



Challenges in Adopting Green Marketing Strategies: A Study of Small and Medium Enterprises

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Abstract. This article provides a systematic literature review (SLR) on the challenges faced by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in adopting green marketing strategies. Green marketing refers to the promotion of products and services based on the environmental benefits, aligning business practices with sustainability goals and meeting the growing demand for ecofriendly solutions. Despite its potential to improve business performance and competitiveness, many SMEs face significant barriers to adoption. Through a SLR, this study explores these challenges by synthesizing findings from different regions and industries, providing a comprehensive analysis of factors that influence the success of green marketing strategies. This study identified key barriers, such as the high cost of sustainable practices, limited market access, and inadequate consumer demand for ecofriendly products. This study also shows that although businesses recognize the potential of green marketing to drive competitive advantage, its implementation is still hampered by practical challenges, especially for SMEs in a diverse economic context. Research recommendations for future are developing region specific green marketing frameworks, exploring innovative financing mechanisms to support green initiatives, and further investigation of digital platforms in improving the visibility and success of sustainable marketing strategies. These SLR provide valuable insights for researchers and practitioners aiming to encourage more sustainable business practices and bridge the gap between environmental goals and market realities.

Keywords: Sustainability, SMEs, Systematic Literature Review.

1 Introduction

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are likely to assume a critical part in stewardship of global social and environmental resources [1]. SMEs are essential participants in the global economic landscape, making substantial contributions to employment, innovation, and economic development. Green marketing has been defined as the practice of marketing products and services in a way that meets the current requirements of consumers and enterprises while simultaneously preserving or improving the capacity of future generations to satisfy their own requirements [2]. Green marketing encompasses the full scope of addressing environmental considerations, from product conceptualization through to product distribution [3].

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The concept of green marketing has gained increasing prominence, particularly as a strategic approach for companies to maintain their current competitive position in the market [4]. As environmental concerns have gained increasing prominence, SMEs now face mounting pressure to adopt sustainable practices, including green marketing strategies. While larger corporations have adopted these strategies with relative ease, SMEs face unique challenges due their limited resources, infrastructure, and market reach. The transition towards sustainability poses both obstacles and prospects for SMEs, as they must reconcile environmental imperatives with imperative to maintain competitiveness and profitability. Adopting green marketing strategies can be crucial approach for SMEs to reconcile these competing priorities and navigate the transition to sustainability.

Systematic literature review (SLR) is a research approach utilized to systematically develop a comprehensive review of the existing literature, adhering to well defined procedures that fundamentally encompass three principal stages that is planning, conducting, and reporting the review [5]. This approach ensures an unbiased and highly rigorous assessment of the available research on the specified topic [6]. A SLR on the challenges SMEs face in adopting green marketing strategies is crucial, as it will offer insights into the barriers and hurdles these enterprises encounter when trying to implement environmentally conscious practices. Understanding these challenges is essential for developing effective strategies and support to help SMEs overcome obstacles and successfully transition to sustainable marketing approaches.

This SLR aims to investigate and elucidate the key obstacles, impediments, and challenges encountered by SMEs in the implementation and adoption of green marketing strategies. The review will explore the diverse barriers and hurdles that SMEs face when attempting to incorporate environmentally conscious marketing practice into their operations across diverse sectors and regions. By addressing these issues, the study seeks to develop actionable insights that can inform both SMEs and policymakers about the obstacles and foster a more sustainable business environment. The overarching research question guided the SLR to ensure the achievement of the key objective is:

RQ. What are the challenges faced by small and medium enterprises in adopting green marketing strategies?

2 Literature Review

Green marketing is an examination of all attempts to consume, produce, distribute, promote, package and reclaim products in a way that is sensitive or responsive to ecological issues [7]. Green marketing is the process of reducing the environmental impact of a product using sustainable production, redesign, and a well-coordinated marketing strategy [8]. Green marketing can also define as a combination of green products, green prices, green distribution, green communication, and online communication [9]. The purpose of using green marketing strategies is to increase consumer awareness of environmental impact of a product and to motivate purchasing decisions [10].

Green marketing emphasizes that environmental preservation requires marketers to innovate in terms of production, sales of ecofriendly products and services, especially

when environmental concerns arise among customers [11]. Green marketing influences environmental behavior, suggesting some constraints on a consistent beneficial influence on purchase intent [12]. This strategy facilitates the reduction of environmental impacts on all production, commercial, and economic processes, beyond the useful life of the product, thus establishing a competitive advantage [13]. Previous studies have shown that green marketing perspective can influence sustainable performance and significantly determine environmental consequence [14].

Monteiro et. al. [15] categorized green marketing into four aspects. The first is related to environmentally friendly products, which meet environmental needs and criteria. The second component relates to green pricing, which reflects the costs determined by company's policies regarding environmental considerations mandated by its standards and directives, or its sustainability programs. The third component has to do with green squares, which represent the distribution of ecofriendly goods that serve consumers by enabling delivery and ensuring the recycling process carried out in accordance with environmental standards and regulations. The fourth component is green promotion, which involves providing accurate information about goods without sacrificing consumer interests.

3 Research Method

The purpose of systematic literature review is to offer a thorough summary of the status of knowledge in a topic now and offer insights on new trends [16]. This study drew upon a systematic review of internationally articles published in the Scopus database between 2014 and 2024. The articles were chosen based on the inclusion of relevant keywords in their titles or abstracts. The Scopus database was employed as the principal source of information owing to its widespread recognition among academics as credible repository of scholarly publications [17]. The methodological approach employed in this study involved the following key steps:

1. The results were filtered using a Boolean search strategy to ensure relevance to the study's objectives.
2. Duplicate articles were removed, and the remaining literature was organized according to the keywords in their titles and abstracts. Further restrictions were applied to restrict the search to specific areas based on criteria such as publication year and language.
3. The most relevant articles were selected for the study.
4. The reviewed literature was subjected to a detailed analysis, and the key challenges encountered by the authors in the implementation of green marketing strategies were subsequently summarized.
5. The findings were analyzed and discussed.

Table 1. Inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1. Research work is related to green marketing or sustainable marketing.	1. Research work is not related to green marketing or sustainable marketing.
2. Research discusses green marketing on	2. Research discusses not on green

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|---|--|
| <p>SMEs.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Research papers are published between 2014 and 2024. 4. The research papers are written in English. 5. The research follows the appropriate structure of research according to the research method. | <p>marketing on SMEs.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Research papers are not published between 2014 and 2024. 4. The research papers are not written in English. 5. The research not follows the appropriate structure of research according to the research method. |
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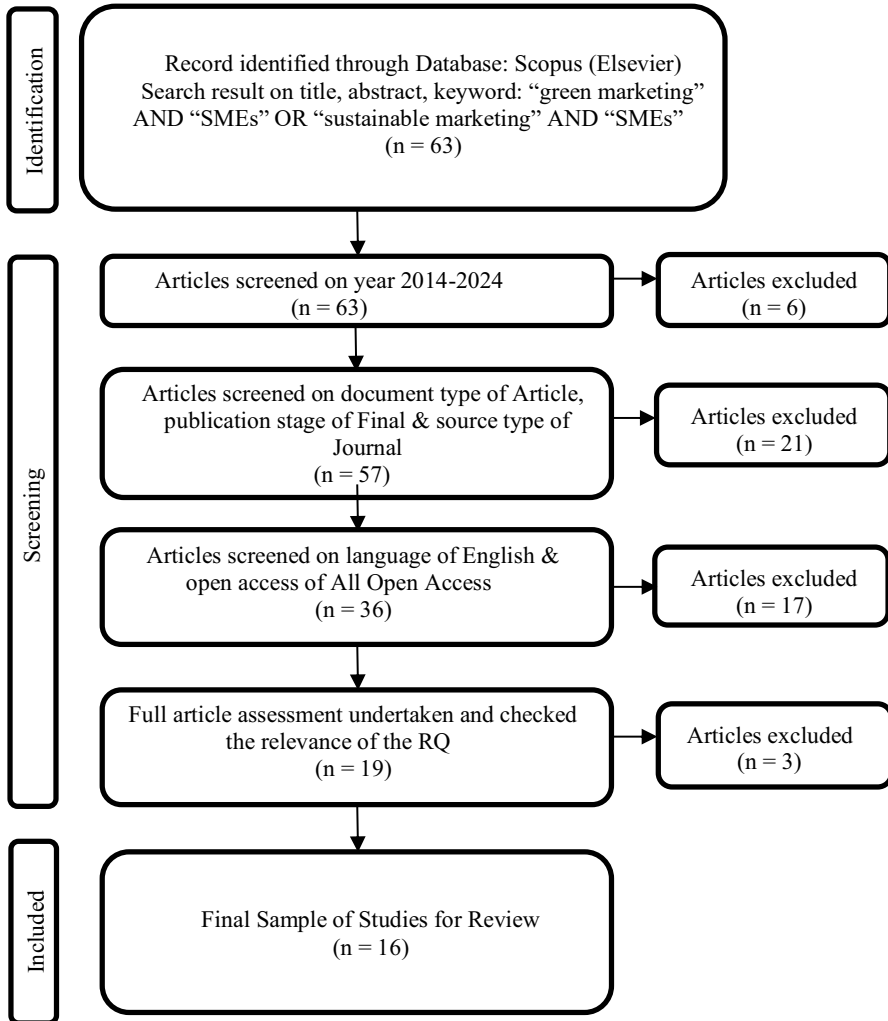


Fig. 1. Selection process based on PRISMA approach

The criteria utilized to determine the articles selected for inclusion and exclusion in the Scopus database for this study are outlined in Table 1. This study used the keywords “green marketing”, “sustainable marketing”, and “SMEs” in the title, abstract, and keywords of the author to acquire relevant data from Scopus database. The search query option used was as follow (TITLE-ABS-KEY (“green marketing” AND “SMEs”)) OR (TITLE-ABS-KEY (“sustainable marketing” AND “SMEs”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (Document Type, “Article”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (Year, “2014-2024”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (Document Type, “Article”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (Source Type, “Journal”)) AND LIMIT-TO (Language, “English”). The selection process is described in Figure 1. The articles found at this stage are 16 articles.

4 Results and Discussion

This SLR analyzes the challenges faced by SMEs in adopting different and comprehensive green marketing strategies across different geographical locations, industry sectors, and economic contexts. The challenges faced by SMEs, as evidenced in the studies, are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The challenges faced by SMEs as obtained from the paper.

Title	Author	Challenges
Marketing Mechanism of Consumer Demand for Ecological Products Identification	Uliana A. Pozdniakova, Larisa V. Ponomareva, Viacheslav U. Lapshin, Alexey V. Bolotin and Galina A. Khmeleva, 2014	Inadequate legal framework, lack of institutional support, need for accurate market research, transition from traditional marketing, consumer awareness and demand, market infrastructure development.
Impact of Drivers for The Implementation of Green Concept in Small and Medium Sized (SMES) Leather Industries of Northern Tamilnadu	G. Kathiresan and S. Ragnathan, 2017	Cost implications, lack of trained workforce, resistance to technology adoption, consumer ignorance, vendor reluctance, inadequate government support, stakeholder collaboration.
The Potential of Smart Technologies and Micro-Generation in UK SMEs	Peter Warren, 2017	Economic impact uncertainty, behavioral vs. Attitudinal discrepancy, intangible commercial value, initial costs and technical barriers, sectoral differences.
A Multi-Dimensional Approach of Green Marketing Competitive Advantage: A Perspective of Small Medium and Micro Enterprises from Western Cape, South Africa	Rodney Duffett, Tudor Edu, Norbert Haydam, Iliuta-Costel Negricea and Rodica Zaharia, 2018	Geographic limitations, resource constraints, consumer behavior and perception, complexity of green marketing tools, communication and awareness, sampling and methodological limitations.

Linking Sustainability-Oriented Marketing to Social Media and Web Atmospheric Cues	Affan Ahmed Khan, Ming Zheng Wang, Sadaf Ehsan, Mohammad Nurunnabi, and Maaida Hussain Hashmi, 2019	Complex consumer responses, increased digital competition, lack of awareness, balancing profitability and sustainability.
SME Managers' Perceptions of Sustainable Marketing Mix in Different Socioeconomic Conditions-A Comparative Analysis of Sri Lanka and Poland	Magdalena Kowalska, 2020	Higher prices of sustainable products, consumer awareness and expectations, differences in market perceptions, investment in sustainable practices, commitment levels to sustainable tools, adapting to socioeconomic conditions.
Linking Green Marketing Strategy, religiosity, and firm performance : Evidence form Indonesia SMEs	Harini Abrilia Setyawati, Agus Suroso, Pramono Hari Adi and Irfan Helmy, 2020	Integration across business functions, balancing consumer needs and environmental impact, market positioning and segmentation, contradictory research findings, comprehensive marketing mix, consumer awareness and education, regulatory compliance and standards, cost implications, distribution challenges.
Green Supply Chain Management and Green Marketing Strategy on Green Purchase Intention: SMEs Cases	Dyah Sugandini, Muafi Muafi, Christin Susilowati, Yuni Siswanti and Wirman Syafri, 2020	Understanding sme characteristics, supply chain coordination, consumer education and awareness, balancing cost and sustainability, packaging and design, market competition, measuring success.
Green packaging and green advertising as precursors of competitive advantage and business performance among manufacturing small and medium enterprises in South Africa	Eugine Tafadzwa Maziriri, 2020	Lack of comprehensive theories and strategies, pressure from larger corporations, need for enhanced scientific rigor, integration with other marketing strategies, resource constraints, lack of government support.
Green Marketing Practices: Green Branding, Advertisements and Labelling and Their Nexus with The Performance of SMES in South Africa	Reginald Masocha, 2021	High production costs, the gap between green attitudes and consumption, institutional and structural conditions, concerns about performance impact.

Do green innovation and green competitive advantage mediate the effect of green marketing orientation on SMEs' green marketing performance?	Nuryakin Nuryakin and Tri Maryati, 2022	Limited organizational capabilities, need for continuous innovation, integration of environmental management, balancing economic and environmental goals, stakeholder engagement and behavior modification.
Examination of Differences in Using Marketing Tools in The Management of Smes in The Visegrád Group Countries	Jaroslav Belas, Beata Gavurova, Lenka Novotna and Lubos Smrcka, 2022	Re-evaluation of traditional approaches, sector-specific implementation, analytical capabilities, stakeholder engagement, economic obstacles, digitalization and innovation.
Conceptualization of Sustainable Marketing Tools among SME Managers in Selected Countries in Poland and Sri Lanka	Magdalena Kowalska, 2022	Financial focus of managers, traditional marketing tools insufficiency, cultural and economic differences, urgency for new concepts, regulatory pressures.
African agri-entrepreneurship in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic	Mariam A. T. J. Kadzamira, Adewale Ogunmodede, Solomon Duah, Dannie Romney, Victor Attquaye Clotney and Frances Williams, 2023	Resource and infrastructure limitations, financial constraints, managerial capacity, gender disparities in entrepreneurship, market access and price fluctuations, regulatory and policy barriers.
The Economarketing Model: Development of Productive and Sustainable Tourism Area	Yuli Agustina, Trisetia Wijijayanti, Agung Winarno and Wening Patmi Rahayu, 2023	Lack of awareness and high costs, government support deficiency, public perception and priorities, integration of environmental issues, need for strategic planning.
Strategic green marketing orientation and environmental sustainability in sub-Saharan Africa: Does green absorptive capacity moderate? Evidence from Tanzania	Ismail Juma Ismail, David Amani and Ismail Abdi Changalima, 2023	Lack of knowledge and awareness, uncertainty in implementation, limited adoption of societal marketing, need for stakeholder engagement, regulatory and institutional barriers.

The result of systematic literature review, consisting of sixteen articles, revealed that Pozdniakova et al. [18] highlighted the lack of strong legal framework and environmental labeling regulations in Russia, which hinder SMEs from executing effective green marketing strategies. In the absence of adequate institutional support and market research, corporations find it challenging to synchronize their marketing strategies with customer demand for environmentally sustainable products. Similarly, Kathitesan and Rangunathan [19] underscore that the leather industry is confronted with high costs, a scarcity of skilled workers, and resistance to new technologies, which renders the transition to green marketing challenging.

The research by Warren [20] and Duffet et al. [21] contends that SMEs face significant initial expenses in adopting green technology and insufficient customer

awareness. SMEs face difficulties in rationalizing investments in green marketing due to ambiguous economic returns and challenges related to technological feasibility, while complex consumer reactions further complicate strategy formulation. Khan et al. [22] examined the volatility of consumer behavior and the increasing competition in the digital realm, resulting in effective green marketing execution by companies becoming more complicated to carry out.

Kowalska [23] observed that reconciling customer demand for ecofriendly products with the costs associated with implementing sustainable practices poses considerable problems, especially for SMEs that have to adopt their strategies to local market dynamics. Setyawati et al. [24] emphasized that the implementation of green marketing requires a thorough incorporation of environmental factors in all company operations, from manufacturing to distribution, posing challenges for SMEs with limited resources.

Sugandini et al. [25] assert that the unique attributes of each SMEs regarding products and supply chains require customized green marketing strategies, complicating the implementation of common approach. Moreover, aligning sustainable practices with supply chain partners and assessing the efficacy for green efforts is resource demanding. Maziriri [26] emphasizes the absence of cohesive framework for green advertising, which hinders the formulation of effective communication methods. The constrained resource of SMEs, coupled with fierce rivalry from larger enterprises, hinder their capacity to invest in green marketing strategies, presenting a substantial obstacle to achieving a competitive advantage through sustainability.

Masocha [27] highlights the financial obstacles encountered by SMEs in South Africa, where escalating sustainable production costs and ambiguity over the effects of green practices on business performance impede the comprehensive implementation of green marketing strategies. Despite increasing customer interest in eco-friendly items, a disparity persists between their pro-environmental sentiments and actual purchase behavior.

Nuryakin and Maryati [28] emphasize the necessity for SMEs to innovate in both technology and marketing to attain sustainability while preserving a competitive edge. Belas et al. [29] contend that conventional marketing methods are inadequate for meeting sustainability requirements, emphasizing that firms must incorporate social, ecological, and economic concepts into their marketing strategy. This necessitates strategic planning, stakeholder participation, and a transition to digital marketing technologies, which numerous SMEs find challenging to implement effectively owing to resource limitations.

Kowalska [30] observes that the emphasis on financial outcomes frequently eclipses sustainability initiatives, complicating the prioritization of environmental goals in marketing strategies. The necessity for regulatory compliance and customized strategies across varied markets exacerbates these issues. Kadzamira et al. [31] emphasize that agricultural SMEs, especially in areas with inadequate infrastructure, encounter substantial obstacles, including elevated operational expenses and restricted access to funding. The obstacles are exacerbated by fluctuating international prices and intricate government restrictions, rendering the implementation of green marketing tactics both expensive and perilous for smaller enterprises.

The study conducted by Agustina et al. [32] ascertain that SMEs in the "Lingkar Selorejo" region encounter challenges in adopting green marketing owing to elevated implementation costs and little governmental support, while customer demand for ecofriendly products remains minimal. Finally, study by Ismail et al. [14] emphasized the lack of knowledge about environmental sustainability, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where variations in corporate models and irregular regulatory enforcement are hindering the application of green marketing techniques.

According to the results of a SLR, the challenges encountered by SMEs in the adaption of green marketing strategies can be classified into four primary categories:

1. Financial Constraints

One of the primary challenges faced by SMEs is the substantial initial investment required for the adoption of eco-friendly technologies and sustainable practices. These expenses frequently encompass investments in environmentally sustainable raw materials, sustainable manufacturing techniques, and the development of green products. Numerous SMEs are deprived of adequate funding alternatives, hindering their ability to manage these expenditures. Moreover, volatile international prices and market uncertainties create financial risks, deterring SMEs from engaging in long-term green marketing strategies.

2. Regulatory and Institutional Barriers

SMEs frequently have challenges in maneuvering through intricate regulatory frameworks that are generally tailored for larger corporations. Environmental rules, although essential, might be excessively rigorous for smaller firms with constrained resources. SMEs face challenges with compliance owing to bureaucratic obstacles, protracted permitting procedures, and the lack of customized regulations that address their specific situations. Furthermore, the inconsistent application of legislation across areas exacerbates the issue, especially in developing markets where regulatory support and governmental incentives for green marketing are scarce or insufficiently developed.

3. Market and Consumer Related Challenges

An essential obstacle to the implementation of green marketing strategies is the erratic consumer demand for environmentally friendly products. Despite the increasing knowledge of environmental issues, a substantial disparity persists between consumer's pro-environmental beliefs and their actual purchasing actions. The insufficient market demand complicates SMEs ability to rationalize the expenses and efforts necessary for the implementation of green marketing strategies. Moreover, SMEs frequently lack the resources necessary to properly inform consumers about the advantages of green products, so constraining their capacity to generate demand.

4. Internal Capacity and Infrastructure Limitations

SMEs often encounter internal obstacles due to their restricted ability to develop and distinguish their products. Numerous entities lack the administrative acumen, technology proficiency, and experienced labor essential for incorporating green marketing into their comprehensive company plans. Moreover, the infrastructure

necessary to facilitate green marketing initiatives, including sustainable supply chains and distribution networks, is frequently inadequate in SMEs. The challenge of synchronizing supply chain partners with environmental goals presents an additional obstacle for smaller enterprises striving to uphold sustainable practices.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic literature review highlights several key challenges that businesses, particularly SMEs, face in adopting and implementing green marketing strategies. Significant barriers encompass financial constraints, including the substantial initial expenses associated with the adoption of sustainable technologies and environmentally friendly practices, with restricted access to funding and market intelligence. SMEs face challenges in navigating through regulatory frameworks, which are sometimes designed for larger corporations and do not provide adequate support for smaller businesses. Furthermore, customer knowledge and demand for eco-friendly products are variable, complicating SMEs ability to make rational investments in green marketing strategies. The analysis highlights that the ability of SMEs to develop and differentiate their products is impeded by inadequate infrastructure and restricted stakeholder interaction, hence hindering the execution of green marketing strategies.

The results highlight a distinct research deficiency in the creation of tailored green marketing frameworks specifically intended for SMEs. Contemporary green marketing strategies frequently neglect the distinct issues encountered by SMEs, including resource constraints and industry-specific obstacles. Moreover, although larger enterprises have effectively incorporated digital tools to enhance green marketing, several SMEs lack the requisite technological proficiency and financial resources, hence exacerbating the disparity between intention and implementation in sustainable business practices.

Future study should focus on various topics that require additional investigation. Initially, it is essential to create standard and scalable green marketing frameworks that can be tailored to the distinct requirements of SMEs across various industries and geographies. These frameworks must encompass measures for limiting implementation expenses, augmenting access to green financing, and strengthening regulatory assistance. Future research should examine the influence of digital marketing technologies on the adoption of green marketing by SMEs and explore methods to enhance consumer education activities to boost demand for sustainable products. Ultimately, additional empirical study is required to evaluate the long-term financial and environmental effects of green marketing techniques on SMEs, yielding significant insights for both practitioners and policymakers. Tackling these aspects will assist SMEs in surmounting current obstacles and fostering more sustainable company models moving forward.

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