

GREEN MARKETING STRATEGIES AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMES)

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Abstract

Environmental sustainability issues have become a global concern affecting business practices across various sectors, including Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This research aims to examine green marketing strategies as one approach that can provide a competitive advantage for SMEs in facing modern market competition. The method used is a literature review, analyzing various scientific references from relevant journals, books, and research reports published in the last ten years. The study results indicate that applying green marketing principles, such as eco-friendly products, sustainable pricing, efficient distribution, and environmental value-based promotion, can enhance brand image, consumer loyalty, and product differentiation. Despite the challenges faced by SMEs, such as limited resources and knowledge, this strategy can still be implemented through a phased and innovative approach. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that green marketing is not only a response to environmental trends, but also a strategic foundation for building sustainable competitive advantages for SMEs.

Keywords: Green Marketing, Competitive Advantage, SMEs

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, environmental sustainability has become a major focus in various sectors of life, including the business world. Environmentally unfriendly economic activities have been proven to have a significant negative

impact on ecosystems (Samad et al., 2023). Therefore, business practices that consider environmental aspects are becoming increasingly important. Companies are required not only to pursue profits but also to be responsible for the environmental impact they cause. This awareness of the importance of sustainability has led to the emergence of the green business concept. One emerging approach is green marketing strategy.

Green marketing refers to strategies that emphasize providing environmentally friendly products and services to consumers. This strategy not only reflects a company's concern for the environment but can also be an effective promotional tool (Toryanto & Indriani, 2022). In the context of modern consumers, the preference for sustainable products is increasingly growing. Consumers are now more aware of the environmental impact of the products they consume. Many of them are willing to pay more for products they believe are more environmentally friendly. This opens up significant opportunities for businesses to adopt green marketing strategies.

Amid rising consumer awareness, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), as a major pillar of the national economy, play a crucial role in this transformation. SMEs contribute a significant proportion to GDP and employment in many countries, including Indonesia. However, many SMEs still face challenges in implementing sustainable business practices (Yadav et al., 2023). Resource limitations, limited access to information, and a lack of understanding of green marketing are major obstacles. Nevertheless, SMEs have greater flexibility to innovate compared to large companies. This provides an opportunity to adopt green marketing strategies more adaptively.

Challenges in implementing green marketing by SMEs include production costs, market education, and technological limitations. Many SME actors believe that environmentally friendly products are expensive and difficult to obtain. In fact, with the right approach, implementing green practices can be efficient and profitable in the long run (Rahmadhani et al., 2024). Additionally, SMEs need to educate the market about the added value of their green products. Effective communication and promotion strategies are essential for consumers to understand the advantages of green products. This requires SMEs to be more creative and innovative in developing their marketing strategies.

Green marketing is not just about selling environmentally friendly products, but also about building a positive brand image in the eyes of consumers. Consumers tend to have higher loyalty to brands that demonstrate a commitment to the environment. Therefore, green marketing

strategies can be a significant source of competitive advantage. This competitive advantage can strengthen the position of SMEs in an increasingly competitive market (Costales et al., 2024). Not only does it increase sales, but it also builds long-term relationships with customers. In the long run, this contributes to the sustainability of the SME's business itself.

In the modern business world, differentiation is key to winning market competition. SMEs can leverage green marketing as a strong differentiation strategy. When products and services have added value in environmental aspects, consumers will find it easier to identify and choose them. This strategy can also expand market segments by reaching consumers who value and prefer sustainable products (Achsa et al., 2023). Thus, SMEs not only survive but also grow significantly. This shows that green marketing strategies have great potential to be developed by SMEs.

Changes in consumer behavior and increasingly strict government regulations regarding the environment are further driving the importance of adopting green strategies. The government and various institutions are now providing incentives and support to businesses that implement sustainability principles. This is a great opportunity for SMEs to increase their capacity and competitiveness through green strategies. On the other hand, pressure from consumers and the market also makes this strategy no longer an option, but a necessity. SMEs that are slow to adapt risk falling behind their competitors (Aarabe et al., 2024). Therefore, the implementation of green marketing strategies has become highly relevant in the current context.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that green marketing strategy is an approach that not only supports environmental sustainability but also serves as an effective business instrument for SMEs. In this study, the focus will be on how green marketing strategies can be designed and implemented by SMEs. Additionally, how this strategy contributes to long-term competitive advantage will also be discussed. A literature review will be used to identify the principles, challenges, and opportunities of green marketing for SMEs. It is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a basis for developing practical strategies for SME actors. This will enable SMEs to grow sustainably and contribute to environmentally friendly economic development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the literature review method. A literature review was conducted to identify, evaluate, and

synthesize various theories, concepts, and previous research findings relevant to the topic of green marketing and the competitive advantage of SMEs. Data sources were obtained from scientific journal articles, proceedings, academic books, and research reports published in the last ten years. Inclusion criteria include publications discussing the concept of green marketing, marketing strategies for SMEs, and research highlighting the relationship between green marketing and competitive advantage. Data collection techniques were carried out through a systematic search of databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect. The selection process was conducted strictly to ensure the validity and relevance of the literature reviewed.

Data analysis in this study was conducted using thematic analysis techniques. The stages include identifying the main themes, grouping findings based on the discussion focus, and drawing synthetic conclusions. Researchers grouped the study findings into three main areas: (1) the concept and basic principles of green marketing, (2) the implementation of green marketing strategies by SMEs, and (3) the role of green marketing in creating competitive advantage. From the results of this analysis, the researcher attempts to compile a comprehensive mapping of how SMEs can effectively utilize green marketing strategies. This study is also expected to provide conceptual and practical recommendations for SMEs and future researchers interested in sustainability and strategic marketing issues (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Concepts and Principles of Green Marketing

Green marketing is a marketing approach that integrates environmental concerns into every business process. This concept emerged in response to increasing environmental damage caused by unsustainable production and consumption activities (Sharma & Bajaj, 2023). Green marketing emphasizes the importance of creating, communicating, and delivering value that is not only economically beneficial but also environmentally friendly (Sachdeva & Mitra, 2023). This includes product design, production processes, distribution, and promotional strategies that consider ecological impact. Thus, green marketing is not merely a promotional tool, but also a business philosophy. Companies that implement green marketing are considered more socially and ecologically responsible.

The scope of green marketing encompasses the entire product lifecycle process. This includes the use of sustainable raw materials, waste-minimizing

production processes, and energy-efficient distribution. Not only that, green marketing also considers product packaging, disposal, and recycling (Singh et al., 2024). This approach encourages companies to be more transparent in explaining the environmental impact of their products. In practice, companies that consistently implement green marketing can gain higher consumer trust. Therefore, the scope of green marketing is very broad and involves the entire business value chain.

In the context of green marketing, the principles of the marketing mix or the 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) undergo adjustments. In terms of the product aspect, companies are required to provide products that are not only of high quality but also environmentally friendly. Raw materials must come from sustainable sources, and the products must have a minimal environmental impact. From a price perspective, consumers tend to accept slightly higher prices if the product has added ecological value. For distribution (Place), energy efficiency and emission reduction in the logistics process are priorities. Meanwhile, promotion is done honestly and emphasizes environmental benefits, not just as a gimmick (Smith, 2022).

Green products are a key component of a green marketing strategy. This product is designed to reduce negative environmental impacts throughout its lifecycle. Green product design typically involves selecting materials that are recyclable or naturally biodegradable (Verdugo-Ochoa & Ordoñez-Espinoza, 2024). Additionally, the product is expected to be energy-efficient, free of harmful substances, and have a long lifespan. Consumers are becoming increasingly critical in choosing products based on sustainability and corporate social responsibility aspects. Therefore, companies need to ensure that environmental superiority claims about their products are true and verifiable.

Pricing in green marketing considers not only production costs but also the added value from environmental aspects. Green products generally have a higher price because they involve more environmentally friendly processes and materials. However, environmentally conscious consumers tend to view that price as an investment for the future. Companies can also offer incentives, such as price reductions for returning used packaging or discounts for repeat purchases (Alcívar et al., 2022). This pricing strategy aims to create consumer awareness and loyalty towards green products. Therefore, the price aspect is an important part of green marketing strategies.

Distribution channels in green marketing aim to minimize the carbon footprint of transportation and logistics. This can be achieved by selecting

efficient distribution routes and using environmentally friendly modes of transportation (Nugraha et al., 2024). Additionally, the company has also started implementing a local distribution system to reduce travel distances and carbon emissions. In the digital age, the use of e-commerce platforms has also become a more energy-efficient distribution alternative. Choosing sales locations like green stores or sustainability-focused outlets also adds value to a green marketing strategy. All these efforts aim to bring products closer to consumers without sacrificing sustainability.

Promotion in the context of green marketing is more than just advertising; it's an educational effort aimed at consumers. Companies need to transparently communicate the environmental benefits of the products they offer. Promotion can be done through eco-labels, environmental certification, and relevant social campaigns. Honesty in promotion is very important so that companies do not fall into the practice of greenwashing, which is making false claims about being environmentally friendly. Consumer education through promotion can also increase awareness and promote more responsible consumption behavior change (Li, 2023). Thus, promotion becomes a strategic means to build a credible green brand image.

Overall, green marketing plays a crucial role in supporting sustainability and strengthening corporate brands. Modern consumers are increasingly paying attention to how companies produce, distribute, and market their products. Applying the principles of green marketing can be a strong value differentiator in a competitive market. Besides having a positive impact on the environment, this strategy also strengthens customer loyalty and brand reputation. SMEs that adopt green marketing have a great opportunity to expand their market share and increase competitiveness. Therefore, a deep understanding of green marketing concepts and principles has become a strategic necessity for business owners.

Green Marketing Strategies for SMEs

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play an important role in the economy, but often lag behind in adopting sustainable practices. The adoption of green marketing strategies by SMEs is usually done gradually and adjusted to their available capacity. Many SMEs start with simple aspects, such as using eco-friendly packaging or reducing production waste (Maghfur & Dahda, 2022). This decision is often triggered by consumer demand or partnerships with sustainability advocates. Although their business scale is small, SMEs have high flexibility to adopt innovations. Therefore, green

marketing strategies for SMEs are highly dependent on the creativity and awareness of business owners.

The adoption of green strategies by SMEs also includes adjustments in product promotion and communication. Many SMEs are starting to highlight environmental issues as added value in their product offerings. This strategy is often implemented through social media and local communities at a low cost but with a wide reach (Ramdan et al., 2023). With a storytelling approach, SMEs can build an emotional connection with environmentally conscious consumers. This not only strengthens consumer loyalty but also enhances the positive image of the business. This advantage allows SMEs to compete despite having limited capital and technology.

Internal factors such as leadership vision, organizational culture, and resource availability significantly influence the successful implementation of green marketing in SMEs. Business owners with environmental awareness tend to be more proactive in implementing green marketing strategies. Additionally, employee skills and knowledge also influence the sustainability of the strategy. Lack of training and information can be a significant barrier to the implementation of green strategies (Rahmadhani et al., 2024). However, with proper training and mentoring, SMEs can enhance their internal capacity. These internal factors need to be strengthened to ensure that green strategies can be implemented consistently.

On the other hand, external factors also play an important role in supporting or hindering the implementation of green marketing in SMEs. These factors include government policies, consumer pressure, and support from business partners and mentoring institutions. Government incentives, such as tax reductions or training assistance, can be a strong catalyst for SMEs to transform (Jayanti & Darma, 2024). Additionally, the increasing market demand for environmentally friendly products is also pushing SMEs to adapt. Collaboration with suppliers, distributors, or green communities also helps strengthen the sustainable business ecosystem. Therefore, the synergy between internal and external factors is crucial for the success of SMEs' green strategies. Despite their potential, SMEs face various challenges in implementing green marketing strategies. Limited funds and access to technology are the main obstacles to efficiently producing green products. Additionally, a lack of understanding of the concept of sustainability and how to communicate it to consumers is also a barrier. Another challenge is the assumption that green marketing is only relevant for large companies. In fact, many studies show that consumers also appreciate the small efforts made by

SMEs in protecting the environment (Surmanidze et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important for SMEs to gain access to relevant training and information in order to overcome these challenges.

Another common obstacle is the difficulty in measuring the environmental impact and economic benefits of green marketing strategies. Many SMEs are hesitant to invest because there is no definitive data on the results they will achieve. In many cases, the benefits of green marketing are only felt in the medium to long term. Therefore, practical guidance and relevant case studies are needed to help SMEs understand this process (Nuryakin & Maryati, 2022). Additionally, the complex and expensive environmental certification process presents its own challenges. The government and supporting institutions need to design more affordable schemes for SMEs.

Literature studies show that some SMEs successfully implement green marketing practices effectively with creative and locally-based approaches. For example, SMEs in the organic food sector leverage a consumer community loyal to healthy and natural products. Their strategies rely on consumer education, information transparency, and participation in local markets or green product exhibitions. In the fashion sector, some SMEs are using recycled materials and promoting themselves through environmental campaigns on social media (Dewantara et al., 2024). This success shows that green marketing strategies don't have to be expensive, but they must be relevant and authentic. These studies serve as an important source of inspiration for other SMEs looking to adopt similar strategies.

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that green marketing strategies for SMEs are a promising opportunity, although they are faced with a number of challenges. Strategy adaptation must be tailored to the internal conditions of SMEs and supported by external factors such as regulations and market demand. The success of SMEs in implementing green marketing depends not only on financial capabilities, but also on their commitment, creativity, and network. It is important for stakeholders to provide support in the form of training, incentives, and access to information. Best practices from successful SMEs can serve as a reference to be adapted according to each context. With the right strategy, green marketing can be a sustainable competitive advantage for SMEs.

Green Marketing as a Source of Competitive Advantage

The theory of competitive advantage proposed by Michael Porter emphasizes the importance of differentiation and cost leadership as key strategies for competing. In the context of green marketing, differentiation arises from the ecological added value offered by a product or service. Environmentally friendly products can offer a unique advantage over competitors. Besides Porter, the resource-based view (RBV) concept is also relevant, where intangible assets like a green brand reputation become a source of advantage (Rosalinda et al., 2024). Green marketing can create value that is difficult to imitate, such as positive perceptions and consumer loyalty. Thus, green marketing can be integrated into long-term strategies to strengthen competitiveness.

Green marketing plays an important role in building brand loyalty, especially among environmentally conscious consumers. Today's consumers are not only considering product quality, but also the ethics and social responsibility of the company. When SMEs consistently implement green marketing strategies, consumers tend to feel more emotionally connected. This loyalty arises because consumers feel they are contributing to environmental protection through their product choices. Strong brand loyalty will lead to repeat purchases and word-of-mouth promotion (Salsabila & Sukmono, 2023). Therefore, green marketing becomes a strategic means to build long-term relationships with customers.

The implementation of green marketing strategies has a significant impact on brand image. A positive brand image will be formed when consumers perceive the company as committed to sustainability and environmental responsibility. In many cases, SMEs that implement green practices are considered more trustworthy and ethical. This not only enhances the company's reputation but also expands its loyal customer base. With a strong image, SMEs are able to compete with larger companies (Meyer & Peter, 2024). This strategy helps SMEs remain relevant and stand out in an increasingly environmentally conscious market.

Besides enhancing image and loyalty, green marketing also creates clear market differentiation. Products that promote green values have their own distinct segmentation, namely consumers who are concerned about environmental and social issues. This differentiation means that SMEs don't have to compete on price, but rather on the value they offer. With these unique values, SMEs are able to attract more specific and loyal consumers. This reduces the risk of direct competition with large companies selling mass-

produced goods (Samanta, 2022). Green marketing is becoming a tool for creating profitable niche markets.

Competitive advantage based on green marketing also supports the achievement of long-term sustainability. This strategy promotes efficient resource utilization, product innovation, and good relationships with stakeholders. In the increasingly demanding global context of environmental responsibility, SMEs that implement green strategies will be better prepared to face challenges. They not only survived the competition but also grew into a relevant and adaptable business (Obadia & Vida, 2024). Thus, green marketing is not merely a promotional tool, but an integral part of transforming future-oriented business models. This advantage is sustainable and strengthens the position of SMEs in the market.

Empirical studies show that implementing green marketing has a positive impact on the competitiveness of SMEs. Research by Chen (2010) found that companies implementing green strategies experienced increased consumer loyalty and brand equity. Another study by Delmas and Burbano (2011) showed that green companies had better long-term market performance. In the context of SMEs, green marketing has been proven to increase the perceived value of products in the eyes of consumers. Even in developing countries, SMEs that emphasize environmental friendliness tend to be more trusted and chosen by consumers (Shafik, 2024). This proves that green marketing is not just idealism, but has a real impact on competitiveness.

Some studies also show that SMEs that successfully implement green marketing often have wider market access. They are able to enter distribution networks that require environmental certification or compliance with green standards. In the export sector, green products often receive preference from international buyers. Additionally, many millennial and Gen Z consumers tend to choose brands committed to sustainability. SMEs targeting this segment have a great opportunity to expand their market and increase profitability (Nordin et al., 2023). Therefore, green marketing strategies are becoming increasingly relevant in today's market landscape.

Overall, green marketing has proven to make a significant contribution to the competitive advantage of SMEs. By building differentiation, a positive image, and consumer loyalty, SMEs are able to create sustainable added value. Empirical studies support the claim that this strategy has a positive impact on overall business performance. Despite persistent challenges such as limited funding and market education, the long-term potential of green marketing is immense. Therefore, green marketing should be viewed as a strategic

investment, not just a fleeting trend. SMEs that can integrate green values into their businesses will have a strong competitive position in the future.

CONCLUSION

The results of the literature review indicate that green marketing is a strategic approach that not only focuses on environmental sustainability but also provides added value for business actors, particularly Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This strategy involves applying environmentally friendly principles to the elements of the marketing mix, such as product, price, distribution, and promotion. SMEs that successfully adopt green marketing generally show improvements in brand image, customer loyalty, and market differentiation. Although SMEs often face challenges such as limited resources and a lack of knowledge, various studies show that adapting these strategies remains possible with a creative and phased approach. Internal factors such as owner commitment and external factors such as government regulations and consumer awareness are important determinants of successful implementation. Thus, green marketing can be seen as a relevant strategic response to the demands of the modern market, which is increasingly concerned about environmental issues.

Literature also confirms a strong relationship between the implementation of green marketing and the achievement of competitive advantage in SMEs. Green strategies help SMEs create unique value that is not easily imitated by competitors, while also strengthening their position in a competitive market. A positive brand image and high consumer loyalty are important assets that support long-term competitiveness. Additionally, green marketing promotes operational efficiency, product innovation, and broader market access opportunities, including international markets with high sustainability standards. Therefore, green marketing is not just a marketing tool, but a strategic foundation in building excellent and sustainable SMEs. The implications of these findings underscore the need for policy support, training, and cross-sector collaboration to strengthen the role of green marketing in SME development.

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