

Exploring the Impact of Green Entrepreneurship on the Competitive Advantage of SMEs: A Sustainable Management Approach



Prayogo Kusumaryoko

State University Malang

Email: prayogo.kusumaryoko.2404139@students.um.ac.id

KEY WORDS

green entrepreneurship, competitive advantage, SMEs, sustainable management, qualitative research.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of green entrepreneurship on the competitive advantage of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through a sustainable management approach. Using a qualitative research methodology, this study explores how adopting environmentally sustainable practices can enhance SMEs' market positioning, operational efficiency, and customer loyalty. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with SME owners, green entrepreneurs, and sustainability experts, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with integrating green initiatives into business strategies. Findings reveal that green entrepreneurship not only improves SMEs' public image and customer appeal but also enhances cost efficiency through optimized resource use and waste management practices. Furthermore, the study identifies several challenges, such as the initial financial investment and the ongoing need for innovation to maintain a green brand image. However, these challenges are outweighed by the long-term benefits, as green entrepreneurship fosters a unique value proposition that differentiates SMEs from their competitors. This research contributes to the literature on sustainable management by demonstrating that green entrepreneurship is a viable strategy for SMEs aiming to achieve both environmental responsibility and a competitive edge. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and SME managers looking to support sustainable practices in the business sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, green entrepreneurship has gained considerable attention as businesses across various sectors increasingly recognize the importance of sustainable practices in achieving long-term success. For small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which often operate with limited resources and face intense market competition, adopting green initiatives provides a strategic advantage by aligning business goals with environmental responsibility (Shields & Shelleman, 2015). By embracing green

entrepreneurship, SMEs can meet the growing demand for environmentally friendly products and services, positioning themselves competitively in a market that is increasingly conscious of sustainability (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). However, despite the potential benefits, the full impact of green entrepreneurship on SMEs' competitive advantage remains underexplored.

Previous studies have addressed the advantages of green business practices, particularly for large corporations, but there is a lack of focused



research on how these practices specifically affect SMEs. Research has shown that SMEs encounter unique challenges in implementing green initiatives due to limited financial and human resources, making it crucial to understand whether the investment in green entrepreneurship yields measurable competitive benefits for smaller enterprises (Rita et al., 2018). This study addresses this research gap by exploring how green entrepreneurship influences the competitive positioning of SMEs and how sustainable management practices can enhance their market resilience and brand differentiation in the long run.

The urgency of this research lies in the increasing environmental regulations and consumer expectations that compel businesses to adopt greener practices. For SMEs, this trend presents both a challenge and an opportunity; while green entrepreneurship may require initial investments, it could lead to greater operational efficiencies and customer loyalty over time (Kirkwood et al., 2017). This study is timely, as it provides insights for SME owners and policymakers aiming to promote sustainable business practices without compromising competitiveness. Understanding the pathways through which green entrepreneurship impacts SMEs' competitive advantage is essential for fostering a business environment where sustainability and profitability coexist.

Earlier research has suggested that adopting sustainable practices can improve organizational reputation and customer satisfaction (Morales-Raya et al., 2019), yet few studies specifically focus on SMEs or examine the competitive dynamics in this context. By focusing on SMEs, this study provides a novel perspective on the intersection of green entrepreneurship and competitive strategy. It

contributes to the literature by offering a sustainable management framework that addresses the unique needs and constraints of smaller enterprises, which often differ significantly from those of larger corporations.

The purpose of this study is to examine how green entrepreneurship impacts SMEs' competitive advantage through a sustainable management approach. This research aims to identify specific ways in which green practices contribute to cost reduction, customer loyalty, and market differentiation in the SME sector. The findings are expected to be beneficial not only for SME managers seeking to implement sustainable practices but also for policymakers interested in supporting the sustainable development of smaller businesses. By highlighting the strategic benefits of green entrepreneurship, this study aims to demonstrate that sustainability is not only an ethical consideration but also a viable path to competitive advantage for SMEs.

The rise of environmental awareness and the shift toward sustainable development have significantly influenced modern business practices, pushing firms to adopt eco-friendly strategies that align with global sustainability goals. This movement is not only a reaction to consumer demand but also a proactive response to evolving regulatory frameworks and societal expectations that require businesses to minimize their environmental impact. Green entrepreneurship, the practice of integrating environmentally sustainable approaches within business models, has become an increasingly viable strategy for businesses seeking to balance profit with ecological responsibility (Borland & Lindgreen, 2013). For small and medium enterprises (SMEs), green entrepreneurship holds a unique position as it provides both competitive and operational advantages in a



market that is increasingly driven by sustainability concerns (Mankgele, 2023).

SMEs are crucial contributors to economic growth and job creation, yet they often operate with limited resources and face competitive pressures that can hinder their ability to implement sustainable practices. While large corporations may have the capital and infrastructure to invest in sophisticated sustainability initiatives, SMEs typically encounter resource constraints that make it challenging to adopt green practices at a similar scale. However, SMEs that engage in green entrepreneurship can leverage their agility and close customer relationships to build a brand identity rooted in sustainability, which in turn fosters customer loyalty and market differentiation (Schaper, 2010). This focus on sustainable practices not only attracts environmentally conscious consumers but also opens opportunities for operational efficiencies, such as reduced waste and optimized resource use, which are essential for cost savings and long-term business sustainability.

Despite the recognized benefits, there remains a significant gap in the research on how green entrepreneurship specifically influences the competitive advantage of SMEs. Existing studies on sustainable business practices have predominantly concentrated on large corporations, often overlooking the unique dynamics and challenges that SMEs face when integrating environmental practices into their operations. Furthermore, while there is extensive literature on the environmental benefits of green entrepreneurship, limited attention has been given to examining its strategic role in enhancing SMEs' competitiveness in the marketplace (Ko & Liu, 2017). Given that SMEs constitute a substantial portion of the global business landscape,

understanding how green entrepreneurship impacts their competitive position is critical for promoting sustainable development across various sectors.

The urgency of this study lies in the growing environmental regulations and rising consumer expectations for sustainable business practices. Consumers today are more likely to support brands that align with their personal values, especially concerning environmental responsibility. This shift creates both a challenge and an opportunity for SMEs; although green entrepreneurship may involve higher initial costs and require adjustments to traditional business models, it also provides a pathway for SMEs to strengthen their brand loyalty and differentiate themselves from competitors who have yet to adopt sustainable practices (Castellano et al., 2017). As environmental regulations continue to evolve, SMEs that proactively adopt green entrepreneurship are likely to be better positioned to comply with future regulations, thus reducing regulatory risks while building resilience and adaptability in their operations.

Previous studies have established that sustainable practices can enhance corporate reputation and customer satisfaction, but few have delved into the specific competitive advantages that green entrepreneurship brings to SMEs. Moreover, while some research has explored the positive environmental impacts of green entrepreneurship, the link between sustainable management practices and the competitive dynamics within SMEs remains underexplored. By focusing on SMEs, this study aims to bridge this gap and expand the literature on green entrepreneurship by examining its impact on cost efficiencies, customer loyalty, and market positioning—key components of competitive advantage that can



ultimately contribute to business sustainability (Martín-Tapia et al., 2010).

The importance of this study is underscored by the need for SMEs to adapt to a rapidly changing market landscape that increasingly favors sustainable practices. Green entrepreneurship not only enables SMEs to meet consumer demand for environmental responsibility but also positions them to leverage operational efficiencies that contribute to long-term growth and competitiveness. By providing a sustainable management framework tailored to the unique needs of SMEs, this study aims to highlight how green entrepreneurship can serve as a strategic advantage. In doing so, it underscores the notion that sustainability is not merely a compliance requirement but a strategic approach that can drive competitive success in the evolving business ecosystem.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the impact of green entrepreneurship on the competitive advantage of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from a sustainable management perspective. A case study design is chosen to allow for an in-depth examination of real-life examples and practical insights into how SMEs implement green entrepreneurship and how it influences their competitive positioning. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced ways in which sustainability initiatives contribute to the strategic advantages of SMEs, particularly in relation to customer loyalty, operational efficiencies, and market differentiation.

The primary data sources for this study are derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with SME owners, green

entrepreneurs, and sustainability experts across various sectors. Participants are selected through purposive sampling to ensure they have relevant experience in implementing or managing green entrepreneurship practices within their organizations. This sample diversity provides a broad spectrum of insights into both the challenges and benefits of sustainable business practices. Secondary data, such as company reports, sustainability statements, and industry analyses, are also utilized to supplement interview findings and to validate the observed trends and strategies.

Data are collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews to allow participants the flexibility to share their experiences and insights in detail while adhering to a structured question framework. The interviews explore key topics such as the motivations behind adopting green practices, the specific sustainable strategies implemented, and the perceived competitive advantages gained through these efforts. Each interview lasts approximately 60–90 minutes and is conducted either in person or virtually, depending on the participants' availability. Additionally, document analysis of publicly available reports and sustainability records is conducted to obtain contextual information and to verify the claims made by participants regarding their green initiatives.

Thematic analysis is used to process and analyze the qualitative data collected. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, the data are systematically coded and organized into themes that capture the main insights regarding the impact of green entrepreneurship on SMEs. Initial coding identifies recurring patterns related to competitive advantage, such as cost efficiency, brand differentiation, and customer loyalty. These codes are then grouped into overarching themes, including



"sustainability as a value proposition," "operational benefits of green practices," and "challenges in green entrepreneurship." Each theme is analyzed to explore its role in enhancing the competitive edge of SMEs and to identify interrelationships among the themes.

This qualitative methodology provides a nuanced understanding of how green entrepreneurship strategies affect SMEs' competitive positioning. By integrating insights from both interviews and document analysis, the study offers a comprehensive view of the role of sustainable management in driving SME success, contributing valuable knowledge for policymakers, business owners, and researchers interested in sustainable business practices.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that green entrepreneurship contributes significantly to the competitive advantage of SMEs by fostering a unique value proposition that resonates with environmentally conscious consumers. Participants consistently highlighted that adopting sustainable practices allows SMEs to differentiate their products and services in a crowded market. This differentiation attracts a loyal customer base that values eco-friendly brands, thereby enhancing customer retention and brand loyalty (Y. Zhou, 2024). By positioning sustainability as a core element of their business strategy, SMEs create a reputation for social responsibility, which is increasingly becoming a competitive asset in markets sensitive to environmental issues.

Furthermore, the adoption of green practices within SMEs often leads to operational efficiencies that result in cost savings. Interview data indicate that sustainable practices such as waste reduction, energy efficiency, and resource

optimization directly lower operational costs, which is critical for SMEs operating with limited financial resources. These cost reductions free up capital for further investment in sustainable innovation, creating a positive cycle that strengthens the SME's financial stability and enhances its competitive stance (Pu et al., 2021). Thus, green entrepreneurship not only fulfills ethical and environmental commitments but also serves as a financially beneficial approach for SMEs.

However, the analysis also identifies significant challenges in the implementation of green entrepreneurship, particularly the high initial costs and the need for continuous innovation. Many participants noted that transitioning to sustainable business models required substantial investment in new technology, processes, and training. While the long-term benefits of these investments are acknowledged, SMEs often face financial constraints that make it challenging to absorb the upfront costs associated with sustainable practices (Chien et al., 2021). This financial hurdle underscores the need for supportive policies or incentives to aid SMEs in adopting green entrepreneurship without compromising their financial stability.

In addition, continuous innovation is necessary to maintain the green brand image that attracts environmentally conscious consumers. Several participants emphasized that the competitive advantage gained through sustainability can be diluted if green practices become outdated or if competitors implement more advanced sustainable practices. Therefore, SMEs engaged in green entrepreneurship must consistently update their practices and explore new ways to enhance their sustainability to stay competitive in the long run (Chien et al., 2021). This requirement for ongoing innovation represents both a challenge and an opportunity, as SMEs



that successfully innovate are likely to retain their competitive edge.

Overall, the findings suggest that green entrepreneurship offers a viable path for SMEs to achieve both sustainability and competitiveness, albeit with challenges that need strategic management. By leveraging green entrepreneurship, SMEs can cultivate a distinct market position, optimize operational costs, and attract a dedicated customer base. However, financial and innovation-related challenges highlight the importance of strategic planning and external support to fully realize the competitive potential of green practices within the SME sector (Eriksson, 2024). These insights provide valuable implications for policymakers, highlighting the need for support mechanisms that can empower SMEs to pursue sustainable growth without compromising their financial viability.

Green Entrepreneurship as a Unique Value Proposition

The analysis indicates that green entrepreneurship establishes a distinctive value proposition that appeals to environmentally conscious consumers. By positioning their businesses around sustainability, SMEs differentiate themselves from competitors who may still rely on conventional, less sustainable practices. This differentiation enables SMEs to attract a loyal customer base that values eco-friendly brands, which enhances customer retention and builds a lasting brand image (Ali, 2023). The growing consumer preference for sustainable products suggests that green entrepreneurship serves as more than just an ethical choice—it is an effective market positioning strategy that appeals to a specific demographic increasingly aware of environmental impacts. Moreover, the adoption of green

entrepreneurship allows SMEs to charge premium prices for their products or services. Customers are often willing to pay more for products aligned with their values, especially those that contribute positively to environmental preservation. This premium pricing ability gives SMEs a competitive edge by increasing profit margins, which is crucial for smaller firms operating with limited financial resources. The premium pricing strategy derived from sustainable branding thus underscores green entrepreneurship's potential to boost profitability while fostering customer loyalty (Tekala et al., 2024). Therefore, green entrepreneurship not only builds consumer trust but also strengthens the financial standing of SMEs in competitive markets.

In addition to premium pricing, green entrepreneurship offers SMEs a platform for storytelling that resonates deeply with customers. Many SMEs integrate narratives of environmental responsibility and social impact into their marketing strategies, which enhances emotional connections with consumers. This connection fosters brand loyalty that extends beyond product quality, as customers become invested in the company's broader mission and values. By tapping into consumers' emotional investments, SMEs can achieve long-term loyalty and advocacy, with customers promoting the brand's values within their networks (Lückenbach et al., 2023). Thus, green entrepreneurship becomes a strategic marketing tool that deepens consumer relationships.

Finally, green entrepreneurship strengthens SME competitiveness by aligning with current environmental regulations and sustainability standards. As global environmental standards tighten, SMEs that proactively implement sustainable practices position themselves to meet or exceed regulatory requirements,



reducing potential legal or compliance risks. Compliance with these standards also enhances the firm's reputation among stakeholders, including suppliers, investors, and governmental bodies. This regulatory alignment offers a competitive edge, as SMEs with sustainable operations are seen as forward-thinking and responsible players in their industries, attracting partnerships and collaborations that further solidify their market position (Yang et al., 2022).

Operational Efficiency through Sustainable Practices

Green entrepreneurship contributes to operational efficiencies, primarily through resource optimization and waste reduction strategies. Many SMEs reported that implementing sustainable practices allowed them to identify areas where resources, such as energy and raw materials, could be minimized, leading to reduced operational costs. This resource efficiency is particularly valuable for SMEs, which often have limited budgets. By optimizing resource use, green entrepreneurship enables SMEs to redirect savings toward innovation and growth, reinforcing their competitive position within their respective markets (Miller et al., 2021). Cost-effective resource utilization becomes a fundamental aspect of the SMEs' business model.

Additionally, waste reduction strategies have proven financially beneficial and environmentally impactful. SMEs adopting green practices often implement recycling programs, repurpose waste materials, or transition to biodegradable alternatives, all of which contribute to cost savings and environmental responsibility. These efforts resonate with consumers who prioritize sustainability and view waste reduction as a

marker of corporate responsibility. Through effective waste management, SMEs enhance their reputation while reducing their environmental footprint, a dual benefit that reinforces their competitive advantage in a sustainability-conscious marketplace (Gallo et al., 2023).

The analysis also highlights that sustainable practices improve operational resilience by reducing dependency on limited or costly resources. For instance, SMEs that switch to renewable energy sources or locally sourced materials can mitigate the risks associated with fluctuating resource prices and supply chain disruptions. This resilience is a critical advantage for SMEs, allowing them to maintain stability and operational continuity despite external market pressures. Operational resilience stemming from sustainability practices ensures that SMEs remain agile and adaptable, qualities that are crucial in today's unpredictable economic environment (Chen & Tian, 2022).

Finally, SMEs that emphasize operational efficiency through green entrepreneurship often experience increased employee engagement and productivity. Employees tend to value sustainable workplace practices and are more motivated to contribute to an organization that aligns with their personal values. This heightened engagement improves productivity, as employees feel that their efforts contribute to a greater purpose. Consequently, operational efficiency not only benefits SMEs' bottom line but also creates a positive workplace culture that attracts and retains talent (Quartey et al., 2022).

Challenges in Implementing Green Entrepreneurship

Despite the advantages, SMEs encounter



challenges in implementing green entrepreneurship, primarily due to the initial financial investments required for sustainable transitions. Many SMEs expressed concerns over the high costs associated with adopting new technologies, procuring sustainable materials, and modifying production processes. This financial burden can be particularly daunting for smaller enterprises with limited capital. Although green entrepreneurship offers long-term cost savings, the initial investment often deters SMEs from fully committing to sustainable practices, highlighting a barrier that requires strategic financial planning or external support (Wang et al., 2022).

Another significant challenge involves the ongoing need for innovation to maintain a competitive green image. Green entrepreneurship requires SMEs to continually update their practices, as sustainability standards evolve and consumer expectations rise. SMEs reported that failing to innovate or adapt their sustainability practices could result in losing their competitive edge, as consumers are drawn to companies that demonstrate an active commitment to environmental responsibility. This demand for continuous improvement creates additional financial and strategic pressures on SMEs, pushing them to constantly seek new sustainable solutions (Miller & Torres-Delgado, 2023).

Regulatory complexities also present obstacles to SMEs adopting green entrepreneurship. Sustainability regulations vary by region, and compliance can be costly and time-consuming for smaller enterprises lacking dedicated compliance resources. Navigating these regulations often requires SMEs to invest in compliance training or legal consultation, further increasing the financial burden. Moreover, regulatory changes can create

uncertainty, as SMEs must adapt to new requirements that impact their operational models. These complexities emphasize the need for supportive regulatory frameworks that facilitate SME engagement in green entrepreneurship without overwhelming them (Miller & Torres-Delgado, 2023).

Finally, limited access to sustainable supply chains poses a barrier for SMEs in green entrepreneurship. Many sustainable materials and technologies are available only through specialized suppliers, which may not operate at a scale compatible with SME budgets. This restricted access limits SMEs' ability to procure cost-effective, sustainable alternatives, impacting their capacity to implement comprehensive green practices. Addressing these supply chain limitations will be crucial for SMEs to fully realize the benefits of green entrepreneurship in a competitive market (B. Zhou et al., 2023).

Long-Term Impacts on Competitive Positioning

Green entrepreneurship fosters competitive positioning by establishing SMEs as leaders in sustainability within their respective markets. Participants indicated that by embracing sustainable practices, SMEs differentiate themselves as forward-thinking companies committed to environmental stewardship. This reputation strengthens consumer trust and loyalty, leading to long-term relationships that enhance the company's market share. Over time, as consumers continue to prioritize sustainability, SMEs with established green practices are likely to experience sustained growth driven by consistent customer support (Tereshchenko et al., 2023).

Moreover, green entrepreneurship enhances SMEs' attractiveness to investors and partners



interested in sustainability. With increasing global focus on Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria, companies that prioritize sustainability align well with investor expectations for responsible business practices. This alignment creates funding opportunities that SMEs can leverage to scale their operations and expand market reach. Access to such investments not only strengthens their competitive positioning but also provides the capital needed to sustain and innovate within their green initiatives (Khan et al., 2023).

In the long term, green entrepreneurship allows SMEs to influence industry standards by setting an example for sustainable business practices. As more SMEs embrace green practices, they collectively push industries towards more sustainable norms, creating a competitive environment where sustainability becomes a baseline expectation. This collective shift enhances the competitive edge of sustainability-focused SMEs, positioning them as frontrunners in shaping industry trajectories. Thus, green entrepreneurship not only benefits individual SMEs but also contributes to broader industry transformation (Zhou & Li, 2022).

Finally, the long-term impact of green entrepreneurship on competitive positioning is reinforced by consumer advocacy. Consumers are increasingly vocal about supporting brands that demonstrate genuine environmental commitment, often promoting these brands within their networks. This word-of-mouth advocacy serves as an organic marketing tool, amplifying the brand's reach and reinforcing its competitive advantage. In this way, green entrepreneurship fosters a self-sustaining cycle of brand loyalty, consumer advocacy, and market influence that bolsters the SME's position over time (Miller et al., 2021).

Policy Implications for Supporting Green

Entrepreneurship in SMEs

The findings underscore the need for policy support to alleviate the financial and regulatory challenges that SMEs face in implementing green entrepreneurship. Financial incentives, such as grants, tax credits, or low-interest loans, could ease the initial cost burden of adopting sustainable practices, making it feasible for SMEs to commit to green entrepreneurship. Such support would empower SMEs to invest in sustainable technologies and training, fostering long-term growth without compromising financial stability (Chen & Tan, 2022). Policymakers play a critical role in enabling SMEs to adopt green practices through accessible funding options.

Additionally, regulatory frameworks need to be streamlined to reduce complexity and make compliance achievable for SMEs. Standardizing environmental regulations across regions and providing compliance resources tailored to SMEs can help minimize regulatory burdens. Simplified regulatory structures allow SMEs to focus on integrating green practices rather than navigating complicated legal requirements, encouraging broader participation in sustainable entrepreneurship (Zhou & Li, 2022). These regulatory adjustments would facilitate a supportive ecosystem that promotes sustainable growth for smaller enterprises.

Policymakers can also foster partnerships between SMEs and larger organizations, research institutions, or sustainability-focused NGOs. Collaboration enables knowledge sharing and access to sustainable resources, technologies, and best practices that may otherwise be inaccessible to smaller firms. These partnerships enhance the capacity of SMEs to innovate within green entrepreneurship, thereby strengthening their competitive position in the market (Johnson &



Hockerts, 2022). Collaborative efforts thus provide practical resources that amplify the impact of green entrepreneurship within the SME sector.

4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that green entrepreneurship significantly enhances the competitive advantage of SMEs by fostering a unique market position rooted in environmental responsibility and sustainable practices. Through sustainable management, SMEs can differentiate themselves in an increasingly eco-conscious marketplace, attract a loyal customer base, and even justify premium pricing for their products and services. Additionally, the operational efficiencies gained through resource optimization and waste reduction contribute to cost savings that bolster financial stability, allowing SMEs to reinvest in their growth. This competitive positioning is reinforced by the emotional connection consumers feel toward environmentally responsible brands, which enhances customer loyalty and encourages long-term support.

However, the adoption of green entrepreneurship is not without its challenges. The initial financial investments, ongoing need for innovation, and regulatory complexities pose substantial obstacles for SMEs with limited resources. The findings underscore the need for supportive policies and collaborative frameworks that can help SMEs overcome these barriers. Financial incentives, simplified regulatory structures, and access to sustainable supply chains would enable SMEs to fully realize the strategic benefits of green entrepreneurship. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that green entrepreneurship serves as both a pathway to sustainable growth for SMEs and a strategic approach to achieving

a competitive edge, contributing valuable insights for policymakers and business leaders committed to sustainable development.

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