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INFLUENCE OF GREEN ENTREPRENEURIAL MARKETING ON THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The study determined the influence of green entrepreneurial marketing on the performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South-East Nigeria. The focus was to ascertain whether green entrepreneurial marketing influences the customer patronage of SMEs in the area. One research question guided the study while one null hypothesis was tested. Survey research design was adopted for the study. Population of the study was 196,075 registered SMEs out of which a sample size of 400 SMEs were randomly drawn from each of the five states and used for the study. Data were collected with a 10- item validated questionnaire which was subjected to face and content validation by three experts. The five-point likert scale with the following responses ranging from 5 indicating strongly agree (SA); 4 indicating agree (A); 3 indicating Neutral (N), 2 indicating disagree (D); and 1 indicating strongly disagree (SD) was utilized. Cronbach Alpha reliability tool was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. Twenty-one (21) copies of the questionnaire were administered to Small and Medium Enterprises in Delta State, outside the area of study and the data obtained yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.90. Mean was used to answer the research question while standard deviation was used to check the spread of the respondents' responses to the mean. The null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance using simple linear regression analysis. Findings of the study revealed that business owners agreed

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that green entrepreneurial marketing positively influences SMEs' performance. The result of the hypothesis testing also revealed that there is a significant positive influence of green marketing on SMEs performance in Southeast Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that there is a significant positive influence of green entrepreneurial marketing on SMEs performance in Southeast Nigeria. It was therefore recommended that SMEs in Southeast Nigeria should adopt green marketing practices, such as applying eco-labels, utilizing social media and offering discounts for recycling. The government should develop policies that support the growth of green marketing, such as tax incentives and subsidies, in the area.

Keywords: Green entrepreneurship, Green marketing, Small and Medium sized enterprises, Performance, Influence.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the surge in global population has fueled a rise in consumption and production, ultimately contributing to resource depletion and environmental harm. Some of the serious repercussions of environmental damage include global warming, increased environmental pollution, and decline in the flora and fauna (plants and animals). Then the environmental concerns of climate change have been globally intensified recently as its disastrous consequences are overwhelming and reported in almost every region in the world, Nigeria inclusive (Michali, et al, 2022).

With the growing attention paid to global environmental protection, firms are facing pressure to take responsibility in protecting the environment in order to meet regulations from local government (Ebrahimi & Mirbargkar, 2017) and to meet expectations from stakeholders and marketplaces. In other words, firms are facing the challenge of cultivating green capability to cope with increasing pressure from the government and the public (Dangelico & Pujari, 2010; Lee & Min, 2015.). Many entrepreneurs have adopted environment-related strategies, such as creating a firm green image, pollution reduction and green marketing, among others. Since then, green entrepreneurship has been receiving growing attention from the public and researchers.

Green entrepreneurship (or environmental entrepreneurship, eco-entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship) refers to the implementation of innovations related to environmental protection (Ebrahimi & Mirbargkar, 2017). According to Kirkwood and Walton (2014), green entrepreneurship was first mentioned in a book by Gustav Berle (1991) which provided a poetic definition of green entrepreneurship as the ability and willingness of humans to take up responsibilities of creating the kind of world they dream to live in. Kirkwood and Walton (2014) defined green entrepreneurship as activities that makes purposeful efforts at proffering solutions to, or curbing socio-environmental challenges using basic entrepreneurial ideas in a way that does not only benefit the environment, but also provides sustained financial gains for the entrepreneur. Similarly, anyone who sets-up and commences the running of an entrepreneurial entity with the goal of designing green products, or offering green service in an environmentally friendly manner is referred to as a green entrepreneur (Schaper, 2016). The goal of a green or eco-friendly business is to reduce or eliminate any negative influence that business will have on the environment, both locally and globally. Green businesses are characterized by; offering non-toxic, eco-friendly products in sustainable, recyclable, or reusable packaging; sourcing materials and ingredients from

companies dedicated to ethical, fair-trade, and sustainable practices; prioritizing the health, wellbeing, and treatment of their workers and employees amongst others.

According to Chukwuka and Eboh (2018), green businesses are also measured by using the indices such as; green entrepreneurial initiative, green entrepreneurial recruitment and selection, green marketing, green innovation, green entrepreneurial inclination, green entrepreneurial orientation, green entrepreneurial jobs, ecological economy and carbon economy. However, Gao et al. (2019), averred that green entrepreneurship is entrepreneurial behavior in an enterprise's green innovation of products and services, aimed at enhancing the performances of SMEs while considering environmental protection.

Green marketing is the marketing of products which are safe for the environment and consumers. It includes activities such as changes in the production process; changes in the product itself; sustainable packaging; changes in labeling and modifying advertising. Green marketing is also the practice of promoting products or services that have environmental benefits or features to include highlighting the sustainability, eco-friendliness, or positive environmental influence of a product to attract and engage environmentally-conscious consumers. Green marketing is considered as a tool for monitoring, seeking and fulfilling consumer needs and desires in the context of environmental responsibility (Akehurst et al., in Obafemi and Ihunwo, 2022). Zhanglan (2016) opines that green marketing entails series of organization functions, to include environmentally friendly products and logistics, promotion and pricing and green consumption. Thus, the process and practice of green marketing is about making products and services that are measured on the basis of environmental benefits that they give. As SMEs increasingly adopt green marketing practices to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers, they also consider the critical role of green recruitment and selection in identifying and hiring employees who can drive and support the eco-friendly practices.

Green marketing is considered as a tool for monitoring, seeking and fulfilling consumer needs and desires in the context of environmental responsibility (Akehurst et al., 2012 as cited in Obafemi and Ihunwo, 2022). Green marketing practices entail serial of organization functions, including environmentally friendly products and logistics, promotion and pricing and green consumption (Zhanglan, 2016). Green marketing connotes the process of selling products based on their environmental gain. The public tends to be skeptical of green claims, companies and their activities can damage their brands and their sales if a green claim is found to be false by a company's other products. Presenting a product or service as green when it's not is called green washing (Babita, 2013). Green cleaning is all about using products that are safe and healthy for the environment and about employing eco-friendly cleaning practices, like reducing water usage etc. It is also about using products from conscientious firms with sustainable business practices. Greenness is a general term that means products and practices that are organic, sustainable and/or otherwise environmentally friendly (Babita, 2013). The term also refers to products that are green (within the context of environmental and social performance) in production, usage and disposal compared to other competing products (Babita, 2013). In other words, a green product is a product that is not harmful to the physical environment and also contains elements that are not potentially harmful to the environment. Consumers are still in the nascent stage of green awareness. There are two aspects of green marketing: telling the value of going green and creating marketing strategies through which green messages can be sent to create the awareness about greenness in the minds of the consumers. Maheshwani (2014) further posits that every product bears some effect on the environment at some point in time in its product life cycle. According to him, there are contentions that there is not a single product in the market that is

totally environment friendly and does not bear any impact on environment. Green marketing is the marketing of products which are safe for the environment and also for the consumers as a whole. It includes a wide range of activities: changes in the production process, changes in the product itself, changes in the packaging, changes in labeling and changes in promotions. The process and practice of green marketing is about making products and services that are measured on the basis of environmental benefits that they give. Therefore, any product or service which itself is environmentally friendly or is produced or packaged in such ways can be termed as "green". Choongo (2017) and Rekik and Bergeron (2017) advocated how applying "green marketing practices" to small and medium-sized businesses may enhance their performance in terms of customer patronage.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are businesses that have limited resources, size and scope. SMEs are defined by the World Bank as businesses with a maximum of 249 employees and annual revenue of $15 million (World Bank, 2020). The European Union (EU) defined an SME as an enterprise which has less than 250 employees; has either an annual turnover not exceeding ECU 50 Million, or annual balance sheet total not exceeding ECU 27 Million; is less than 25% owned by non-SME, (European Commission, 2020). SMEs play a vital role in economic development as they have been the main source of employment generation and output growth, both in developing as well as in developed countries. SMEs are also the fastest-growing sector of most economies and are perceived to be more pliant regarding structure and speed of response than larger enterprises (Kumar 2015). Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute the largest business entities in many countries, where governments show a keen interest in ensuring their competitiveness. This interest is usually channeled through policies and financial assistance towards the implementation of innovative and emerging technologies, especially in developing countries. To compete and survive in a highly competitive global marketplace, it is important for SME owners to resort to the utilization of green entrepreneurial practices to have a competitive edge over their rivals, as well as to improve business performance (Maziriri and Maramura, 2022).

Consequently, the environmental damage phenomenon is a challenge for businesses today, including small and medium industries in developing countries. In Nigeria, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in the economy, contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and innovation (Adejumo & Olufemi, 2015). However, SMEs in Nigeria face numerous challenges, including environmental degradation, resource depletion, and climate change. The country's southeast region, home to numerous Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), is no exception. This region has suffered from devastating oil spills, causing environmental degradation and health issues (UNEP, 2011); Rampant deforestation and land degradation threatening biodiversity and ecosystem; Industrial activities, vehicle emissions, and poor waste management leading to air and water pollution, affecting human health and the environment (WHO, 2018; NPC, 2018); Vulnerability to climatic change impacts like rising temperatures, droughts, and floods, which affect agriculture, health, and livelihoods (IPCC, 2014).

Green entrepreneurial marketing has become increasingly important in Nigeria, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In southeast Nigeria, green marketing has the potential to drive socio-economic development while promoting environmental conservation. Green marketing among SMEs in southeast Nigeria has several socio-economic benefits. These include: ensuring sustained long-term growth along with profitability; helping firms to market their products and services by keeping the environmental aspects in mind (Babita 2013).

Also, Uydaci (2002) sees Green marketing as serving two major purposes which are: Purpose of developing goods that can appeal to the consumer at reasonably, affordable prices and environmentally friendly products which will cause minimal damage; For the purpose of reflecting a products image of high quality, environmental sensitivity and production of products compatible with environmental requirements is another great benefit: eco-labeling, eco-branding, environmental advertising etc. According to a study by the Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team NEST (2019), the adoption of green entrepreneurship practices such as green marketing among SMEs in Nigeria can lead to significant economic benefits, including increased revenue and job creation. Another study by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019), found that green entrepreneurship can contribute to poverty reduction and improved livelihoods in Nigeria. As a valuable resource, green entrepreneurial marketing can be a crucial component of a firm's resourced-based view strategy, enabling it to differentiate itself from competitors and achieve long-term success.

The resource-based view (RBV) theory was propounded by Jay Barney in 1991. RBV theory posits that a firm's resources and capabilities are the primary sources of competitive advantage and superior performance. The theory suggests that firms can develop sustainable competitiveness advantages by exploiting their internal resources. According to RBV theory, intangible assets are essential for a company's success (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993). This theory notes that entrepreneurs must interact with their resources over time to discover their productive services and judge how best to allocate, deploy, and maintain those resources (Penrose, 1959). Technological advancements, production/process, expertise, customer loyalty, and machine capacity are all among the company's resources (Wernerfelt, 1984). The RBV theory relates to green marketing by highlighting the importance of developing unique resources and capabilities that enable firms to adopt environmentally friendly practices and technologies.

Review of Empirical Studies

Yaseen et al. (2022) assess the effects of green marketing practices on competitive advantage and business performance in Malaysia. A quantitative approach was used to obtain data from a survey (questionnaire) consisting of 33 items with a five-point Likert scale. The unit of analysis is small and medium companies in Malaysia. The respondents in this paper are the managers of departments. Smart PLS 3.2.9 was used to analyze the results. The findings of the path analysis of partial least squares (PLS) support variables in their hypothesized direct relationships with business performance. The analysis results suggest that competitive advantage partially mediates the relationship between green marketing practices and business performance. The paper provides many suggestions that are helpful both for researchers and policymakers to undertake more research in this area as well as to enhance the competitive advantage and business performance of institutions in the future. This study shares similarity with the current one as they both have the same independent variable (green marketing practices which is one of the green entrepreneurial practices) and dependent variable (competitiveness, which is one of the measures of sustainability). The difference exists in terms of the geographical scope and tool of analysis.

Obafemi and Ihunwo (2022) study examined the relationship between green market practices and business wellness in the Nigerian food and beverages firms in Rivers State. The target population of the study was 12 food and beverages firms with 60 respondents drawn from the management of the sampled firms. A self-administered structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data from the respondents, and data obtained were accordingly analyzed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient Statistical Tool to test the

hypotheses with the aid of SPSS version 20.0. Results revealed that there is positive and significant relationship between green marketing practices and business wellness of Nigerian food and beverages firm; while innovativeness moderates the impact on green marketing practices and business wellness. This study shares similarity with the current one as they both have the same independent variable (one major green entrepreneurial practice, ie entrepreneurial green marketing) and dependent variable (an aspect of sustainability), as well as same manufacturing sector. The difference exists in terms of the geographical location and scope.

Odiah (2017) conducted a study to determine the impact of green marketing on consumer purchase behavior. The study made use of a sample size of 301 consumers of fast moving consumer goods manufacturing firms in Lagos State, Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted, and the statistical tool used comprised frequency and correlation as well as regression analysis. The findings show that green awareness, green packaging, and green pricing, have significant positive effect on consumers' purchase behavior while green promotion has no significant effect on consumers' purchase behaviour. These implies that consumers are becoming more aware about environment-friendly products and feel that these products are safe and secure for use due to the ever-increasing waste generation. The work of Odiah (2017) is related to the present study because both of them provided information on green marketing and adopted the same research design but differs in sample size and statistical tools used.

A study by Nabsiah (2011) assessed the effect of green marketing instruments on Consumers' actual purchase behavior. A survey was carried out on 250 Chinese, Malaysia, Indian and other races that represents' the Malaysia population. Factor analysis, Cronbach alpha and multiple regressions were used to identify component impact on Penang consumers actual purchase behaviour. The result showed that customer's trust in eco-label and eco-brand and their perception of eco-brand show positive and significant effect on their actual purchase behaviour. This study shares similarity with the current one as they both have the same independent variable (one major green entrepreneurial practice, ie entrepreneurial green marketing) and dependent variable. The difference exists in terms of the geographical location and method of data analysis.

Chinda and Umeh, (2023) conducted a study on the impact of green marketing on consumer buying behavior in selected shopping malls in Enugu Nigeria. The research design of the study was descriptive survey design. The study used structured questionnaire to obtain data. The population of this study comprised of infinite customers of shopping malls in Enugu State. Slip of paper sample technique was used and the Cochran sample technique for uncountable population was 225 sample sizes. The empirical result revealed that green advertisement, green packaging and green sales promotion has positive and significant impact on consumers' patronage, on consumers' purchase intention and consumers' repeated purchase in selected shopping malls in Enugu Nigeria. This study shares similarity with the current one as they both have the same independent variable (one major green entrepreneurial practice, ie entrepreneurial green marketing) and dependent variable and shares the same geographical location. The difference exists in terms of sampling technique used and method of data analysis.

Olufunmi, (2022) examined the effect of green marketing on customer satisfaction. The specific objective of the study was to identify the role of green marketing on customer satisfaction in PZ Cusson Nigeria Plc. The data for this study was obtained from primary sources. They were gathered using questionnaire structured on the basis of the research hypothesis. The researcher sampled employees of PZ Cusson Nigeria Plc using simple

random sampling. The researcher however made use of 200 respondents for this study. Following the major findings of this study, it was found that the study also showed that Green product has effect on customer satisfaction, green promotion has effect on customer satisfaction, green distribution has effect on customer satisfaction and green price has effect on customer satisfaction. The study is related to the current study because they both provided information on green marketing but they differ in area of study, while Olufunmi studied only one company in Nigeria, the present study will get data from several SMEs in Southeast Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Several environmental hazards in Nigeria gave rise to youth restiveness in the country and emergence of angry groups came up due to the environmental pollution caused by SMEs that did not appreciate the need to go green. Nigeria has a high level of air pollution, poor water quality, high level of noise from traffic, environmental pollution caused by polymer, a lot of great and rapid decrease energy waste. SMEs in Nigeria face numerous challenges, including environmental degradation, resource depletion, and climate change. The country's southeast region, home to numerous Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), is no exception. This region has suffered from rampant deforestation and land degradation threatening biodiversity and ecosystem; Industrial activities, vehicle emissions, and poor waste management leading to air and water pollution, affecting human health and the environment (WHO, 2018; NPC, 2018); Vulnerability to climatic change impacts like rising temperatures, droughts, and floods, which affect agriculture, health, and livelihoods (IPCC, 2014). Small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria as a whole and southeast in particular can use different strategies to encourage green behavior to achieve sustainable development. Due to growing environmental problems and its adverse effects on physical and mental health of human beings a lot needs to be done in advocacy for ethos of greenness.

Despite the growing importance of green entrepreneurship in influencing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) performances in southeast Nigeria, this region is still faced with significant challenges in adopting green innovative practices, which hinders their ability to improve their environmental performance, reduce carbon footprint, and enhance their overall performance (Chukwuka and Eboh, 2018). The lack of understanding of the influence of green entrepreneurship on firms' performance and inadequate regulatory support are some of the key barriers that hinder the adoption of these practices among SMEs in the region. As a result, SMEs in southeast Nigeria are missing out on the opportunities to improve their competitiveness, gain customers' patronage, reduce environmental degradation, and contribute to sustainable economic development. There is also limited research that explores this area and need for more empirical studies to be carried out in order to understand the actual outcomes and influences of green entrepreneurship in different context, more especially on the context of green marketing. This study therefore seeks to close this gap by determining the influence of green entrepreneurial marketing on SMEs performance in Southeast Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The broad objective of this study was to determine theinfluence of green entrepreneurial marketing on small and medium enterprises performance in South-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine whether green entrepreneurial marketing influences customers' patronage of SMEs in the region.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

1. How does green entrepreneurial marketing influence customers' patronage of SMEs in South-East Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance

H0: There is no significant influence of green entrepreneurial marketing on customers' patronage of SMEs in South-East Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This is because the study made use of questionnaire to collect data from a sample of SMEs operators while the findings are expected to be generalized to the entire population. Survey research design involves asking questions and recording responses on a defined research problem using a specified instrument usually the questionnaire (Okeke, Olise & Eze, 2014). The study was conducted in the South-East Nigeria comprising Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States respectively. The population of the study comprised of all the small and medium enterprises in South east Nigeria. The population of the study was all the 196,075 small and medium enterprises in the area that were registered with SMEDAN as at 2020. Taro Yamane formula was used to determine sample size of 400 SMEs, while stratified random sampling technique was employed to draw 80 SMEs from each of the five states. The instrument for data collection was a five-point rating scale questionnaire titled "Green entrepreneurship and SMEs performances (GESMEsP) containing 13 items with strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The questionnaire was validated by three experts and to check the internal consistency, Cronbach Alpha was used because it is the one of the best methods used in measuring attitude scales where there are no preferred answers and every answer attracts a score (Nworgu 2015). The internal consistency of the questionnaire items was 0.83. Data were collected using electronic media comprising of Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram to distribute the online questionnaire prepared using Google form and collect data from respondents. This helped in the seamless distribution of the questionnaire and easy coding and analysis of the questionnaire as the questionnaire was returned to a designated email already arranged and some level of descriptive statistics would have already been done.

The data collected were analyzed using mean ratings and standard deviation to answer the research question and to check the spread of the respondents' responses to the mean; while simple linear regression analysis was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Decisions for the questionnaire items and the research question were based on a cut-off mean score of 3.50 which implies that if an item or the cluster mean score is 3.50 and above, it means that the respondents agreed but if it is below 3.50, it means that the respondents disagreed. Therefore, a cluster mean score is 3.50 and above means that respondents agreed that green marketing influences the customers' patronage of SMEs in the area of study, but where it is less than 3.50, it means that respondents disagreed that green marketing influences SMEs' customers' patronage in the study area. For the hypothesis, where the p-value is equal or greater than 0.05, ($P>0.05$) it means that green marketing does not have significant influence on the customers' patronage of the SMEs and the null hypothesis was not rejected. Where the reverse is the case, ($P<0.05$), it means that green

marketing has significant influence on the customers' patronage of SMEs and the null hypothesis was rejected. SPSS version 25 was used for the analysis.

Results

The result of the descriptive analysis is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Respondents' mean and standard deviation ratings on how green entrepreneurial marketing influences customers' patronage of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria.

(N=383)

SN	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Green Marketing is used for promoting products and services that are environmentally friendly to customers who prioritize sustainability.	4.1	0.8	A
2.	Green marketing is used for promoting customers that are willing to support businesses that align with their values.	4.1	0.8	A
3.	Applying eco-labels helps to communicate products' environmental benefits.	4.1	0.9	A
4.	Green marketing is used in building trust and credibility leading to increased patronage as customers supports businesses they perceive as ethical and responsible.	4,1	0.9	A
5.	Developing brand identities that convey environmental responsibility and values help SMEs stand out from their competitors.	4.1	0.8	A
6.	Actively engaging with environmental conscious communities, such as participating in local sustainability events help businesses connect with like-minded customers and increase patronage.	4.1	0.8	A
7.	Utilizing social media and digital platforms to reach a wider audience increases customer patronage.	4.1	0.8	A
8.	Offering discounts or reward for recycling or using reusable products attracts customers who value sustainability.	4.2	0.8	A
9.	Supporting activities that promotes environmental sustainability attracts customers that needs to contribute to environmental initiatives thereby increasing patronage.	4.2	0.8	A
10.	Designing and promoting reusable, recyclable and edible packaging such as paper or plastic bags appeals to customers who prioritize sustainable packaging practices thereby increasing patronage.	4.2	0.8	A
	Cluster Mean	**4.13**		**A**

Table 1 shows that mean scores for all the items are above the cut-off mean of 3.50 which means that the respondents agreed with each of them. The cluster mean value of 4.13 which is above the cut-off point of 3.50 indicates that on the whole, the business owners agreed that green marketing influences customers' patronage of SMEs in South-East Nigeria. Standard deviation for all the items are within the same range from 0.8 to 1.0 which shows that the respondents are homogeneous in their ratings.

Table 2
Results of linear regression analysis on the influence of green marketing on customers' patronage of SMEs in South-East Nigeria.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R square	Std Error of estimate
1	0.69	0.48	0.48	1.9

Predictors (constant) Green marketing
Dependent variable: customer patronage

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Decision
Regression	1319.349	1	1319.349	360.140	.000	Significant
Residual	1395.7698	381	3.663			
Total	2715.117	382				

Coefficients of Regression analysis

Model	Unstandardized coeff.		Standardized coeff.	T	Sig
	B	Std Error	Beta		
Constant	6.0	0.77		7.7	.000
Green marketing	0.7	0.37	0.69	18.9	.000

Data in table 2 shows that the model demonstrated a significant overall fit. F (1, 381) = 360.140, P< 0.05, with an R^2 of 0.48, indicating that approximately 48% of the variance in customer patronage could be explained by the linear relationship with marketing which is large. The regression equation in competitive advantage where the unstandardized coefficient for green marketing (B=6.0, β=0.69, P< 0.05) signifies that there is significant positive influence of green marketing on customer patronage of SMEs, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. The findings suggest that SMEs that adopt green marketing strategies are more likely to gain more customer patronage than others.

DISCUSSION

Influence of green entrepreneurial marketing on customer patronage of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria.

The result of the analysis showed that business owners in southeast Nigeria agreed to the statements that show that green marketing positively influences customer patronage of SMEs in this region. A cluster mean of 4.13 confirms that. The result of the hypothesis testing carried out also confirmed that there is a significant positive influence of green marketing on customer patronage of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria. This suggests that SMEs that practice green marketing strategies and skills tend to attract more customers and retain existing ones. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have shown that green marketing can lead to increased customer patronage. According to Yaseen (2022), competitive advantage partially mediates the relationship between green marketing practices and business performance. Obafemi and Ihunwo (2022) results also revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between green marketing practices and business wellness of Nigerian food and beverages firm. Odiah (2017) result showed that green awareness, green packaging and green pricing have significant positive effect on consumers' purchase behavior. According to Odiah, consumers are becoming more aware about environmental-friendly products and feel that these products are safe and secure for use due to the ever-increasing waste generation. In Chinda and Umeh (2023) study, it was revealed that green advertisement, green packaging and green sales promotion has positive and significant impact on consumers' patronage, purchase intention and consumers' repeated purchase. Ayodele, Ejiro and Eguononefe (2017) also found out that green social influence and brand strength have positive and statistically significant effect on consumers' purchase intention of environmentally-friendly electrical products.

The findings of this study have implications for SMEs in Southeast Nigeria. SMEs can adopt green marketing strategies such as eco-labelling, eco-packaging and environmental advertising to attract customers and differentiate themselves from competitors. SMEs can also educate customers about the environmental benefits of their products and services, which can lead to increased customer loyalty and patronage. Furthermore, the study's findings suggest that policy makers and regulatory bodies can play a crucial role in promoting green marketing practices among SMEs in southeast Nigeria. For instance, they can provide incentives and support for SMEs that adopt green marketing strategies and establish regulations that promotes environmental sustainability. This will in turn result to improve business performance and sustainability.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, that green entrepreneurial marketing has a significant positive influence on SMEs' performance in South-East Nigeria, it was concluded that SMEs that practice green marketing strategies and skills tend to attract more customers and retain existing ones leading to customer loyalty and patronage and also contributing to sustainable development in the region.

Recommendations

1. SMEs in Southeast Nigeria should adopt green marketing strategies such as eco-labelling, eco-packaging, environmental advertising, utilizing social media and offering discounts for recycling to attract customers and differentiate themselves from competitors.

2. The government should develop policies that support the growth of green marketing in Southeast Nigeria, such as tax incentives and subsidies. They should provide training and capacity-building programs for SMEs to develop the skills and knowledge needed to adopt green entrepreneurship practices.
3. Financial institutions should provide access to green finance, such as loans and grants, to support the growth of green entrepreneurial marketing in Southeast Nigeria. This can help overcome the financial barriers that often prevent SMEs from adopting environmentally friendly practices.

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