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Brand Advocacy and Business Sustainability: The Mediating Role of Customer Lifetime Value and the Moderating Role of Market Turbulence in an Indonesian Certification Body

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Abstract

This study examines how brand advocacy affects business sustainability in a business-to-business certification service, with customer lifetime value (CLV) as a mediator and market turbulence as a moderator. The research was conducted at PT Jaminan Mutu Berkelanjutan Indonesia (JMBI), an ISO certification body whose client base fell from 284 in 2024 to 171 in 2025 amid intense price competition. Using a quantitative explanatory design, data were collected from 120 management representatives of client companies that had completed at least two ISO certification cycles. Respondents were selected by purposive sampling from a population of 323. The data were analyzed with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4, using 5,000 bootstrap subsamples. The measurement model met all validity and reliability criteria. Brand advocacy had a strong positive effect on CLV ($\beta = 0.617$, $p < 0.001$) and a positive direct effect on business sustainability ($\beta = 0.311$, $p = 0.002$). CLV positively affected business sustainability ($\beta = 0.305$, $p = 0.027$) and partially mediated the relationship between advocacy and sustainability (indirect effect = 0.188, $p = 0.035$). Market turbulence strengthened the effect of brand advocacy on business sustainability ($\beta = 0.567$, $p < 0.001$). The model explained 64.3% of the variance in business sustainability. These findings suggest that certification bodies should shift from transactional client acquisition toward relationship-based advocacy and retention strategies, particularly in turbulent markets.

INTRODUCTION

Between 2021 and 2025, the global economy underwent a substantial shift driven by digital integration and growing sustainability demands in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recovery took place amid inflationary pressure and supply chain disruption, and firms were increasingly expected to adopt environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles (Chen et al., 2023; Eccles et al., 2020). In such an environment, international standards serve as a common language of global business. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) provides structured management system frameworks, such as ISO 9001 for quality

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management, ISO 14001 for environmental management, and ISO 45001 for occupational health and safety. Holding an ISO certificate signals credibility and reduces information asymmetry between providers and buyers. As a result, certification has moved from a voluntary choice to a strategic requirement for firms that wish to win tenders and enter domestic and international supply chains.

This demand has created a dynamic conformity assessment industry. In Indonesia, the national quality infrastructure is governed by the National Standardization Agency (BSN) and supported by the National Accreditation Committee (KAN), which accredits conformity assessment bodies under Law No. 20 of 2014 on Standardization and Conformity Assessment. Certification bodies operate as independent third parties that assess whether client management systems meet the relevant standards. Their certificates differ in recognition. Certificates issued under the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), either through KAN or foreign accreditation bodies, are recognized across borders through multilateral recognition arrangements. Non-IAF bodies often offer faster and cheaper services but face limited acceptance in international tenders.

Although the market potential is large, Indonesia's certification industry has become hypercompetitive. The growing number of local and foreign certification bodies has triggered price wars, shifts in marketing strategy, and pressure on audit integrity. PT Jaminan Mutu Berkelanjutan Indonesia (JMBI), a certification body, illustrates these pressures. Between 2021 and 2025, certification prices fell by 15% to 20% from their initial levels. The firm's client base grew to a peak of 284 clients in 2024, supported by 102 new (initial) clients in 2023 and 101 in 2024. In 2025, however, new client acquisition collapsed to only eight, and the total client base fell to 171, even though 163 surveillance clients remained. Rapidly changing and overlapping regulations also made clients hesitant to commit for the long term. In addition, the client portfolio is heavily concentrated: construction services account for 69.6% of clients, followed by non-construction services (16.0%), manufacturing (8.8%), and public services (5.6%). Together, these conditions threaten the firm's business sustainability.

The firm's situation points to a gap between theory and practice. In principle, customer lifetime value (CLV) should drive long-term stability and retention because it treats customers as financial assets whose value depends on their future purchases and relationship duration (Gupta & Lehmann, 2003; Venkatesan & Kumar, 2004). In practice, relationships in Indonesia's certification industry tend to be transactional. Clients often switch providers when a cheaper offer appears, which makes trust and loyalty difficult to build. Relationship marketing theory argues that commitment and trust turn exchanges into durable relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The resource-based view adds that such relationships can become valuable, rare, and hard-to-imitate resources that sustain competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

Brand advocacy is one of the strongest expressions of such relationships. It represents the highest level of customer commitment, in which customers voluntarily recommend a brand, speak positively about it, defend it against criticism, and persuade others to use it (Wilder, 2015; Fullerton, 2011). In professional business-to-business services, advocacy is particularly valuable because buyers rely heavily on peer recommendations when assessing credence qualities such as auditor competence and integrity. Prior studies have linked advocacy to trust, brand relationship quality, and loyalty (Quaye et al., 2022; Becerra & Badrinarayanan,

2013; Coelho et al., 2019). Studies on CLV have shown that the value of customer relationships drives profitability and financial performance (Reinartz & Kumar, 2003; Ali & Shabn, 2024). Meanwhile, research on market turbulence suggests that environmental uncertainty changes how firm resources translate into performance (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Slater & Narver, 1994). More recent studies show that turbulence moderates the link between intangible resources and business sustainability (AlQershi et al., 2023; İbrahimcioğlu & Kitapçı, 2025).

Despite this growing literature, three research gaps remain. First, empirical tests that link brand advocacy directly to business sustainability are scarce, particularly in business-to-business certification services. Most advocacy studies have focused on retail, consumer brands, or online communities (Wilk et al., 2020; Cheung & To, 2024). Second, few studies combine CLV as a mediator and market turbulence as a moderator in a single model. As a result, it is unclear whether advocacy affects sustainability directly, through long-term customer value, or differently under turbulent conditions. Third, business sustainability is usually measured with generic financial or triple-bottom-line indicators (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Epstein & Roy, 2001). These indicators do not capture what sustainability means for a certification body, where survival depends on recurring surveillance audits and recertification.

This study addresses these gaps and makes three contributions. First, it develops and tests an integrated model in which brand advocacy influences business sustainability both directly and indirectly through CLV, while market turbulence moderates the direct path. Second, it applies the model to a high-trust professional service that is tightly constrained by accreditation rules and audit independence, a context that differs sharply from the retail and manufacturing settings that dominate prior research. Third, it adapts the measurement of business sustainability to the operating realities of certification bodies. The measure captures stakeholders' confidence in long-term survival, adaptability to regulatory change, service continuity, and long-term commitment. By drawing on contingency theory, the study also explains why the value of advocacy may increase rather than decrease when the market becomes unstable.

Accordingly, this study addresses five questions. It examines whether brand advocacy affects CLV and business sustainability, and whether CLV affects business sustainability. It also tests whether CLV mediates the effect of brand advocacy on business sustainability and whether market turbulence moderates that effect. Theoretically, the study extends relationship marketing and the resource-based view by positioning advocates and high-value clients as strategic relational assets. Practically, it offers certification bodies evidence-based guidance for moving from a transactional, acquisition-driven model toward a relational model that can withstand market shocks.

METHODS

Research design. This study used a quantitative, non-experimental explanatory design to test causal relationships among latent constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The conceptual model draws on relationship marketing theory, the resource-based view, and contingency theory. Brand advocacy is the exogenous construct, business sustainability is the endogenous construct, CLV is the mediator, and market turbulence is the moderator of the direct path from brand advocacy to business sustainability. Figure 1 presents the model and the five hypotheses.

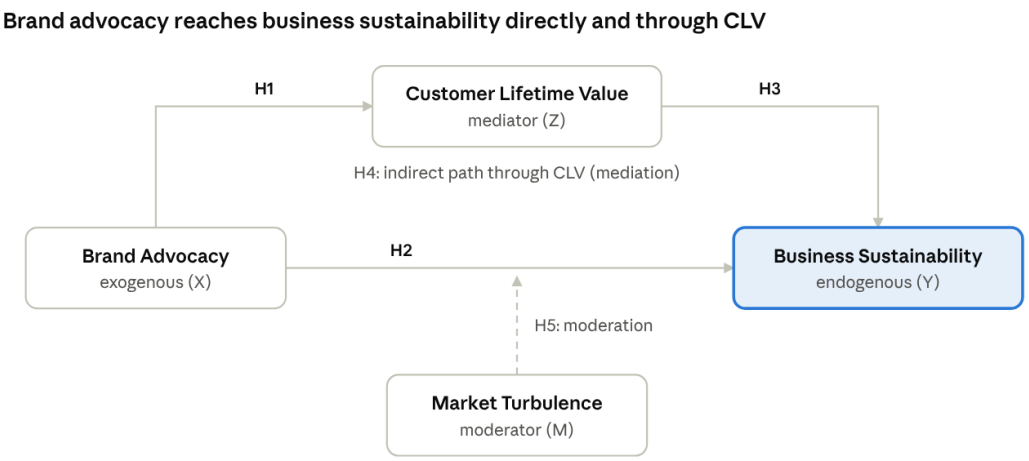

Figure 1. Conceptual model and hypotheses (Source: Research design, 2026)

The hypotheses are as follows. H1: Brand advocacy has a positive effect on CLV. H2: Brand advocacy has a positive effect on business sustainability. H3: CLV has a positive effect on business sustainability. H4: CLV mediates the effect of brand advocacy on business sustainability. H5: Market turbulence moderates the effect of brand advocacy on business sustainability.

Population and sample. The unit of analysis was the 323 client companies enrolled in certification programs at PT JMBI. Each company appoints a management representative (MR) who coordinates its ISO management system, so the population consisted of 323 MRs. Purposive sampling was used to select MRs whose companies had completed at least two ISO certification cycles by 2026, had interacted with the firm for at least two years, and held a strategic role in evaluating its services. This procedure yielded 120 respondents, which falls within the range of 100 to 200 recommended for PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017).

Measurement. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed in person and online. Before completing it, respondents were informed of the study's purpose, the confidentiality of their data, and the voluntary nature of participation. Each construct was measured by four reflective indicators, and each indicator by two items, on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Table 1 summarizes the constructs and indicators.

Table 1. Constructs and indicators

Construct	Indicators	Main source
Brand advocacy (X)	Recommending the brand; spreading positive word of mouth; defending the brand; persuading others to use the brand	Wilder (2015)
Customer lifetime value (Z)	Intention to keep using the service; intention to maintain the relationship; willingness to repurchase (recertify); willingness to expand service use	Gupta and Lehmann (2003)
Market turbulence (M)	Rapidly changing client needs; unpredictable client preferences; many alternative providers; unstable market conditions	Jaworski and Kohli (1993)
Business sustainability (Y)	Confidence in long-term survival; confidence in adaptability; perceived service stability; clients' long-term commitment	Adapted for certification bodies

Source : Compiled by the author (2026)

Data analysis. The data were analyzed with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4, which suits complex predictive models with mediation and moderation (Hair et al., 2014). The analysis followed three stages. First, the measurement model was assessed for convergent validity (outer loadings ≥ 0.70 and average variance extracted, AVE, ≥ 0.50), discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion and heterotrait–monotrait ratio, HTMT, < 0.85; Henseler et al., 2015), and internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability ≥ 0.70). Second, the structural model was assessed through collinearity (VIF < 5), effect size (f^2 of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for small, medium, and large effects), the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance ($Q^2 > 0$), and goodness of fit (GoF). GoF was calculated as the square root of the product of the mean AVE and the mean R^2 (Chin, 2009). Third, the hypotheses were tested by bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. A path was considered significant when $t \geq 1.96$ and $p \leq 0.05$. Mediation was assessed through the specific indirect effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), and moderation through an interaction term between brand advocacy and market turbulence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All five hypotheses were supported. Brand advocacy increased both CLV and business sustainability, CLV partially mediated the effect of advocacy on sustainability, and market turbulence strengthened the direct effect of advocacy.

Respondent profile and descriptive statistics

All 120 questionnaires were complete and usable. Most respondents were men (65.0%) and aged 30–49 years (76.7%). More than half (55.0%) had served as management representatives for over three years, and 76.6% held director or manager positions. These characteristics indicate that respondents had sufficient experience and authority to evaluate the certification body's services.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the constructs (five-point scale)

Construct	Mean	Highest-rated indicator (mean)	Lowest-rated indicator (mean)
Business sustainability	4.26	Adaptability to change (4.33)	Clients' long-term commitment (4.08)
Brand advocacy	4.19	Recommending the brand (4.27)	Defending the brand (4.06)
Customer lifetime value	4.15	Maintaining the relationship (4.26)	Willingness to repurchase (4.10)
Market turbulence	4.13	Unstable market conditions (4.22)	Unpredictable preferences; many alternatives (4.07)

Source : Questionnaire data, processed (2026)

All constructs had means above 4.0, which indicates agreement. The lowest-rated indicators share a common pattern. Clients were willing to recommend the firm and speak positively about it, but they were less willing to defend it against criticism, to remain loyal when competitors made offers, to recertify through the firm, and to commit to a long-term partnership. In addition, respondents perceived the market as highly turbulent, particularly because of intense competition and widely varying prices.

Measurement model

All outer loadings ranged from 0.909 to 0.980, well above the 0.70 threshold, so no indicator was removed. Table 3 shows that every construct met the criteria for convergent validity and reliability.

Table 3. Convergent validity and reliability

Construct	Loadings	AVE	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Brand advocacy	0.953–0.963	0.917	0.970	0.978
Customer lifetime value	0.909–0.947	0.857	0.946	0.960
Market turbulence	0.955–0.965	0.922	0.974	0.979
Business sustainability	0.971–0.980	0.951	0.984	0.987

Source : SmartPLS 4 output, processed (2026)

Discriminant validity was also established. Under the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the square root of each construct's AVE (0.926–0.975) exceeded its correlations with the other constructs, the highest of which was 0.617 between brand advocacy and CLV. All reported HTMT ratios were below the strict threshold of 0.85, ranging from 0.057 (market turbulence and brand advocacy) to 0.643 (CLV and brand advocacy).

Structural model

All VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 1.657, well below 5, which indicates no collinearity problems. Table 4 summarizes the explanatory and predictive power of the model.

Table 4. Explanatory and predictive power

Endogenous construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2
Business sustainability	0.643	0.630	0.538
Customer lifetime value	0.381	0.375	0.368

Source : SmartPLS 4 output, processed (2026)

The model explained 64.3% of the variance in business sustainability, which is close to the substantial level, and 38.1% of the variance in CLV, which is moderate. Both Q^2 values were above zero, which confirms predictive relevance. The effect sizes were large for brand advocacy on CLV ($f^2 = 0.615$), medium for the interaction

term on business sustainability (f^2 = 0.208) and for brand advocacy on business sustainability (f^2 = 0.164), and medium for CLV on business sustainability (f^2 = 0.158). The GoF index was 0.683, which exceeds the 0.36 threshold for a large fit.

Hypothesis testing

Table 5 reports the bootstrapping results, and Figure 2 presents the estimated model.

Table 5. Results of hypothesis testing

Hyp.	Path	β	SD	t	p	Decision
H1	Brand advocacy → CLV	0.617	0.059	10.488	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Brand advocacy → Business sustainability	0.311	0.102	3.063	0.002	Supported
H3	CLV → Business sustainability	0.305	0.137	2.216	0.027	Supported
H4	Brand advocacy → CLV → Business sustainability	0.188	–	2.109	0.035	Supported (partial mediation)
H5	Brand advocacy × Market turbulence → Business sustainability	0.567	0.084	6.723	< 0.001	Supported

Source : SmartPLS 4 bootstrapping output, processed (2026)

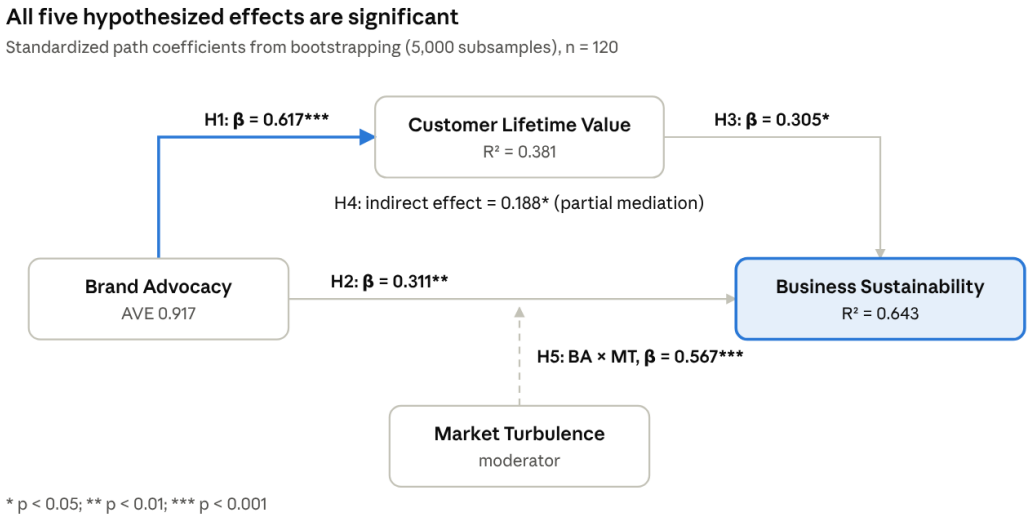

Figure 2. Estimated structural model (Source: SmartPLS 4 output, processed, 2026)

Because the direct effect of brand advocacy remained significant when CLV was included, the mediation is partial. The indirect effect accounts for about 38% of the total effect of brand advocacy on business sustainability (0.188 of 0.499). The positive interaction coefficient indicates that the effect of brand advocacy on business sustainability becomes stronger as market turbulence increases.

Discussion

Brand advocacy builds long-term customer value. The strongest path in the model runs from brand advocacy to CLV (β = 0.617). Clients who recommend, praise, and defend the certification body are also those most willing to continue the

relationship, recertify, and expand their use of its services. This finding supports commitment–trust theory, which holds that committed partners invest in the relationship rather than treat it as a single transaction (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It is also consistent with evidence that advocacy grows out of satisfaction, trust, and brand identification (Fullerton, 2011; Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Quaye et al., 2022). In a certification market, publicly recommending a provider puts the advocate's own reputation at stake. Clients who are willing to take that risk are therefore signaling a durable commitment, which in turn raises their expected lifetime value (Kumar et al., 2010).

Advocacy directly supports business sustainability. Brand advocacy also had a significant direct effect on business sustainability (β = 0.311). This result supports the resource-based view, in which loyal advocates function as intangible assets that competitors cannot easily imitate (Barney, 1991). The finding is consistent with studies showing that advocacy strengthens brand reputation and relational outcomes (Coelho et al., 2019; Ahmadi & Ataei, 2024). For a certification body, advocacy works as organic promotion: a peer recommendation from one management representative to another reduces the perceived risk of choosing an auditor, which price-based marketing cannot achieve.

CLV links advocacy to sustainability. CLV had a positive effect on business sustainability (β = 0.305) and transmitted part of the effect of advocacy (indirect effect = 0.188). These results support the view that customers are financial assets whose retained value determines a firm's long-term viability (Gupta & Lehmann, 2003; Rust et al., 2004; Venkatesan & Kumar, 2004). They also echo recent evidence that CLV improves organizational financial performance (Ali & Shabn, 2024). The partial mediation shows that advocacy contributes to sustainability in two ways: by attracting new clients through word of mouth and by converting existing clients into long-term revenue. This explains PT JMBI's 2025 position. When new acquisitions collapsed to eight clients, the 163 retained surveillance clients carried the business. Yet the lowest-rated CLV indicators were repurchase and recertification, which suggests that this retained base is not yet secure.

Turbulence makes advocacy more valuable. The interaction between brand advocacy and market turbulence was positive and strong (β = 0.567). In other words, advocacy matters more, not less, when the market becomes unstable. This finding supports contingency theory and the view that environmental uncertainty changes how firm resources translate into performance (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Slater & Narver, 1994). It is also consistent with AlQershi et al. (2023), who found that market turbulence strengthens the link between intangible resources and business sustainability. When regulations change quickly, prices vary widely, and many alternative providers compete for the same clients, buyers face more uncertainty in choosing a certification body. Under these conditions, a credible recommendation from a peer becomes the most trusted source of information, so advocates provide the firm with resilience.

Practical implications. Certification bodies should shift from acquisition-driven, price-based competition toward advocacy and retention. PT JMBI could establish a structured advocacy program, including referral schemes, client forums, and digital testimonials. It should also strengthen after-sales service during surveillance audits and recertification, which were the weakest links in client loyalty. In addition, the firm should monitor regulatory changes systematically so that it can respond quickly when turbulence rises.

Limitations. This study was conducted at a single certification body, so its findings cannot be generalized to the whole industry. Business sustainability was measured through client perceptions rather than objective financial or operational indicators. The cross-sectional design cannot capture changes in client behavior over time. The very high loadings (up to 0.980) may also reflect common-method variance from a single-source survey. Future studies should use multi-firm samples, objective performance data, and longitudinal designs, and should consider additional variables such as trust, service quality, and organizational resilience.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that brand advocacy is a strategic driver of business sustainability for a business-to-business certification body. Brand advocacy strongly increased customer lifetime value and also had a direct positive effect on business sustainability. CLV, in turn, improved business sustainability and partially mediated the effect of advocacy, accounting for about 38% of its total effect. Market turbulence strengthened the effect of advocacy on sustainability, which indicates that advocates become more valuable as the market becomes less stable. Together, the model explained 64.3% of the variance in business sustainability.

Theoretically, these findings integrate relationship marketing theory, the resource-based view, and contingency theory by showing that advocates and high-value clients are relational assets whose value increases under uncertainty. Practically, certification bodies such as PT JMBI should move away from price-based client acquisition and toward structured advocacy programs, stronger after-sales service during surveillance and recertification, and systematic monitoring of regulatory change. Future research should test the model across multiple certification bodies and service sectors, use objective sustainability indicators, and adopt longitudinal designs.

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