment. Additionally, we assume that the adoption of eco-responsible behavior ultimately leads to the strengthening of individuals' loyalty and attachment to their territory.

Fig. 1: conceptuel model



Source: Conceptual model developed by the authors

Thus, the conceptual model is based on the following assumptions:

H1: Sustainable territorial branding positively influences the territorial brand image through the generation of functional and abstract associations.

H2: The strength of a sustainable territorial brand image is more influenced by abstract associations than by functional associations.

H3: A positive image of the sustainable territorial brand has a direct and significant impact on behaviors through attitudes toward the environment.

H4: A positive image of the sustainable territorial brand has a direct and significant impact on behaviors through the trust placed in local authorities and their environmental actions (green and organizational trust).

H5: A positive image of the sustainable territorial brand has a direct and significant impact on behaviors through social, altruistic, and environmental values.

H6: A positive image of the sustainable territorial brand has a direct and significant impact on behaviors through Commitment in local sustainability actions.

H7: The adoption of environmentally responsible behavior by individuals leads to the development of loyalty and lasting attachment to the territory.

The main objective of our study is twofold: on the one hand, to measure the impact of integrating the sustainability dimension into the territorial brand on the city's image, and on the other hand, to analyze how this image influences the eco-responsible behavior of residents, through factors such as attitude, trust, values, and Commitment with the brand. In this context, the city of Rabat was chosen as the study site.

Morocco has initiated several projects aimed at transforming some of its cities into models of sustainability. Rabat, nicknamed 'City of Light, Moroccan Capital of Culture,' embodies this vision, initiated by His Majesty King Mohammed VI. Since its designation as a green city in 2010, Rabat has aimed to provide its residents with a prosperous living environment while reducing the ecological impact associated with urban growth, particularly through the conservation of natural resources such as water.

The major challenge lies in simultaneously achieving three imperatives: economic and social development, as well as environmental protection. To reach this goal and enhance the national and international prominence of the city as a sustainable model, several projects have been implemented, including the rational use of resources, intelligent urban planning, and the promotion of values of responsibility and sustainability.

Rabat has experienced significant changes in terms of infrastructure, urban planning, and green spaces. Today, the city stands out for the density and quality of its green areas, exceeding twice the global average recommended by the WHO, with more than 20 m² per inhabitant (compared to 10 m² per inhabitant worldwide). This development has significantly improved the quality of life for residents, notably through the creation and development of parks, gardens, and recreational areas, particularly in working-class neighborhoods. Notable examples include El Majd Gardens (El Kamra roundabout), El Kifah (El Kifah Avenue), Nouzhat Hassan (Bab El Bouiba, 7 ha), Ibn

Rochd (former Madinat Al Irfane), Hassan (Near the Mohammed V Mausoleum), Ibn Toumert (Along the Bab Rouah ramparts to Bab El Had), and the Botanical test Garden (Agdal).

From this context, two main questions guide our study: to what extent has the integration of the sustainability dimension contributed to the improvement of Rabat's territorial brand image, and how has this sustainable territorial brand image reinforced the eco-responsible behavior of its residents?

To conduct this empirical study, we opted for a simple random sampling, allowing the extrapolation of results to the entire population, with each individual having an equal chance of being selected. A sample of 500 residents of Rabat was thus assembled. This approach was chosen for the accuracy of the estimates it provides and the simplicity of data processing. After administering the questionnaire by email, 298 responses were received, of which 120 were usable; the others were discarded because they were incomplete.

The study variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The data processing and analysis were carried out using software [SMART PLS].

3. Results

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis validated the structure of the constructs in the conceptual model. The results show that the perception of Rabat's sustainable territorial brand is organized around coherent dimensions, reflecting the robustness of the proposed model.

Table 1 - External loads

| | Attitudes | Eco-friendly behavior | Trust | Commitment | Image of the sustainable territorial brand | Values |
|-------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|---|---------------|
| C1 | | | 0,862 | | | |
| C2 | | | 0,943 | | | |
| C2 | 0,918 | | | | | |
| CO1 | | 0,914 | | | | |
| CO10 | | 0,773 | | | | |
| CO11 | | 0,791 | | | | |
| CO12 | | 0,868 | | | | |
| CO13 | | 0,743 | | | | |
| CO2 | | 0,874 | | | | |
| CO3 | | 0,725 | | | | |
| CO4 | | 0,786 | | | | |
| CO5 | | 0,758 | | | | |
| CO6 | | 0,779 | | | | |
| CO7 | | 0,831 | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|--|-------|-------|-------|
| CO8 | | 0,830 | | | | |
| CO9 | | 0,124 | | | | |
| E1 | | | | 0,940 | | |
| E2 | | | | 0,920 | | |
| E3 | | | | 0,936 | | |
| IT1 | | | | | 0,594 | |
| IT10 | | | | | 0,072 | |
| IT11 | | | | | 0,054 | |
| IT2 | | | | | 0,326 | |
| IT3 | | | | | 0,951 | |
| IT4 | | | | | 0,942 | |
| IT5 | | | | | 0,801 | |
| IT6 | | | | | 0,839 | |
| IT7 | | | | | 0,783 | |
| IT8 | | | | | 0,609 | |
| IT9 | | | | | 0,952 | |
| V1 | | | | | | 0,921 |
| V1 | 0,796 | | | | | |
| V2 | | | | | | 0,887 |

Source : developed by the authors

The analysis carried out indicates that the perception of the sustainable territorial brand Rabat would be based on several dimensions, tout à fait cohérentes. Trust (C1, C2) presents itself as the key dimension, with very high costs, showing that here we encounter both the brand's credibility and the quality aspect of the ecological actions carried out for the city. Attitudes, in particular through C2 and V1, show that the favorable perception of actions implemented for the city in the environmental field is indeed the dimension that directly influences citizens' willingness to act. Responsible behaviors, through the items CO1 to CO13, appear particularly homogeneous, showing that practical waste sorting practices, sustainable transport, or energy consumption reduction are well integrated into the behaviors of current city residents, even if the direct impact of the territorial brand (Under the item CO9) still appears weak.

Civic Commitment (E1, E2, E3) proves to be particularly strong, reflecting a genuine willingness to get involved in local initiatives, while the values of solidarity and social cohesion (V1, V2) reinforce the collective dimension of the actions. The image of the sustainable territorial brand is generally positive, with strong associations related to ecology and modernity (IT3, IT4, IT5, IT6, IT7, IT9), but some items like IT10 and IT11, related to perceived levers and obstacles, they show very low loadings, revealing a lack of clarity and ownership. Overall, the identified structure confirms that trust, Commitment, and responsible behaviors are solid pillars, but emphasizes the need to strengthen communication and brand visibility to consolidate its impact on civic practices.

Table 2 - External weights

| | Attitudes | Eco-responsible behavior | Trust | Commitment | Image of the sustainable territorial brand | Values |
|------|-----------|--------------------------|-------|------------|--|--------|
| C1 | | | 0,434 | | | |
| C2 | | | 0,664 | | | |
| C2 | 0,694 | | | | | |
| CO1 | | 0,115 | | | | |
| CO10 | | 0,084 | | | | |
| CO11 | | 0,070 | | | | |
| CO12 | | 0,092 | | | | |
| CO13 | | 0,117 | | | | |
| CO2 | | 0,113 | | | | |
| CO3 | | 0,117 | | | | |
| CO4 | | 0,103 | | | | |
| CO5 | | 0,123 | | | | |
| CO6 | | 0,125 | | | | |
| CO7 | | 0,086 | | | | |
| CO8 | | 0,098 | | | | |
| CO9 | | -0,009 | | | | |
| E1 | | | | 0,434 | | |
| E2 | | | | 0,325 | | |
| E3 | | | | 0,314 | | |
| IT1 | | | | | 0,082 | |
| IT10 | | | | | 0,015 | |
| IT11 | | | | | 0,026 | |
| IT2 | | | | | 0,042 | |
| IT3 | | | | | 0,201 | |
| IT4 | | | | | 0,180 | |
| IT5 | | | | | 0,122 | |
| IT6 | | | | | 0,170 | |
| IT7 | | | | | 0,104 | |
| IT8 | | | | | 0,115 | |
| IT9 | | | | | 0,190 | |
| V1 | | | | | | 0,600 |
| V1 | 0,456 | | | | | |
| V2 | | | | | | 0,504 |

Source : developed by the authors

External weights confirm the results of the applied loads but with a more moderate intensity. Trust, it, measured by C1 and C2, maintains a significant contribution (0,434 et 0,664), which illustrates its central involvement in the perception of ecological initiatives. Attitudes also appear to be linked to C2 and V1, weighing respectively C2 to 0,694 and V1 to 0,456, which shows that the way

citizens perceive ecological actions has a direct impact on their willingness to engage in supportive behaviors. On the other hand, eco-friendly behaviors (CO1 to CO13) yet have low weights, ranging between 0.07 and 0.125, which indicates that even though they are present in the factorial structure, their specific contribution to the overall explanation of the model remains weak. Also note the slight negativity of CO9 (-0,009) attesting that the influence of the territorial brand on individual practices remains minimal.

Commitment (E1, E2, E3) manifests with weights ranging between 0,314 and 0,434, which reflects genuine civic involvement but is less decisive than trust or attitudes. The image of the sustainable territorial brand (IT1 to IT11) appears relatively weak in this structure, with contributions ranging from 0,015 to 0,201, which highlights a certain dispersion and a lack of direct impact. Finally, the values of solidarity and social cohesion (V1 = 0,600; V2 = 0,504) stand out positively, confirming that brand sustainability relies more on shared principles than on institutional representations. Overall, these results suggest that trust and values are the main drivers, while concrete behaviors and institutional image need to be strengthened to increase their influence in explaining the observed dynamics.

Table 3 - Construct reliability and validity

| | Cronbach's alpha | rho_A | Composite reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|---|-------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|---|
| Attitudes | 0,658 | 0,737 | 0,849 | 0,738 |
| Eco-responsible behavior | 0,939 | 0,954 | 0,949 | 0,604 |
| Trust | 0,784 | 0,885 | 0,899 | 0,816 |
| Commitment | 0,925 | 0,958 | 0,952 | 0,869 |
| Image of the sustainable territorial brand | 0,866 | 0,963 | 0,897 | 0,500 |
| Values | 0,778 | 0,795 | 0,900 | 0,817 |

Source: developed by the authors

The reliability and convergent validity results generally demonstrate good robustness of the constructs. Cronbach's alpha ranges between 0,658 and 0,939, which indicates satisfactory internal consistency, although the attitude (0,658) is slightly below the recommended threshold of 0,70. However, the other dimensions show high coefficients, particularly eco-friendly behavior. (0,939) and commitment (0,925), which confirms the stability of the responses for these scales. The coefficients rho_A and the composite reliability exceeds 0.80 in most cases, indicating strong internal consistency and reliability higher than that provided by Cronbach's alpha.

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) confirms the convergent validity of the constructs. Most of the dimensions exceed the 0.50 threshold, which means that the items share enough variance to represent the underlying construct. Commitment (0,869), trust (0,816) and the values (0,817) stand out for their strong convergent validity, highlighting their central role in the model. Eco-friendly behavior (0,604) also presents a AVE satisfactory, while the image of the sustainable territorial brand is at the minimal threshold (0,500), indicating acceptable but improvable validity. Finally, the attitudes reveal a high AVE (0,738), compensating for their initially lower reliability. Overall, the constructs show good reliability and strong convergent validity, suggesting that the model is statistically reliable and theoretically relevant.

Table 4 - Discriminant validity

| | Attitudes | Eco-friendly behavior | Trust | Commitment | Image of the sustainable territorial brand | Values |
|---|------------------|------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|---|---------------|
| Attitudes | 0,859 | | | | | |
| Eco-friendly behavior | 0,426 | 0,777 | | | | |
| Trust | 0,869 | 0,304 | 0,904 | | | |
| Commitment | 0,134 | 0,145 | 0,145 | 0,932 | | |
| Image of the sustainable territorial brand | 0,350 | 0,029 | 0,469 | 0,170 | 0,707 | |
| Values | 0,692 | 0,472 | 0,348 | -0,028 | 0,084 | 0,904 |

Source: developed by the authors

The results of the Fornell-Larcker criterion show a mixed picture of discriminant validity. The square roots of the AVE, recorded on the diagonal (e.g., 0.859 for attitudes, 0.904 for confidence, 0.932 for commitment, 0,904 for values), are generally higher than the correlations with other constructs, which indicates good conceptual distinction in several cases. Thus, commitment and values appear as dimensions clearly distinct from the other variables in the model, with low cross-correlations, which confirms their theoretical autonomy.

On the other hand, some crossings call the discriminant validity into question. Confidence and attitudes show a particularly high correlation (0.869), close to their respective convergent validity value, suggesting a conceptual overlap between these two constructs. Similarly, the high correlation between attitudes and values (0.692), as well as between trust and brand image (0.469), reflects significant proximities that may limit the empirical distinction between these dimensions.

Thus, while the overall structure of the model remains acceptable, it would be advisable to further refine the conceptual differentiation between attitudes and trust, as well as between values and territorial brand image, in order to strengthen the theoretical and statistical robustness of the model.

Table 5 - Path coefficients

| | Initial sample (O) | Sample mean (M) | Standard deviation (STDEV) | Value t (O/STDEV) | values-p |
|--|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Attitudes -> Eco-responsible behavior | 0,197 | 0,201 | 0,074 | 2,665 | 0,008 |
| Trust -> Eco-friendly behavior | 0,042 | 0,039 | 0,056 | 0,739 | 0,041 |
| Commitment -> Eco-friendly behavior | 0,759 | 0,761 | 0,036 | 21,268 | 0,000 |
| Image of the sustainable territorial brand -> Attitudes | 0,596 | 0,591 | 0,068 | 8,773 | 0,000 |
| Image of the sustainable territorial brand -> Trust | 0,560 | 0,560 | 0,072 | 7,828 | 0,000 |
| Image of the sustainable territorial brand -> Commitment | 0,942 | 0,941 | 0,013 | 75,117 | 0,000 |
| Image of the sustainable territorial brand -> Values | 0,686 | 0,687 | 0,048 | 14,443 | 0,000 |

Source: developed by the authors

The path coefficients highlight the dynamics of the relationships between the constructs of the model. The image of the sustainable territorial brand appears as a determining factor: it exerts a strong and significant influence on attitudes (0,596, $p < 0,001$), about trust (0,560, $p < 0,001$), on commitment (0,942, $p < 0,001$) as well as on values (0,686, $p < 0,001$). These results confirm that the perception of the Rabat brand plays a central role in shaping citizens' representations and behaviors, and that it constitutes the anchor point of the explanatory model. The particularly strong effect on commitment suggests that the brand, when perceived positively, directly motivates residents towards active involvement.

Downstream, commitment proves to be the main predictor of eco-responsible behavior (0,759, $p < 0,001$), emphasizing that individual action stems primarily from the feeling of involvement in local initiatives. Attitudes also play a complementary role (0,197, $p = 0,008$), but their effect is much more modest. On the other hand, trust, although important in the overall perception, does not have a significant influence on behaviors (0,042, $t = 0,739$), which suggests that it acts indirectly through commitment or attitudes. Thus, the structure reveals a strong causal chain:

brand image → **Commitment/values** → **behaviors**, confirming that the valuation and credibility of the territorial brand are essential for sustainably embedding eco-friendly practices.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the results obtained reveals the decisive importance of a sustainable territorial brand image in shaping citizens' perceptions and behaviors. Indeed, the path coefficients indicate that this image significantly and strongly influences commitment, trust, attitudes, and shared values. This observation aligns with the work of Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) reconsidering the territorial image as a fundamental lever for collective mobilization by expanding it to the issue of sustainability, showing that the environmentally conscious and responsible perception of the city of Rabat represents a lever for social change. The very high level of influence of the image on commitment seems to suggest that the brand it represents, when conveying values of sustainability, thus transforms mere perception into active involvement, as corroborated by Chan and al. (2022), explaining (The established relationship between green image and civic behaviors).

The results also confirm that commitment is the main determinant of eco-friendly behavior, far more than trust or attitudes. This observation nuances certain earlier models that attributed a more direct role to attitudes (Ajzen, 1991), and highlights the importance of collective and participatory dynamics in taking action. Trust, despite its significant role in overall perception, has no direct effect on behaviors, suggesting that it acts as a necessary but not sufficient psychological prerequisite, supported by actual commitment. Similarly, convergent and discriminant validity show that while the constructs are generally reliable, overlaps persist, particularly between attitudes and trust, highlighting the need for conceptual and methodological refinement. Finally, the central role of values of solidarity and community underscores the cultural and social dimension of territorial sustainability, confirming that ecological transition in an urban context cannot be separated from shared representations and social cohesion. These results have theoretical implications by strengthening the link between image, commitment, and behaviors, as well as practical implications for local policymakers, which must strengthen communication and citizen commitment so that the sustainable territorial brand becomes a real driver of environmental transformation.

Conclusion

This study highlights the central role of the image of a sustainable territorial brand in shaping citizens' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. The results show that this image serves as a key lever to boost trust, commitment, and adherence to shared values, and that it has an indirect but powerful effect on eco-responsible behaviors through citizen involvement. Commitment thus confirms itself as the main driver of taking action, while trust and attitudes play a supportive role without directly inducing behaviors. These results highlight the relevance of integrating sustainability as a core dimension of territorial brand strategy, as it helps mobilize residents around collective and responsible practices.

From a theoretical perspective, this research enriches the literature on place branding by linking it with sustainability issues, showing that territorial image goes beyond mere symbolic construction to become a tangible driver of social and environmental change. From a managerial perspective, it encourages local decision-makers and institutional actors to strengthen communication and citizen participation mechanisms so that the sustainable territorial brand is perceived as credible, legitimate, and unifying. Nevertheless, limitations remain, particularly related to the specific context of Rabat and the measurement tools used, which opens up interesting prospects for future comparative and longitudinal research. In sum, the study confirms that sustainability, when integrated into territorial brand strategy, is not only a factor of attractiveness but also a catalyst for citizen commitment and environmentally responsible behavior.

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