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When sustainability feels fair: how social and altruistic value drive justice and advocacy in specialty coffee

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how brand sustainable management practices (BSMPs) influence customer perceptions of interactional justice in the U.S. specialty coffee context, guided by the value-attitude-behavior framework. Results show that BSMPs significantly enhance perceptions of interactional justice, both directly and indirectly via perceived social value (SPV) and perceived altruistic value (APV). Interactional justice strongly predicts brand advocacy. While product knowledge did not moderate the SPV – justice link, it amplified the positive effect of APV on justice perceptions. These findings underscore the dual pathway through which BSMPs foster fairness perceptions and highlight the boundary condition of product knowledge in interpreting altruistic brand value.

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Introduction

As sustainability increasingly shapes consumer decision-making, tourism and hospitality brands have adopted brand sustainable management practices (BSMPs) that integrate environmental stewardship, social equity, and economic viability into organizational operations (Al-Kwifi et al., 2025; Hosseini et al., 2025; McCamley & Morland, 2021). These practices aim to support responsible resource use and long-term resilience while signaling corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Beske et al., 2014). Beyond operational benefits, BSMPs may also impact perceived fairness among consumers and trust in service interactions (Gupta et al., 2019; Mistry et al., 2025). Despite the widespread adoption of BSMPs, two critical questions remain unanswered: how do consumers internalize such sustainability signals, and under what conditions do they translate into favorable brand outcomes?

Importantly, sustainability initiatives do not automatically translate into favorable consumer evaluations. Rather, consumers must first interpret and internalize these practices in meaningful ways. In service contexts, this interpretation process often occurs through value activation, whereby sustainability cues trigger consumers' underlying value systems and shape how brand actions are evaluated (Homer & Kahle, 1988; Perrea et al., 2017). Without such value activation, sustainability practices may remain symbolic or abstract, limiting their influence on fairness perceptions and subsequent behavioral responses. Consumers' value perceptions play an important role in how they assess fairness in tourism and hospitality settings (Japutra et al., 2023). Among these, social and altruistic values guide both the thoughts and feelings that shape fairness judgments during brand interactions. Social value emphasizes looking good to others and gaining social approval, while altruistic value focuses on acting ethically and supporting the well-being of people and the environment (Perrea et al., 2017).

Previous research in tourism and hospitality has underscored the importance of sustainability, value perceptions, and justice mechanisms. On the employee side, for example, ethical CSR has been shown to enhance commitment via procedural justice and self-esteem, and socially responsible human resource practices boost retention and word-of-mouth through interactional justice and identification (Kim et al., 2021; Mistry et al., 2025; Wood et al., 2021). On the customer side, sustainability across social, environmental, and economic dimensions improves customer satisfaction and loyalty (Olya et al., 2020), with self- and other-oriented experiential values fostering trust and brand equity (Gupta et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2024). CSR initiatives can stimulate green consumer behavior through engagement and emotions, moderated

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by altruistic values (Raza et al., 2023). Quality management, human capital, and incremental innovation have also been identified as drivers of social sustainability (Tarí et al., 2024).

Several important gaps, however, remain in this growing body of research. Although prior tourism and hospitality research has considered the association between sustainability practices and justice perceptions (Kim et al., 2021; Mistry et al., 2025; Wood et al., 2021), and others have linked value perceptions to fairness evaluations (Ahmad et al., 2024; Cannas et al., 2018; Japutra et al., 2023; Raza et al., 2023), these streams have largely developed in parallel rather than being theoretically integrated. As a result, it remains unclear how brand-level sustainability initiatives are translated into consumer perceptions of fairness. Specifically, existing studies often assume that sustainability efforts directly enhance justice perceptions, without explaining the psychological process through which consumers interpret these efforts as fair or unfair. Value activation represents a critical but underdeveloped mechanism in this process. While values are frequently acknowledged as important, prior research has not explicitly tested whether and how sustainability practices activate distinct other-oriented values – such as social and altruistic value – that subsequently shape interactional justice perceptions. This omission leaves a key theoretical question unresolved: why do some sustainability initiatives successfully foster fairness perceptions while others do not, even when similar practices are adopted?

Second, while the mediating roles of values have been conceptually acknowledged, direct empirical tests of these mechanisms in customer – brand interactions in the tourism and hospitality settings remain insufficiently examined, despite their central importance in interpersonal fairness perceptions to relationship quality in the service context (Tarí et al., 2024). Third, prior research has largely treated consumers as homogeneous evaluators of sustainability efforts (Mistry et al., 2025; Olya et al., 2020; Raza et al., 2023), overlooking the influence of cognitive capacity on interpreting ethical and altruistic signals. As consumer scrutiny over sustainability claims increases, the lack of boundary conditions, such as product knowledge, limits understanding of when value activation leads to justice perceptions. To address these gaps, this study tests a moderated mediation model in which BSMPs influence brand advocacy through interactional justice and social and altruistic values, with product knowledge as a boundary condition. Consumers with higher product knowledge, such as familiarity with supply chains, production methods, and sustainability certifications, are better equipped to recognize altruistic cues in sustainability messaging (Oriade et al., 2021) and are therefore more sensitive to fairness in interpersonal brand interactions. In contrast, less knowledgeable consumers may rely on surface-level brand cues (e.g. popularity or price) when forming fairness judgments. Accordingly, this study examines whether product knowledge strengthens the relationship between perceived value and interactional justice.

The value – attitude – behavior (VAB) framework explains how values guide attitudes and subsequent behavioral intentions (Homer & Kahle, 1988), including consumers' judgments of fairness in brand interactions (Blodgett et al., 1997). Building on this framework, this study argues that BSMPs, such as ethical sourcing, fair labor initiatives, and environmental stewardship (McCamley & Morland, 2021), shape customer outcomes indirectly by activating other-oriented values, specifically social and altruistic value (Perrea et al., 2017). To explain how these value perceptions translate into fairness evaluations and behavioral responses, we draw on social exchange theory (SET), which suggests that individuals evaluate relationships by weighing perceived benefits and fairness (Cropanzano et al., 2002). When sustainability practices are interpreted as genuinely other-oriented, consumers are more likely to reciprocate through favorable fairness judgments and brand advocacy. Together, the integrated VAB – SET framework clarifies how sustainability-driven value activation leads to justice perceptions and reciprocal consumer behavior, offering a coherent theoretical basis for examining sustainability branding in the specialty coffee context. The VAB framework explains how brand sustainable management practices activate consumers' underlying values (Blodgett et al., 1997), whereas social exchange theory describes how value appraisals are converted into judgments of fairness and corresponding reciprocal actions (Cropanzano et al., 2002). Combining the two frameworks is particularly appropriate in the specialty coffee context, where sustainability initiatives are interpreted through value-based meanings and evaluated within ongoing, relationship-oriented service interactions (Tran, 2025).

The Specialty Coffee Association characterizes specialty coffee as encompassing not only the product but also the experience surrounding its consumption distinguished by its unique qualities and strong emphasis on quality, fair trade, and ethical sourcing, which together contribute to enhanced value and differentiation in the marketplace (Cadwalader, 2021). Specialty coffee brands increasingly function as experiential and place-based assets that contribute to destination image and brand differentiation (Kwame Opoku et al., 2023). Through sustainability-oriented branding, specialty coffee shops communicate local values, authenticity, and ethical positioning to visitors, thereby shaping tourists' value

perceptions and relational evaluations beyond the immediate consumption experience (Tran, 2025). In this sense, BSMPs in specialty coffee serve not only as brand-level strategies but also as tourism marketing tools that influence fairness perceptions and advocacy. The specialty coffee sector provides a particularly fitting context for this study, as leading specialty coffee brands, such as Intelligentsia, Blue Bottle, and Ritual Coffee, have built their market identities around sustainability-driven practices. For example, Ritual Coffee in San Francisco (ritualcoffee.com, 2025) incorporates staff training that emphasizes sustainability storytelling, allowing service encounters to reflect both interpersonal respect and the brand's ethical values. Similarly, Intelligentsia Coffee (intelligentsia.com, 2025) features farmer-relationship narratives in its promotional materials, highlighting long-term partnerships, equitable compensation, and environmental stewardship.

Overall, this study aims to (1) examine how BSMPs influence interactional justice through perceptions of social and altruistic values, (2) test the effect of justice perceptions on brand advocacy, (3) assess whether product knowledge moderates the link between value perceptions and justice evaluations, and (4) investigate whether product knowledge moderates the indirect effects of social and altruistic values on brand advocacy through interactional justice, thereby testing a conditional process of value-based mediation.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Social exchange theory and the value–attitude–behavior framework

This study draws upon two overarching theoretical frameworks, SET and the VAB model, to explain how BSMPs influence consumer evaluations of fairness and advocacy in the specialty coffee context. SET postulates that individuals assess relationships through expectations of reciprocity, perceived fairness, and shared benefits (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano et al., 2002). When tourism and hospitality brands engage in prosocial behaviors such as ethical sourcing or environmental stewardship, customers interpret these actions as relational investments, improving fairness judgments and prompting reciprocal responses in the form of loyalty and advocacy (Dai et al., 2023; Hsiao et al., 2023; Jiang & Kim, 2015). In other words, SET provides a lens for understanding how sustainability initiatives can be translated into perceptions of interactional justice, grounded in fairness and respect.

The VAB framework explains how values guide the formation of attitudes, which in turn drive behaviors (Homer & Kahle, 1988). Within the tourism and hospitality sectors, sustainability initiatives act as external signals that activate consumer values, shaping both attitudinal evaluations and behavioral responses (Habib et al., 2023; M. J. Kim et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Quan et al., 2025). By emphasizing values oriented toward others, with an emphasis on social and altruistic dimensions, this study applies the VAB framework to reveal how BSMPs trigger psychological mechanisms that inform perceptions of justice and, in turn, brand advocacy. Together, SET and VAB provide a complementary foundation for this research: VAB clarifies how consumer values serve as mediators that translate sustainability cues into fairness evaluations, while SET explains why consumers reciprocate perceived moral and prosocial efforts with supportive behaviors. This integrated perspective offers a robust basis for examining how social and altruistic values function as mediators, alongside the moderating influence of product knowledge in shaping justice and advocacy outcomes.

BSMPs and interactional justice

BSMPs refer to consumers' perceptions of how a brand systematically incorporates sustainability principles into its environmental, operational, and social management practices (Das, 2017; Wood et al., 2021). These practices include efforts to reduce environmental impact through responsible sourcing and cleaner production, and the adoption of efficient and waste-reducing operational systems, and to promote safe, fair, and socially responsible working conditions and community engagement (Das, 2017). Collectively, BSMPs capture the extent to which specialty coffee brands embed sustainability into their core management philosophy and everyday operations, providing salient ethical cues that consumers use when evaluating brand values and fairness. BSMPs are organizational initiatives designed to promote prosocial outcomes, such as environmental stewardship, social equity, and ethical transparency. In addition to serving as operational strategies, BSMPs communicate a brand's moral orientation and commitment to stakeholder well-being (Lee et al., 2018).

From the perspective of SET, these prosocial practices act as relational signals that invite reciprocity, fostering trust and fairness within consumer – brand relationships (Sengoz et al., 2025). When customers perceive a brand as investing in socially responsible actions, they are more likely to evaluate the brand as fair, respectful, and sincere in its interpersonal dealings, core elements of interactional justice (Blodgett et al., 1997). Justice has been a foundational construct in social and organizational psychology for decades (Cropanzano et al., 2001). Prior literature conceptualizes justice as comprising three

distinct dimensions: distributive, procedural, and interactional, each shaping customers' fairness perceptions and satisfaction (Sparks & McColl-Kennedy, 2001). Distributive justice refers to individuals' perceptions of outcome fairness (e.g. refunds or compensation), whereas procedural justice pertains to the fairness of the procedures through which those outcomes are determined (Cropanzano et al., 2001). Interactional justice, in contrast, captures the perceived fairness of interpersonal treatment within service encounters (Martínez-Tur et al., 2006; Olson & Ro, 2020). Among the three, interactional justice is particularly crucial in tourism and hospitality settings because it captures the relational aspects of fairness, such as courtesy, empathy, respect, and sincerity (Wirtz & Mattila, 2004). Relationship marketing emphasizes that positive interpersonal interactions are essential for building customer satisfaction and loyalty (Gronroos, 1994). When employees demonstrate care and respect, customers perceive higher justice and respond with stronger trust and positive behaviors (Bradley & Sparks, 2000).

Empirical evidence supports the link between sustainability-driven organizational conduct and perceptions of justice. Kim et al. (2021) found that ethical CSR programs enhance procedural justice and self-esteem, increasing employees' affective commitment. Similarly, Mistry et al. (2025) showed that socially responsible human resource management improves employees' retention and favorable word-of-mouth by strengthening interactional justice and identification with the organization. When perceived as authentic, prosocial practices reinforce the belief that an organization treats stakeholders with fairness and respect. Broader organizational behavior research has also underscored the justice-enhancing effects of ethical climates and leadership. Haldorai et al. (2020) demonstrated that workplace spirituality, fostered by an ethical climate, mediates the justice – citizenship behavior link, illustrating how perceived fairness underpins positive stakeholder behaviors. Shin et al. (2015) suggested that ethical leadership in top-level management promotes a climate of ethical and procedural justice, enhancing both organizational citizenship behavior and brand performance. Examining service encounters, Chi et al. (2020) concluded that perceived justice directly contributes to relationship quality between brands and consumers, which in turn improves service evaluations and strengthens relational bonds.

In the specialty coffee industry, where consumers place strong emphasis on authenticity, ethical sourcing, and transparent communication (Giacalone et al., 2016), interactional justice provides the relational lens through which BSMPs are interpreted. Consumers are more likely to perceive specialty coffee brands that demonstrate sincerity and respect in their sustainability messaging and service encounters as just and reciprocate with trust and advocacy. Together, the literature suggests that by signaling a brand's fairness, empathy, and ethical responsibility, BSMPs can meaningfully shape customer perceptions of interactional justice. Based on this reasoning, we put forward the following hypothesis:

H1: BSMPs positively influence customers' perceptions of interactional justice in the specialty coffee industry.

BSMPs and perceived other-oriented value

Customer value represents consumers' assessment of products or service's benefits in relation to the costs incurred (Holbrook, 1999, 2006). This value can be categorized into distinct dimensions, such as functional, hedonic, social, and altruistic values, of which social and altruistic values are theoretically central in contexts where brand actions carry moral and symbolic meaning rather than purely functional utility (Homer & Kahle, 1988). Social value reflects extrinsic, other-oriented concerns, tying consumption to a desire for social approval, reputation, and the signaling of status to others (Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2009). In contrast, altruistic value captures intrinsic and other-oriented motives grounded in ethics and spirituality, demonstrating individuals' sensitivity for social welfare and environmental protection (Perrea et al., 2017).

The VAB framework explains how values activated by external cues (e.g. BSMPs) influence attitudes and shape behavioral evaluations (Habib et al., 2023). BSMPs are particularly powerful in this regard because they function not merely as operational strategies but as moral and symbolic cues that signal a brand's underlying intentions and social orientation. When sustainability practices are salient, consumers rely on other-oriented values to interpret what the brand stands for, making social and altruistic values especially relevant mechanisms through which BSMPs influence consumer evaluations. Social value arises when customers believe a brand's activities benefit the broader community, whereas altruistic value arises when customers perceive the brand as exhibiting genuine, selfless concern for others and the environment (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). By communicating commitments to environmental integrity, social equity, and ethical transparency, BSMPs strengthen these other-oriented value perceptions.

Empirical evidence from tourism and hospitality supports the central role of value activation in sustainability contexts. Environmental leadership in hotels fosters shared social responsibility and pro-environmental organizational citizenship behavior (M. J. Kim et al., 2020),

while alignment between green innovation and sustainability goals enhances societal performance alongside financial outcomes (Al-Kwifi et al., 2025). From a collective value co-creation perspective, social values – particularly reciprocity – play a key role in embedding corporate social responsibility into tourism management systems (Cannas et al., 2018). Lee et al. (2025) identified technology-led social values as significant drivers of attitudes toward sustainable events, with these positive attitudes being associated with higher levels of social well-being and civic engagement. Experiential and relational mechanisms further reinforce these effects: self- and other-oriented green experiential values build trust and brand equity in hospitality settings (Gupta et al., 2019), and sustainability-driven experiences enhance guest well-being and advocacy behaviors (Sohaib et al., 2022). Together, these studies suggest that sustainability initiatives exert their influence not directly, but through value-based interpretations.

The specialty coffee industry provides a particularly compelling context for examining these value activation mechanisms. Unlike many sustainability-oriented products where ethical attributes remain abstract or distant, specialty coffee consumption involves frequent, tangible, and identity-relevant encounters with sustainability practices (Kwame Opoku et al., 2023). Such practices are not only operational choices but also moral and symbolic cues that actively shape consumers' value perceptions. Consumers in the specialty coffee market assess authenticity and value through a dual lens: extrinsic sustainability cues (e.g. ethical sourcing, eco-friendly farming, and fair labor practices) and intrinsic product qualities (e.g. taste complexity and sensory differentiation) that align with ethical and quality expectations (Giovane da Silva et al., 2023). Because specialty coffee brands place exceptional emphasis on transparent sourcing, farmer relationships, and sustainability storytelling (McCamley & Morland, 2021), consumers are especially likely to rely on social and altruistic value perceptions to interpret brand intentions. As a result, social and altruistic values are not incidental outcomes but core psychological mechanisms through which BSMPs are understood and evaluated in the specialty coffee market. These value perceptions allow consumers to translate sustainability practices into meaningful judgments about what the brand contributes to society and whether it acts with genuine concern for others and the environment. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H2a: BSMPs positively influence perceived social value.

H2b: BSMPs positively influence perceived altruistic value.

Perceived values and interactional justice

Interactional justice is concerned with consumers' fairness perceptions, respect, and sincerity within a brand's treatment of and communication with its customers (Olson & Ro, 2020). These judgments are often guided by heuristic cues, such as the perceived values underpinning a brand's actions (Blodgett et al., 1997). When consumers view a brand as making a meaningful contribution to societal well-being (i.e. social value) or acting out of genuine selflessness toward others and the environment (i.e. altruistic value), they are more likely to infer positive brand intentions and favorably evaluate its interpersonal conduct. Value perceptions have been consistently linked to justice evaluations in the tourism and hospitality context. Japutra et al. (2023), for instance, found that individual and social values shape perceived fairness and brand experience in upscale hotel settings, reinforcing customer engagement. Similarly, Cannas et al. (2018) highlighted the centrality of social values like reciprocity in embedding CSR and sustainability within co-created value processes, contributing to positive perceptions of fairness. Ahmad et al. (2024) and Raza et al. (2023) showed that CSR initiatives promoting altruistic values encourage positive emotions, engagement, and pro-brand behaviors among consumers, suggesting that such values heighten sensitivity to fairness cues. The relationship between justice and value is further supported by the organizational behavior literature. Abuelhassan and Algassim (2022) demonstrated that organizational justice fosters proactive customer service performance, while Peng et al. (2021) found that perceived justice can reduce negative behaviors from employees toward a brand. Justice climates in the workplace enhance positive outcomes through ethical and value-driven leadership, reinforcing the role of perceived fairness as a mediating psychological state (Haldorai et al., 2020; Shin et al., 2015).

In the context of specialty coffee, social and altruistic values are particularly salient because consumption is inherently relational, value-laden, and identity expressive (Kwame Opoku et al., 2023). Specialty coffee consumers frequently engage in repeated, face-to-face service encounters with baristas and brand representatives, making interpersonal treatment a central component of the consumption experience (Giovane da Silva et al., 2023). Unlike standardized mass-market products, specialty coffee brands explicitly communicate ethical sourcing, farmer equity, and environmental stewardship, which elevate consumers' moral expectations regarding how the brand should treat others, including customers (Tran, 2025). As a result, consumers who perceive strong social or altruistic value from a specialty coffee brand are

more likely to scrutinize whether the brand's interpersonal interactions reflect courtesy, empathy, and sincerity consistent with those values. This heightens moral sensitivity and increases the salience of interactional justice as a key evaluative criterion in this context (Japutra et al., 2023; McCamley & Morland, 2021).

Social and altruistic values serve as critical interpretive lenses through which consumers judge fairness in brand interactions. Social value strengthens consumer perceptions that a brand acts in alignment with collective well-being, reinforcing impressions of courtesy and respect (Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2009), while altruistic value deepens perceptions of sincerity and empathy in brand communications (Perrea et al., 2017). In the specialty coffee context, these dynamics are especially salient: consumers who see their purchases as socially recognized acts or morally purposeful contributions are more likely to judge the brand's interpersonal treatment as fair and genuine. BSMPs in the specialty coffee context not only activate other-oriented values but also transform them into heightened justice evaluations, strengthening the relational foundation for advocacy. A brand perceived as contributing to society or genuinely altruistic is more likely to be judged as just, respectful, and sincere. Accordingly, we propose:

H3a: Perceived social value positively influences interactional justice.

H3b: Perceived altruistic value positively influences interactional justice.

Mediating role of perceived value

When applied together, the VAB framework and SET suggest that the effect of BSMPs on interactional justice is likely transmitted through consumers' perceptions of other-oriented values. Perceiving BSMPs as evidence of a brand's commitment to social welfare (i.e. social value) or genuine selflessness (i.e. altruistic value) forms the cognitive and affective basis for consumers' judgments of brands' fairness in interpersonal interactions. This mediating pathway is empirically supported by the tourism and hospitality literature (e.g. Cannas et al., 2018; Japutra et al., 2023; Raza et al., 2023). Similarly, Shih et al. (2024) stressed the critical role of value-based mediation in sustainability – outcome relationships, explaining that sustainability perceptions enhance customer satisfaction via emotional and social values. From a VAB perspective, sustainability practices first activate consumers' value structures, which then shape evaluative attitudes toward the brand before influencing downstream judgments and responses (Homer & Kahle, 1988). In this process, social and altruistic values serve as interpretive lenses through which consumers assess not only what a brand does, but also how it behaves toward stakeholders. Because interactional justice reflects perceived respect, sincerity, and moral intent in interpersonal exchanges, it is particularly sensitive to value-based interpretations formed in response to sustainability cues (Blodgett et al., 1997).

CSR initiatives can also inspire advocacy and pro-environmental behaviors by cultivating perceptions of altruistic value, which drive positive emotions and engagement (Ahmad et al., 2023; Raza et al., 2023). Gupta et al. (2019) reported that other-oriented green experiential values (e.g. recycled water for the hotel's indoor waterfall) strengthen trust and loyalty in green tourism and hospitality contexts. Parallel findings in organizational research reinforce this logic; mediators that have been shown to influence the impact of ethical or green practices on positive behaviors, such as workplace spirituality and organizational pride, are often rooted in shared values (Elshaer et al., 2023; Haldorai et al., 2020). SET further explains why these value perceptions translate into interactional justice evaluations. SET posits that individuals assess relationships based on perceived intentions, fairness, and reciprocity (Cropanzano et al., 2002). When sustainability practices are interpreted as socially or altruistically motivated, consumers tend to be more inclined to attribute benevolent intent to the brand, increasing perceptions that the brand treats them with respect and fairness during interpersonal interactions. Thus, interactional justice becomes a relational outcome of value-based social exchange rather than a direct reaction to sustainability actions alone.

This perspective can easily be extended to the specialty coffee context, where social and altruistic values are central mechanisms through which BSMPs influence justice perceptions. Consumers may choose sustainable coffee for its perceived social value, viewing its purchase as a socially endorsed act that aligns them with ethical consumption communities (Servín-Juárez et al., 2021), reinforcing fairness judgments in brand interactions. Altruistic value, in contrast, is reflected in the intrinsic satisfaction consumers may derive from supporting environmentally responsible practices and fair compensation for farmers (Kwame Opoku et al., 2023), which could deepen perceptions of sincerity and respect in brand communication. In short, BSMPs in specialty coffee are not only interpreted as signals of sustainability but are also transformed into evaluations of

relational fairness that strengthen consumer – brand ties. The mediating role of social and altruistic values is theoretically well-supported, as prior studies have highlighted the importance of value co-creation, reciprocity, and organizational identification in translating sustainable practices into perceptions of justice and positive brand outcomes (Cannas et al., 2018; Freire et al., 2021; Tarí et al., 2024). However, direct empirical tests of these specific mediating pathways, especially distinguishing between social and altruistic values, remain limited. By integrating VAB and SET, the present study clarifies how sustainability-driven value activation operates as a psychological bridge between BSMPs and interactional justice, thereby addressing a key theoretical ambiguity in prior research. The hypotheses proposed below close these gaps by extending VAB and SET to the domain of perceptions of tourism and hospitality service fairness:

H4a: Social value functions as a mediator in the relationship between BSMPs and interactional justice.

H4b: Altruistic value functions as a mediator in the relationship between BSMPs and interactional justice.

Moderating and moderated mediating role of product knowledge

In this study, product knowledge is defined as consumers' self-perceived familiarity and confidence in evaluating specialty coffee. It reflects experiential understanding of coffee quality and taste, attentiveness to market cues (e.g. barista recommendations and promotions), and awareness of sustainability-related attributes such as coffee origin and organic cultivation (Oriade et al., 2021). This consumption-based product knowledge enables consumers to better interpret sustainability and ethical signals conveyed by specialty coffee brands. Product knowledge (PK) enhances consumers' ability to process complex information, allowing them to attribute deeper meaning to prosocial cues (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Brunner & Siegrist, 2011; Lin et al., 2024). Consumers with higher levels of PK are more capable of discerning and interpreting brand signals, particularly those related to non-functional attributes such as ethics, sustainability, and fairness. For instance, knowledgeable customers are better able to evaluate whether a brand's socially responsible efforts are genuinely aligned with collective welfare (i.e. social value) and reflect authentic concern for others (i.e. altruistic value) (Oriade et al., 2021). Consumers with lower PK, on the other hand, may struggle to differentiate between symbolic and substantive sustainability initiatives, relying instead on general impressions or peripheral cues (Gupta et al., 2019). As a result, their justice evaluations may be less shaped by nuanced perceptions of social or altruistic value. This suggests that PK conditions the extent to which perceived values influence fairness judgments.

In the tourism and hospitality sector, where service encounters and brand trust are deeply intertwined (Mistry et al., 2025), PK can act as a critical boundary condition shaping how consumers interpret and respond to brands' sustainability initiatives. Guests who are more familiar with sustainability certifications, ecolabels, or transparent CSR reporting, for example, may interpret sustainable practices as authentic justice signals, reinforcing their fairness perceptions. According to Olya et al. (2020), greater guest awareness of hotel sustainability practices leads to higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty. However, familiarity with practices alone was insufficient to increase satisfaction and loyalty without strong value activation.

The proposed model of this study further posits that the relationship between perceived other-oriented value and brand advocacy is contingent on PK, as mediated by interactional justice. Within the VAB framework, BSMPs activate other-oriented values, specifically, social value (SPV) and altruistic value (APV), which subsequently guide consumers' attitudes and fairness evaluations. When customers internalize BSMPs as reflections of a brand's social or altruistic goals, they are more prone to regard the brand as fair, respectful, and sincere, strengthening interactional justice. Under the lens of SET, such fairness perceptions signal a high-quality relational exchange, prompting consumers to reciprocate with stronger brand-supportive actions such as advocacy.

In the specialty coffee industry, this process of fairness perception is particularly salient. Specialty coffee consumers can be broadly segmented into casual drinkers and knowledgeable connoisseurs (Giacalone et al., 2016). Those with high PK, such as experienced specialty coffee consumers familiar with sourcing transparency, roasting practices, and sustainability certifications, are more capable of critically evaluating and interpreting sustainability signals (McCamley & Morland, 2021). For these consumers, other-oriented values (SPV/APV) serve as strong heuristics for assessing fairness and relational sincerity, amplifying the indirect pathway from perceived value to advocacy via interactional justice. In contrast, low-PK consumers, the casual drinkers, may lack the evaluative lens to connect sustainability cues to fairness perceptions, relying instead on general brand impressions, leading to weaker or non-significant mediated effects. This study hypothesizes that the indirect effects of SPV and APV on brand advocacy are conditional on PK, reflective of a moderated mediation

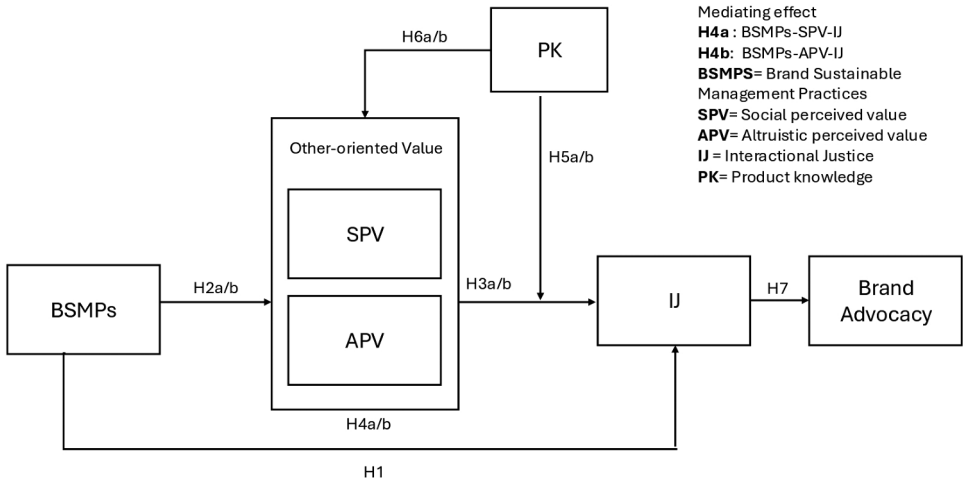


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

mechanism. Specifically, when PK is high, the fairness-based mediating role of interactional justice becomes more pronounced, strengthening the link between values and advocacy. When PK is low, this mediated pathway weakens, meaning that without sufficient product understanding, sustainability-driven value perceptions may not fully translate into justice or advocacy. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5a: Product knowledge moderates the relationship between social value and interactional justice, indicating that the relationship intensifies for consumers with high levels of product knowledge.

H5b: Product knowledge moderates the relationship between altruistic value and interactional justice, indicating that the relationship intensifies for consumers with high levels of product knowledge.

H6a: Product knowledge moderates the indirect effects of social value on brand advocacy via interactional justice.

H6ab: Product knowledge moderates the indirect effects of altruistic value on brand advocacy via interactional justice.

The proposed conceptual framework and associated hypotheses are shown in Figure 1.

Methodology

Data collection

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey approach to investigate how BSMPs influence consumer perceptions of interactional justice, mediated by perceived social and altruistic values, and moderated by product knowledge. The research framework draws on the VAB model and SET to explain the psychological mechanisms underlying fairness evaluations and brand advocacy in the specialty coffee context. Participants were recruited in the United States through a professional online survey panel. Eligibility was restricted to adults aged 18 and older who met strict specialty coffee consumption criteria. To distinguish genuine specialty coffee consumers from casual or mainstream coffee drinkers, a multi-stage screening process was employed. Respondents were required to (1) confirm prior specialty coffee consumption, (2) report having a favorite specialty coffee shop or brand, and (3) indicate prior exposure to sustainability-related information from that brand (e.g. ethical sourcing, fair trade practices, or sustainable cultivation). Respondents who failed any screening criterion were automatically excluded from the survey. To ensure sufficient experiential engagement, participation was further restricted to consumers who had visited a specialty coffee shop within the past month. Additional behavioral questions assessed visit frequency, consumption context (e.g. café, home brewing), and brand type (independent vs. chain), providing further validation of respondents' involvement with specialty coffee. To aid recall and ensure a shared understanding, the official definition of specialty coffee by the Specialty Coffee Association was presented at the beginning of the survey. Data were collected in February 2022. After excluding incomplete or low-quality responses, 301 valid cases remained for analysis.

Measures

All variables were measured using validated multi-item Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree), adapted to the specialty coffee context. BSMPs

were measured with 12 items adapted from Das (2017), capturing perceptions of sustainable sourcing, environmental care, and ethical labor. Social value (SPV) and four items drawn from Perrea et al. (2017) were used to assess altruistic value (APV), emphasizing benefits to society and to others, respectively. Interactional justice was assessed with three items from Martínez-Tur et al. (2006), focusing on perceived fairness, respect, and sincerity in interpersonal encounters. Six items adapted from De Regt et al. (2021) were used to measure brand advocacy, capturing consumers' intentions to support and recommend the brand. Finally, product knowledge was measured with an eight-item index from Brunner and Siegrist (2011), reflecting consumers' confidence, experience, and awareness regarding coffee product quality and sustainability cues. All measurement items are presented in Table 2.

Profile of respondents

The final sample included 301 valid cases, with males accounting for 64.1%, females for 35.5%, and 0.3% opting not to disclose. Most respondents were aged 23–42 (41.9% born 1990–1999; 37.9% born 1980–1989), while smaller proportions were born earlier. Educational attainment was high, with 69.4% holding a college degree and 23.6% a graduate degree. The majority identified as Caucasian (73.8%) and reported annual incomes between $40,000 and $59,999 (36.9%). Most respondents were married (83.1%). Regarding coffee habits, 67.4% primarily consumed specialty coffee at cafés, 22.6% at home, and 10.0% at the office. Preferences were nearly evenly split between independent cafés (50.5%) and chain brands (48.8%). Most participants had visited their favorite specialty coffee brand within the past two weeks (79.5%).

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using a two-step approach. First, the measurement model's reliability and validity were examined through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) conducted in AMOS, with assessments of model fit, factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) across all constructs. To ensure no multicollinearity among predictors, we calculated Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. Second, we tested the hypothesized structural relationships using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression via Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 7). This enabled simultaneous testing of mediation, moderation, and moderated mediation effects (Hayes, 2022). All continuous predictors were mean-centered prior to interaction term creation, and bootstrapping with 5000 samples was employed to test the significance of indirect and conditional effects. Prior to hypothesis testing, we conducted several diagnostic analyses to assess normality, CMB, and potential non-response bias. Descriptive statistics indicated acceptable univariate normality. For the key constructs, the observed skewness (−0.78 to −0.42) and kurtosis (−0.11 to 0.21) values were well within acceptable thresholds for CB-SEM (|skewness| < 2; |kurtosis| < 7), indicating no severe deviation from normality (Kline, 2016). To assess common method bias, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. The exploratory factor analysis showed that the largest unrotated factor accounted for 37.93% of total variance, which is under the recommended 50% cutoff. These results suggest that common method bias is not a major concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To evaluate potential non-response bias, independent-samples t-tests were conducted between early and late respondents (upper and lower 30% by response order). No significant differences were found across key constructs ($p > .05$), suggesting that non-response bias does not pose a significant concern for the dataset.

Results

Measurement validity and reliability

All constructs exhibited satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients above .80. Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the presence of convergent and discriminant validity. To check for potential multicollinearity, Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) were calculated for all predictor variables: BSMPs, perceived social value, altruistic value, and product knowledge. All VIFs values fell within the range of 1.00 to 1.02, far below the threshold of 3.0. Because interactional justice and brand advocacy serve as dependent variables, VIF diagnostics were not applicable to them (Table 1). To test measurement validity, a CFA specifying six latent constructs was conducted: BSMPs, social value (SPV), altruistic value (APV), interactional justice (Just), brand advocacy (Adv), and product knowledge (PK), each measured with multiple observed indicators. The CFA demonstrated a good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.13$, CFI = 0.957, TLI = 0.945, RMSEA = 0.051, SRMR = 0.042). (Table 2). All standardized loadings were greater than 0.70 and statistically significant ($p < .001$), providing strong evidence of convergent validity. The Fornell – Larcker approach was employed to evaluate discriminant validity, with results showing that the square root of each construct's AVE was greater than its correlations with other constructs (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2015) (Table 3).

Table 1. Construct reliability and variance Inflation factor (VIF).

Construct	Mean	Std	AVE	CR	Cronbach's α	VIF
BSMPs	5.46	0.77	0.62	0.88	0.88	1.02
Social Value (SPV)	5.38	1.02	0.59	0.84	0.83	1.02
Altruistic Value (APV)	5.52	0.85	0.64	0.85	0.85	1.00
Interactional Justice	5.68	0.83	0.61	0.87	0.86	
Brand Advocacy (Adv)	5.43	0.94	0.65	0.86	0.85	
Product Knowledge (PK)			0.58	0.89	0.88	1.01

Table 2. Measurement model CFA table.

Construct item	Standardized Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
BSMPs	0.65	0.85	0.79	0.49
My favorite specialty coffee brand/company …				
"Address environmental concerns of customers in terms of eco-friendly design/distribution of products"				
"Address environmental concerns of customers by adopting cleaner production"	0.70			
"Have successfully designed products which consume reduced amount of input materials/energy"	0.71			
"Have implemented lean production and follow it consistently to minimize waste"	0.68			
"Communicate customers' future needs to the suppliers quickly"	0.67			
"Provides healthy and positive working environment for the employees"	0.68			
"The safety measures undertaken are quite advanced and reduce the risk to accident"	0.68			
"Provide employment/business opportunities to the surrounding community"	0.66			
Social Value	0.80	0.75	0.8	0.67
"My favorite specialty coffee brand/company would improve the way other people perceive me"				
"Buying my favorite specialty coffee brand/company would make a good impression on other people"	0.83			
"My favorite specialty coffee brand/company would give those who by it social approval"	0.82			
Altruistic Value	0.71	0.73	0.74	0.56
"My favorite specialty coffee brand/company strives to reduce energy consumption"				
"Buying it would have an ethical interest for me"	0.74			
"The environmental improvement from its production is coherent with my ethical values"	0.77			
"Purchasing it would have ethical value for me"	0.75			
Interactional Justice	0.77	0.69	0.75	0.61
"The employees of my favorite specialty coffee brand/company understand the needs of each customer"				
"The employees of my favorite specialty coffee brand/company provided personal attention"	0.79			
"The employees of my favorite specialty coffee brand/company were very involved in taking care of customers"	0.79			
Brand Advocacy	0.67	0.84	0.81	0.55
"I engage in forwarding the promotions offered by my favorite specialty coffee brand/company to others"				
"I actively inform others online and offline about the superiority of my favorite specialty coffee brand/company and its products"	0.74			
"I am willing to stand to protect the reputation of my favorite specialty coffee brand/company"	0.73			
"I recommend my favorite specialty coffee brand/company and its employees to others"	0.76			
"I encourage friends and relatives to try out my favorite specialty coffee brand/company in the future"	0.74			
"I give advice to others regarding my favorite specialty coffee brand/company's products"	0.80			
Product Knowledge	0.54	0.79	0.69	0.58
"I have a good general knowledge about specialty coffee"				
"I drink specialty coffee to relax after a busy workday"	0.65			
"I drink specialty coffee because it connects people in the community"	0.6			
"I pay attention to bargains and special offers"	0.61			
"I pay attention to recommendations of the baristas"	0.67			
"I drink specialty coffee because I love the taste"	0.63			
"I drink specialty coffee to try something new"	0.72			
"I pay attention to organic cultivation and the origin of coffee"	0.65			

Table 3. Fornell – Larcker criterion.

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
BSMPs	**0.70**	0.59	0.71	0.68	0.70
Social Value (SPV)	0.59	**0.75**	0.67	0.60	0.73
Altruistic Value (APV)	0.71	0.67	**0.77**	0.66	0.74
Interactional Justice	0.68	0.60	0.66	**0.79**	0.70
Brand Advocacy	0.70	0.73	0.74	0.70	**0.77**

Note: The bold diagonal values represent the **square roots of AVE**.

Hypotheses testing

Findings from the regression-based path analysis are presented in Tables 4 and 5. The hypothesized model was tested using regression-based mediation and moderation analyses. Results indicated that BSMPs exerted a significant positive effect on interactional justice (β = 0.312, $p < .001$), providing support for H1. Results showed that BSMPs significantly influenced social value (SPV; β = 0.814, $p < .001$) as well as altruistic value (APV; β = 0.842, $p < .001$), supporting H2a and H2b. In turn, both SPV (β = 0.224, $p < .001$) and APV (β = 0.318, $p < .001$) significantly influenced interactional justice, supporting H3a and H3b. Mediation analyses further confirmed that the indirect effects of BSMPs on interactional justice were significant through both value constructs. The indirect effect via SPV was supported (95% CI [0.1009, 0.2710]), as was the indirect effect via APV (95% CI [0.1540, 0.3777]), thereby supporting H4a and H4b (Table 4). All hypothesized path coefficients are illustrated in Figure 2.

Regarding moderation, no significant moderating effect of product knowledge was observed on the SPV → justice link (β = 0.0206, $p = .789$), indicating that H5a was not supported. However, product knowledge moderated the APV → justice relationship (β = 0.063, $p < .05$). Simple slope analysis revealed that the effect of APV on interactional justice was stronger for consumers with high product knowledge (+1 SD) compared to those with low product knowledge, providing support for H5b. Finally, interactional justice significantly predicted brand advocacy (β = 0.468, $p < .001$), supporting H7 (Table 4) (Figure 3).

Moderated mediation analysis

To assess whether the indirect effects of social value (SPV) and altruistic value (APV) on brand advocacy via interactional justice were contingent on consumers' product knowledge, we employed Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 7) to examine the moderated mediation effects. Results revealed that the mediated relationship between APV and advocacy through justice differed across levels of product knowledge. Specifically, the indirect effect was 0.0944 at low product knowledge (−1 SD), 0.1123 at the mean level, and 0.1302 at high product knowledge (+1 SD). The index of moderated mediation for APV was 0.0179, suggesting that consumers with greater product knowledge were more likely to translate altruistic value into stronger perceptions of interactional

Table 4. Summary of key findings.

Hypothesis	Path	β/S.E	t	R^2	Results
H1	BSMPs → Just	0.76/0.044	17.22***	0.50	Supported
H2a	BSMPs → SPV	0.83/0.060	13.73***	0.39	Supported
H2b	BSMPs → APV	0.79/0.045	17.51***	0.51	Supported
H3a	SPV → IJ	0.49/0.037	13.12***	0.37	Supported
H3b	APV → IJ	0.65/0/042	15.36***	0.44	Supported
H7	Just → Advocacy	0.80/0.047	17.04***	0.49	Supported
Hypothesis	**Indirect Effect**	**Z-value**	**p-value**	**95% CI (Lower/Upper)**	**Results**
H4a (via SPV)	0.18	5.02	<.001	[0.1009, 0.2710]	Significant mediation
H4b (via APV)	0.25	5.62	<.001	[0.1540, 0.3777]	Significant mediation
Hypothesis	**Model**	**Interaction β /S.E**	**t**	**p-value**	**Results**
H5a	SPV × PK → IJ	0.017/0.031	0.62	0.922	*n.s.*
H5b	APV × PK → IJ	0.063/0.033	2.04	$p < .05$	Significant moderation

Table 5. Conditional indirect effects using Hayes' PROCESS 7.

Value Type	PK Level	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	95% CI (Bootstrapped)	Significance
H6a: Altruistic Value (APV)	Low (−1 SD)	0.0944	0.0421	[0.0018, 0.1745]	Significant
	Mean	0.1123	0.0453	[0.0032, 0.1968]	Significant
	High (+1 SD)	0.1302	0.0528	[−0.0004, 0.2409]	Marginally Significant
H6b: Social Value (SPV)	Low (−1 SD)	0.0727	0.0495	[−0.0271, 0.1782]	n.s.
	Mean	0.0793	0.0504	[−0.0255, 0.1834]	n.s.
	High (+1 SD)	0.0851	0.0518	[−0.0228, 0.1906]	n.s.

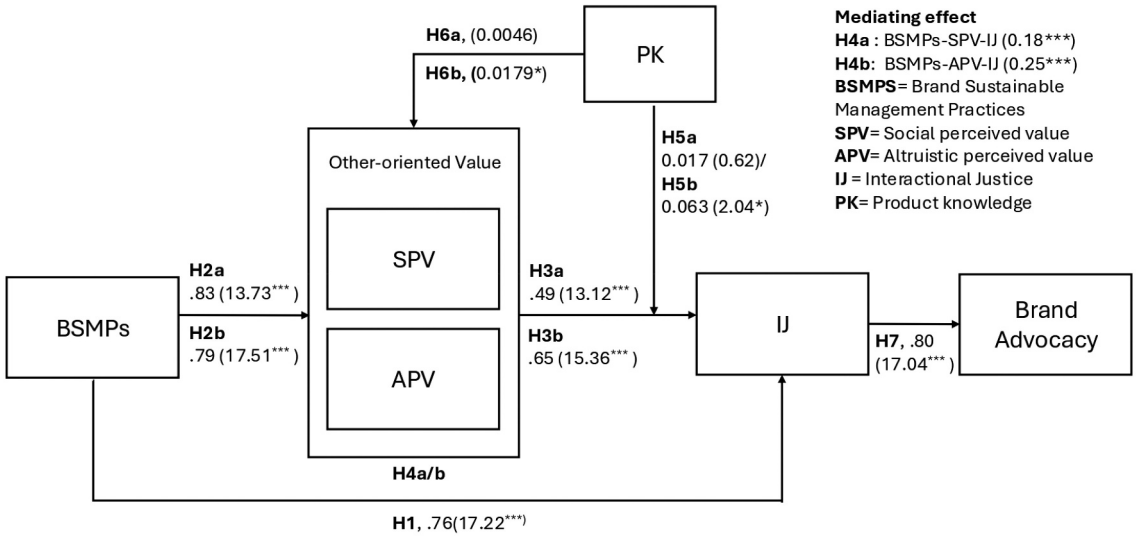


Figure 2. The results of path coefficient.

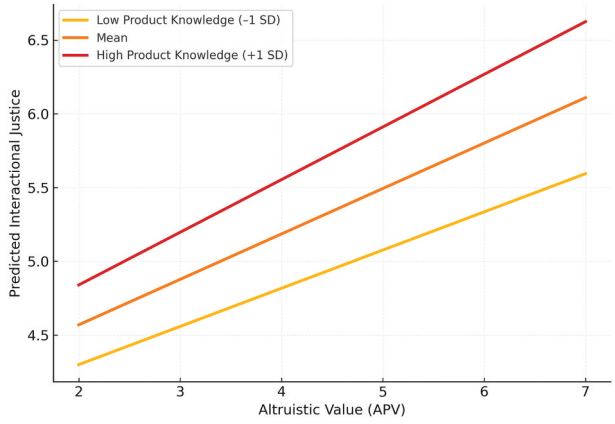


Figure 3. Simple slope analysis of the moderating effect.

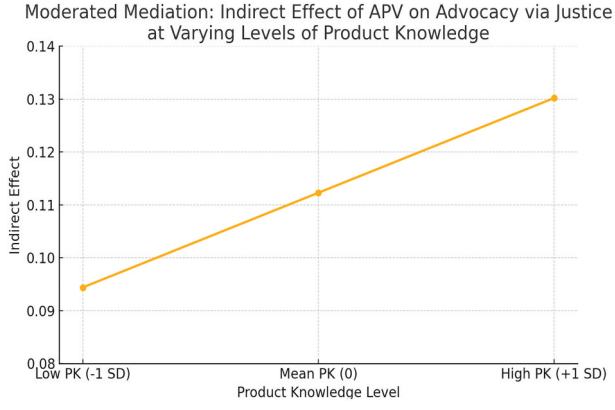


Figure 4.

justice, which in turn enhanced brand advocacy. In contrast, the moderated mediation pathway via SPV was not statistically significant. The index of moderated mediation for SPV was 0.0046, with the 95% confidence interval crossing zero, indicating no evidence that product knowledge moderates the indirect effect of SPV on advocacy through justice (Table 5). Taken together, these results highlight the differential roles of value types: altruistic value exerts a stronger influence on fairness and advocacy among product-knowledgeable consumers, whereas social value does not demonstrate the same conditional amplification. A graphical representation of the APV-based moderated mediation is shown in Figure 4.

Discussion

This study explored how brand sustainable management practices (BSMPs) influence consumers' perceptions of interactional justice in the U.S. specialty coffee market. Building upon the Value – Attitude – Behavior (VAB) framework and Social Exchange Theory (SET), we developed and examined a dual mediation model involving perceived social and altruistic value. Additionally, we investigated whether product knowledge, serving as a cognitive moderator, amplifies the relationship between perceived value and justice perceptions.

Our findings revealed that BSMPs influence interactional justice through both direct and mediated pathways, with the indirect effects occurring through two distinct paths: social value and altruistic value. Both paths were statistically significant, affirming the role of perceived other-oriented values as psychological mechanisms through which sustainability efforts translate into fairness judgments. Moreover, the results showed that interactional justice significantly enhances brand advocacy, indicating that justice

evaluations are not merely moral appraisals but also behavioral drivers. This finding generally supports the tourism and hospitality literature that identified CSR-driven practices as antecedents of justice perceptions (e.g. Kim et al., 2021; Mistry et al., 2025), while extending the scope to a consumer-facing specialty coffee context. The uniqueness of our study lies in demonstrating that justice not only mediates fairness perceptions but also serves as a direct behavioral driver of advocacy, a link less emphasized in earlier work.

In addition, we found a significant moderation effect of product knowledge on the relationship between APV and interactional justice: customers with greater knowledge about the brand or product were more likely to recognize and respond to altruistic values in the form of fair and respectful treatment. This suggests that product-knowledgeable consumers are better equipped to decode and appreciate sincere sustainability signals, thereby fostering stronger perceptions of justice in service interactions. This result resonates with Olya et al. (2020) and Gupta et al. (2019), who showed that familiarity or knowledge enhances the effects of sustainability initiatives, but our study uniquely demonstrates that such moderation applies specifically to altruistic value signals rather than to sustainability cues in general. Moreover, the indirect effect of APV on brand advocacy via justice was amplified at higher levels of product knowledge, as indicated by the positive index of moderated mediation. These findings highlight the boundary condition under which BSMPs are most effective: customers must possess sufficient product knowledge to cognitively process and appreciate the brand's altruistic intentions, which then catalyze justice perceptions and downstream advocacy behaviors.

While previous research (Ahmad et al., 2023; Raza et al., 2023) highlighted the function of altruistic values in reinforcing CSR – advocacy links, our study adds value by demonstrating that this process is conditional on consumer knowledge, revealing a cognitive boundary condition absent in earlier studies. In contrast, no significant moderation was found for the social value (SPV) path, suggesting that signaling benefits, such as appearing socially responsible, are less reliant on product-specific expertise. This distinction implies that altruistic appeals require greater consumer elaboration, whereas social signaling may operate more universally across knowledge levels. This finding contrasts with prior evidence emphasizing social value as a broad mediator of CSR effects (Cannas et al., 2018; Japutra et al., 2023). Our study uniquely identifies that SPV operates independently of consumer knowledge, while APV requires deeper product understanding, thus distinguishing between the robustness of social signaling and the conditionality of altruistic signaling in specialty coffee.

Theoretical implications

The study advances theory by making multiple contributions to the literature. First, we extend the VAB framework by identifying social and altruistic value as parallel mediators between BSMPs and interactional justice. While VAB theory traditionally highlights how values are transformed into attitudes and behavioral outcomes (Homer & Kahle, 1988), our findings show that other-oriented values are critical because they capture how consumers evaluate brands based on their concern for others and function as key psychological mechanisms linking sustainability practices to fairness perceptions (Holbrook, 1999; Perrea et al., 2017). By explicitly positioning value activation as the key psychological process linking brand-level sustainability practices to interpersonal fairness judgments, this study clarifies a mechanism that has been rarely tested in prior tourism and hospitality research. This expands the scope of VAB beyond functional or hedonic values (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001), foregrounding ethical and relational dimensions of value in tourism and hospitality settings.

Second, drawing on SET, we illustrate that fairness perceptions are shaped by how consumers interpret the moral intent behind sustainability practices. This highlights that reciprocity in consumer – brand exchanges does not stem solely from observable actions (e.g. implementing BSMPs), but from the consumer's perception of those actions as socially or altruistically motivated. In doing so, our findings shift SET applications in tourism and hospitality away from a narrow focus on transactional fairness toward a more interpretive, value-based understanding of justice formation in ongoing service relationships. In doing so, our study broadens SET applications in tourism and hospitality by emphasizing that justice-based reciprocity emerges from value-based interpretations rather than procedural or distributive outcomes alone. Third, we introduce product knowledge as a boundary condition in the value – justice relationship, demonstrating that consumer cognition plays a pivotal role in shaping fairness perceptions. This contribution enhances both VAB and SET by showing that the translation of values into justice is contingent on consumers' cognitive ability to process sustainability signals. This insight responds to increasing calls in the tourism and hospitality literature to move beyond assuming uniform sustainability effects and to recognize that consumers differ in how they interpret

and assign meaning to sustainability initiatives (Raza et al., 2023; Olya et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2025). By embedding an individual-level moderator into these frameworks, our study challenges the linear assumptions of existing models and contributes to the emerging recognition that consumer-level knowledge and expertise critically condition responses to sustainability efforts.

Fourth, by incorporating moderated mediation into the analysis, this study advances tourism and hospitality research with a more dynamic and realistic account of conditional value processing. Rather than viewing the influence of sustainability initiatives as uniform across consumers, our model shows that the pathways through which BSMPs drive justice and advocacy depend on how consumers interpret and internalize other-oriented values. This contribution is theoretically important because it demonstrates that sustainability effects unfold through layered psychological processes rather than direct cause – effect relationships, reflecting the complexity of contemporary service consumption. This layered approach aligns with the complexity of consumer decision-making in tourism and hospitality contexts (Al-Kwifi et al., 2025), offering a more nuanced theoretical lens for studying sustainability and justice.

Finally, our results extend the justice literature by distinguishing between social and altruistic value as antecedents of interactional justice. Social value was found to exert robust effects across consumers, whereas altruistic value was contingent on product knowledge. This differentiation enriches justice theory by clarifying how values differentially shape perceptions of fairness: some values function as universal heuristics, while others require deeper cognitive elaboration. By empirically separating these value pathways, this study refines existing justice models (Cropanzano et al., 2002) and highlights the importance of considering value content, not just fairness perceptions, in explaining justice-based outcomes. In the tourism and hospitality sector, such as specialty coffee, where authenticity and transparency are salient (Tran, 2025), this refinement underscores the importance of context-specific justice mechanisms rooted in consumer value perceptions.

Practical implications

This research provides multiple managerial and practical insights for professionals in the specialty coffee sector and the broader tourism and hospitality industries. First, BSMPs should be positioned not only as operational or compliance-oriented strategies but also as signals of fairness that shape consumers' justice perceptions. Communicating ethical sourcing, fair compensation for producers, and environmental stewardship in customer-facing contexts can help consumers interpret sustainability initiatives as expressions of respect and sincerity, thereby strengthening trust and brand advocacy. Second, activating social and altruistic values requires differentiated communication approaches. Social value can be reinforced by highlighting collective benefits and community-oriented initiatives, such as local engagement activities or partnerships that emphasize shared responsibility. Altruistic value, by contrast, is more effectively activated through messages that convey genuine care and moral commitment, such as transparent explanations of trade practices that prioritize producer welfare even when they involve higher costs. Such value-based communication helps consumers translate sustainability efforts into perceptions of interpersonal fairness.

Third, managers should recognize the importance of consumer product knowledge in amplifying sustainability signals. Consumers possessing greater product knowledge are better able to understand and appreciate the deeper intentions behind sustainability initiatives. Accordingly, brands can invest in educational touchpoints, such as in-store explanations of sourcing practices, interactive displays, or packaging information that traces product origins, to make sustainability efforts more transparent and interpretable. These initiatives enable knowledgeable consumers to perceive BSMPs as authentic justice signals. Fourth, the findings suggest the importance of segmenting sustainability communication based on consumers' knowledge levels. Detailed, information-rich narratives may be more effective for highly knowledgeable consumers, while simpler messages emphasizing shared social responsibility and fairness may resonate better with less knowledgeable segments. This tailored approach ensures that sustainability messaging fosters justice perceptions across diverse consumer groups.

Fifth, the strong link between interactional justice and brand advocacy highlights the importance of frontline service encounters. Employees should be trained to communicate sustainability values with courtesy, empathy, and respect, ensuring that everyday interactions reinforce fairness perceptions activated by BSMPs. Integrating sustainability narratives into service interactions helps translate abstract sustainability commitments into meaningful relational experiences. Overall, the specialty coffee context illustrates a broader implication for tourism and hospitality firms: sustainability must be enacted relationally, not merely operationally. By embedding sustainable practices into daily customer interactions, through communication, service delivery, and experiential design (Lin et al., 2024), brands can transform sustainability initiatives into tangible advocacy outcomes.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations of this study provide avenues for future investigation. First, reliance on cross-sectional survey data constrains causal interpretation. While the proposed model aligns with established theoretical frameworks, longitudinal or experimental designs would allow researchers to more directly assess how perceptions of BSMPs and justice evolve over time and influence advocacy behaviors in dynamic service encounters. Second, because the study was situated in the U.S. specialty coffee market, the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts or industries may be limited. Consumers in different cultural contexts may place varying emphasis on social versus altruistic values or interpret justice signals differently. Future research could replicate this study in diverse geographic regions or compare service/product categories (e.g. quick-service restaurants, fine dining, hotels) to explore contextual variations. Third, although this study employed a rigorous screening procedure, self-reports may not fully capture objective levels of consumer expertise or behavioral involvement regarding specialty coffee consumption and sustainability practices. Subsequent research could improve validity by employing objective metrics such as transaction records, loyalty data, or observational measures of specialty coffee consumption. Finally, the study distinguished between social and altruistic values but treated them as unidimensional constructs. Future research could examine subdimensions within these values (e.g. reputation signaling vs. community belonging for social value; environmental altruism vs. human welfare altruism for altruistic value) to gain deeper insight into how nuanced value perceptions interact with justice evaluations.

Author contributions

CRediT: **Kyong Sik Sung:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Seoki Lee:** Conceptualization, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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