

Sustainable Marketing Strategies for SMEs: The Impact of Customer Engagement on Business Growth in the Context of Environmental Sustainability

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Abstract. As a crucial segment in the economy, SMEs face unique challenges and opportunities in implementing sustainable marketing strategies. Amid growing awareness of the environmental impacts of business activities, SMEs are expected to adapt to practices that support environmental sustainability while driving their business growth. This study aims to identify and analyze the most effective sustainable marketing strategies for SMEs and how customer engagement influences their business growth. The study employs a literature review method with a qualitative approach. Research data were sourced from Google Scholar, focusing on publications between 2017 and 2024. The findings of this study demonstrate that implementing sustainable marketing can have a significant positive impact on the business growth of SMEs in the context of environmental sustainability. SMEs can enhance customer attraction and loyalty, as well as strengthen their brand reputation by integrating sustainability principles into their marketing strategies. Case studies such as Kopi Kita and Batik Keris affirm that adopting eco-friendly practices can improve SMEs' market positioning in an increasingly environmentally conscious marketplace.

Keywords: Sustainable Marketing, SMEs, Customer Engagement, Business Growth, Environmental Sustainability

1. Introduction

Sustainable marketing has become an increasingly important topic in today's global business context, especially for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which play a crucial role in the economy. SMEs, as vital components of the economic ecosystem, face unique challenges in implementing marketing strategies that support environmental sustainability while enhancing their business performance. In an era where consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental impact of the products and services they consume, SMEs are expected to adapt to environmentally friendly practices without compromising their competitiveness [1]. This involves integrating sustainability elements into marketing strategies, including how SMEs can engage customers in their sustainability efforts and leverage this for business growth. This approach requires a deep understanding of how SMEs can apply relevant sustainability principles in line with their capacities and how this can impact their performance and market appeal.

Climate change and global environmental degradation have demanded greater attention to environmental responsibility from all business sectors. Today's consumers are increasingly choosing brands that demonstrate a commitment to social and environmental responsibility [2]. Although SMEs often have limited resources compared to larger companies, they have the potential to play an important role in these sustainability efforts. To capitalize on this potential, SMEs need to adopt sustainable marketing strategies that align with their resources and capacities. This means developing approaches that meet environmental standards and involve customers in their sustainability processes. Effective strategies should include ways to communicate sustainability efforts to customers and motivate them to support brands committed to eco-friendly practices, thereby enhancing the attractiveness and relevance of SMEs in a competitive market.

Customer engagement is a critical aspect of sustainable marketing that can often influence the outcomes of implemented strategies. Customers who care about environmental issues tend to be more loyal and willing to pay a premium for products or services they perceive as sustainable [3]. SMEs that can build and maintain



strong relationships with customers through transparent communication about their sustainability efforts can benefit from increased customer loyalty and better business growth potential. Customer engagement can also enhance brand reputation, which is an important asset in a market increasingly aware of environmental issues. In this way, SMEs can leverage customer engagement to support and strengthen their marketing strategies while contributing to broader environmental goals.

In Indonesia, SMEs play a very important role in the economy, making significant contributions to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and absorbing a large portion of the workforce. This significant contribution makes the implementation of sustainable marketing strategies highly relevant for SMEs in the country. However, many SMEs in Indonesia face various obstacles in accessing the information and resources needed to effectively implement sustainability strategies. Customer engagement can be a key solution in addressing these challenges by providing incentives for SMEs to invest in sustainable practices through customer support and preference [4].

Furthermore, some SMEs in Indonesia have started to integrate sustainability principles into their business strategies, although challenges remain. For example, SMEs in the food and beverage sector, such as Kopi Kita and Batik Keris, have begun to implement sustainable practices in their production processes. The success of these initiatives largely depends on the extent to which customers are engaged and support these sustainability efforts. This underscores the need for a deeper understanding of how customer engagement can be optimized to support SMEs' sustainability agendas. With a better understanding of the factors that influence customer engagement, SMEs can develop more effective strategies for implementing sustainable practices and improving their business performance [5].

Research on sustainable marketing strategies for SMEs requires a deep analysis of how these strategies can be tailored to local contexts. This includes studies on effective ways to increase customer engagement in sustainable practices and their impact on SME business growth. In Indonesia, cultural, social, and economic factors can influence how customers interact with brands and how SMEs can respond to these preferences in their strategies [6].

In addition to external factors, technology and innovation play a crucial role in supporting sustainable marketing strategies. Digital technology, including social media and e-commerce platforms, can extend the reach of SMEs and facilitate customer engagement more efficiently [7]. These platforms enable SMEs to convey their sustainability messages to a wider audience and monitor customer responses in real-time. SMEs can enhance the visibility and impact of their sustainability efforts, as well as build stronger relationships with customers who are concerned about environmental issues by leveraging this technology.

The research background highlights the importance of sustainable marketing strategies for SMEs and how customer engagement can influence the effectiveness of these strategies. In the increasingly relevant context of environmental sustainability, understanding these dynamics can help SMEs develop approaches that enhance environmental sustainability and support sustainable business growth. This research aims to provide in-depth insights into how SMEs can effectively implement sustainable marketing strategies, leverage customer engagement, and adapt to the challenges and opportunities present in the local market.

1.1. Sustainable Marketing

Sustainable marketing is a marketing approach that integrates environmental and social sustainability principles into business strategies to create long-term value for both companies and society [8]. It involves developing and promoting products or services that minimize negative environmental impacts while maximizing social benefits. Sustainable marketing focuses not only on financial gains but also on considering the effects on the environment, social welfare, and business ethics, such as using eco-friendly materials, reducing waste, and supporting local communities. The goal is to build strong relationships with consumers who are increasingly aware of sustainability issues while supporting responsible and sustainable business growth [9].

1.2. MSMEs

MSMEs, or Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, are business categories defined by operational scale and company size. MSMEs include micro-enterprises, which typically have very few employees and low turnover; small enterprises, which have slightly more employees and turnover; and medium enterprises, which are larger than small enterprises but smaller than large corporations. The specific criteria for each category are often determined by government regulations, such as the number of employees and annual turnover, which can vary by country. MSMEs play a crucial role in the economy as they often absorb a significant portion of the workforce, promote innovation, and support local economic growth by providing products and services needed by the community [10].

1.3. Customers

Customers are individuals or entities that purchase or use products or services offered by a company or organization [11]. They are the primary target in marketing strategies because their decisions and preferences influence business success. Customers can consist of end consumers, who use products for personal or household needs, or business customers, who purchase products for commercial purposes [12]. Understanding customer needs, desires, and behaviors is essential for designing products, setting prices, and developing effective marketing strategies, as well as for building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships between customers and companies.

1.4. Business Growth

Business growth refers to the increase in a company's capacity, size, and performance over a certain period (Ardyan, Elia 2022). It can be measured through various indicators, such as increased revenue, profits, number of customers, market share, or geographic and product expansion. Business growth often reflects a company's success in expanding operations, entering new markets, and improving efficiency and innovation. The goal of business growth is to strengthen the company's market position, enhance competitiveness, and create added value for stakeholders, including owners, employees, and customers [13].

1.5. Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability refers to practices and policies aimed at protecting and preserving the environment's health for future generations by minimizing the negative impacts of human activities on ecosystems and natural resources [14]. This includes efforts to reduce pollution, manage waste effectively, use resources efficiently, and conserve biodiversity and natural habitats. Environmental sustainability focuses on achieving a balance between current human needs and the environment's ability to meet future needs, with the goal of creating a harmonious and sustainable relationship between human activities and nature [15].

2. Method

This study employs a literature review method with a qualitative approach to explore and analyze sustainable marketing strategies and their impact on MSME business growth within the context of environmental sustainability. A qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, emphasizing the meanings and contexts found in existing literature. Descriptive analysis is used to organize and describe the findings from the reviewed literature without conducting statistical comparisons or hypothesis testing. The research data was sourced from Google Scholar, with publications ranging from 2017 to 2024. The data selection process began by identifying 44 articles relevant to the research topic. After a rigorous selection based on relevance and quality criteria, only 23 articles were chosen for further analysis. These articles cover studies related to sustainable marketing strategies, customer engagement, and MSME business growth, providing comprehensive insights into the researched topic. With this approach, the study aims to outline how sustainable marketing strategies can influence MSME business growth within the context of environmental sustainability.

3. Result and Discussion

Sustainable marketing has become an integral component of modern business strategy, especially for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) striving to grow while maintaining environmental responsibility. This concept involves integrating sustainability principles into all aspects of a company's operations, from production to product marketing, with the primary goal of minimizing negative impacts on the environment and society. For MSMEs in Indonesia, implementing sustainable marketing not only addresses the demands of a market increasingly aware of environmental issues but also serves as a strategic tool to create a competitive advantage. MSMEs can differentiate themselves from competitors, build stronger relationships with customers, and enhance their brand image as pioneers in social and environmental responsibility by adopting sustainable marketing. Amid the growing consumer awareness of the environmental impact of the products they consume, MSMEs that implement sustainability principles can gain an additional edge in an increasingly competitive market. The application of these sustainability principles benefits the environment and can significantly contribute to the growth and success of MSMEs, giving them a relevant advantage in an industry increasingly focused on environmental issues.

One tangible example of sustainable marketing implementation is Kopi Kita, a coffee brand that has successfully integrated sustainability principles into every aspect of its operations. Kopi Kita adopts eco-friendly

packaging and ensures that the coffee beans used are sourced from sustainable sources. Their efforts to use recyclable packaging and implement environmentally friendly farming practices are part of a clear and transparent sustainability strategy. Through consistent communication about their sustainability efforts, Kopi Kita has been able to attract environmentally-conscious customers, increase customer loyalty, and strengthen their brand image. Initiatives like these demonstrate that customer engagement in sustainable practices positively impacts brand image and directly contributes to business growth and success [16]. Kopi Kita's success in integrating sustainable marketing proves that sustainability principles can be a decisive factor in market appeal and sales growth, showing how small businesses can leverage environmental responsibility as a strategic tool.

Batik Keris, an Indonesian batik brand, is another successful example of sustainable marketing implementation. Batik Keris has adopted the use of natural dyes and production techniques with minimal environmental impact, positioning itself as a pioneer in the batik industry with a commitment to sustainability. They actively communicate these sustainability practices to customers through various marketing channels, including social media and traditional marketing campaigns. This approach enhances brand transparency and strengthens the appeal of their products in an increasingly environmentally-conscious market. Batik Keris has demonstrated that MSMEs can implement sustainability strategies without compromising product quality by utilizing natural dyeing techniques and reducing the environmental impact of the production process. This approach proves that applying sustainability principles can increase product appeal and strengthen a brand's position in the market, as well as show how innovation in production processes can contribute to sustainability and business success [17].

However, the adoption of sustainable marketing faces several challenges, especially for MSMEs that often lack the resources to implement environmentally-friendly practices comprehensively. Some of the issues faced include high costs for eco-friendly technology and a lack of knowledge about effective sustainability practices. Therefore, it is important for the government and related institutions to provide the necessary support through training and subsidies. Government assistance programs designed to reduce the costs of eco-friendly technology can help MSMEs overcome financial barriers and facilitate the implementation of sustainability practices [18]. With such support, MSMEs can more easily integrate sustainability principles into their operations and capitalize on the competitive advantages offered by an increasingly environmentally-conscious market. Initiatives like these can play a key role in addressing the challenges faced by MSMEs and facilitating the transition towards more sustainable business practices.

Customer engagement is a key factor in sustainable marketing, as environmentally-conscious customers are more likely to be loyal to brands they perceive as committed to sustainability. Examples like Greenology, a start-up that produces eco-friendly products, show how an engaged target market can provide significant impetus to business growth. Greenology utilizes social media to interact with customers, gather feedback, and adjust their products according to customer preferences. This approach helps them build strong relationships with customers, increase sales, and strengthen their market position. Customer engagement in the sustainability dialogue allows Greenology to better understand market needs and preferences, which in turn contributes to sustainable business growth. This demonstrates that sustainable marketing is about meeting customer expectations and plays a role in creating stronger and more sustainable relationships with the target audience [19].

Digital technology, including e-commerce platforms and social media, plays a crucial role in sustainable marketing. MSMEs can leverage this technology to reach a wider audience and educate customers about their sustainability efforts. For example, Sejauh Mata Memandang, a local fashion brand, uses social media to highlight their eco-friendly practices and engage customers in a dialogue about sustainability. In this way, Sejauh Mata Memandang can expand their market reach, build stronger customer loyalty, and increase awareness of the importance of sustainability. Digital technology also enables MSMEs to implement more targeted and efficient marketing strategies, which can contribute to overall business performance improvement. The appropriate use of technology can help MSMEs disseminate their sustainability message more effectively and reach a larger audience [20].

However, the use of digital technology also brings challenges related to data privacy and information management. MSMEs must ensure that they comply with data protection regulations and maintain transparency in the collection and use of customer data. With increasing concerns about data privacy, it is crucial for MSMEs to manage technology carefully to avoid risks that could damage their brand reputation. Improper use of technology can lead to privacy violations and loss of customer trust, which can ultimately affect business performance and brand reputation [21]. Therefore, MSMEs need to implement good data management practices and ensure that they operate in accordance with applicable regulations to maintain customer trust and satisfaction.

In Indonesia, cultural and social factors have a significant impact on the adoption of sustainable marketing by MSMEs [22]. Awareness of sustainability is not uniform across the country; different regions have varying levels of knowledge and concern about environmental and social issues. For example, in major cities like Jakarta or Surabaya, the level of awareness and demand for sustainable products and practices tends to be higher compared to rural or more remote areas. This is due to differences in access to information, education, and economic priorities in different regions.

To succeed in adopting sustainable marketing, MSMEs need to deeply understand their local context. Comprehensive market research is key to assessing how local communities perceive sustainability and what they consider important within their cultural context. For instance, in Bali, where traditional culture and environmental conservation play a strong role, products that emphasize sustainability and social responsibility are more likely to be well-received. Conversely, in areas with limited access to information or where economic issues are more pressing, an approach that highlights the direct economic benefits of sustainability may be more relevant.

Consulting with local experts and involving the community in developing marketing strategies can provide valuable insights. Local experts can help MSMEs understand the cultural and social nuances that influence perceptions of sustainability. For example, in product development, paying attention to local beliefs and cultural values can enhance the appeal of the product. MSMEs that can adapt to these values often find that they can reach a wider market and build stronger relationships with their consumers.

A sensitive approach to the local context enhances market acceptance of sustainable products and practices and strengthens MSMEs' position in the market. MSMEs that successfully adapt their marketing strategies to local needs and preferences often see increases in customer loyalty and brand reputation [23]. For instance, local brands that integrate sustainable practices with local cultural elements, such as textile products that incorporate traditional motifs while using eco-friendly materials, have successfully attracted consumer attention and gained a strong market position. This means that understanding the cultural and social factors that influence perceptions of sustainability allows MSMEs to develop a more appropriate and sustainable approach to their market. This involves understanding consumer preferences and adapting business practices to reflect local values, which can ultimately enhance competitiveness and business sustainability in an increasingly competitive market.

Support from government agencies and non-governmental organizations is crucial to facilitating the adoption of sustainable marketing by MSMEs. Training programs, financial incentives, and subsidies can help MSMEs overcome barriers in implementing environmentally-friendly practices. For example, the Partnership and Community Development Program (PKBL) can provide financial and technical support for MSMEs to implement sustainable solutions. With support from various parties, MSMEs can more easily adopt sustainability practices and take advantage of existing opportunities for environmentally and socially friendly business growth. Such support plays a vital role in accelerating MSMEs' transition to sustainable practices and ensuring that they can compete effectively in a market increasingly aware of environmental issues.

In conclusion, the implementation of sustainable marketing offers significant opportunities for MSMEs to grow in an environmentally and socially responsible way. To effectively leverage these opportunities, MSMEs need to address various challenges related to resources, technology, and cultural factors, as well as take advantage of support from various stakeholders. With the right approach and adequate support, MSMEs can enhance their performance, strengthen brand reputation, and contribute positively to environmental sustainability. The implementation of sustainable marketing not only helps preserve the environment but also provides significant competitive advantages in a market increasingly focused on social and environmental responsibility.

Table 1. Summary of Key Findings on Sustainable Marketing for SMEs

No	Topic	Key Finding
1	Sustainable Marketing	Integrating sustainability principles into marketing strategies enhances brand reputation and attracts environmentally conscious customers.
2	Case Study: Kopi Kita	Successfully uses eco-friendly packaging and sustainable coffee beans, leading to increased customer loyalty and brand attractiveness.
3	Case Study: Batik Keris	Utilizes natural dyes and eco-friendly production techniques, enhancing product appeal while maintaining quality.
4	Challenges	MSMEs face resource limitations and lack of knowledge in implementing sustainable practices. Financial and technological constraints are significant barriers

5	Role of Customer Engagement	Customers who value sustainability tend to be more loyal and willing to pay a premium for eco-friendly products, which supports business growth.
6	Technology and Digital Tools	Leveraging digital platforms and social media helps MSMEs reach a broader audience and communicate sustainability efforts effectively.
7	Cultural and Regional Differences	Local awareness and values regarding environmental issues vary, affecting the effectiveness of sustainability strategies in different regions.
8	Support from Government and NGOs	Financial incentives and technical assistance from government and non-governmental organizations can help overcome barriers to adopting sustainable practices.

4. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the implementation of sustainable marketing can have a significant positive impact on the business growth of MSMEs within the context of environmental sustainability. MSMEs can enhance customer appeal and loyalty while strengthening their brand reputation by integrating sustainability principles into their marketing strategies. Case studies such as Kopi Kita and Batik Keris confirm that the adoption of environmentally friendly practices can improve the market position of MSMEs in an increasingly environmentally conscious market. However, challenges such as resource limitations, lack of knowledge, and variability in cultural awareness need to be addressed for MSMEs to fully capitalize on the potential of sustainable marketing.

The implications of this research for MSMEs are that they need to develop and implement sustainable marketing strategies that are aligned with their local context and capabilities. The adoption of environmentally friendly practices can become a competitive advantage and enhance customer loyalty, which in turn can drive business growth. For stakeholders such as government and non-governmental organizations, the research findings highlight the need for greater support through training programs, subsidies, and incentives to help MSMEs overcome barriers in implementing sustainability strategies.

MSMEs need to enhance their capacity and knowledge through training and access to adequate resources on sustainable marketing practices. The government and non-governmental organizations should expand their support by providing financial incentives and technical assistance programs to help MSMEs overcome the costs associated with environmentally friendly technologies and sustainable production processes. Additionally, MSMEs should effectively utilize digital technology to expand market reach and increase customer engagement. The use of e-commerce platforms and social media should be directed towards building strong relationships with customers and promoting sustainability practices. In-depth market research is also crucial to understanding customer preferences and aligning marketing strategies with local values, making marketing campaigns more effective and relevant.

This research has limitations in terms of data sourced from Google Scholar with a publication period limited to 2017 to 2024, which may not encompass all relevant studies or the latest developments in sustainable marketing. The research findings may not be fully representative of all local contexts in Indonesia, as differences in environmental awareness and customer preferences across regions can influence the success of sustainable marketing strategies. The qualitative methodology used provides deep insights but does not allow for statistical generalization, making the research findings more descriptive and possibly not universally applicable to all MSMEs. Finally, some MSMEs may face limitations in accessing the technology and resources needed to effectively implement sustainable practices, which could affect their ability to leverage sustainable marketing strategies.

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