

## Consumer Information and Sustainable Marketing in Small and Medium Enterprises in Kenya

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### Abstract

*The rapid climatic changes orchestrated by environmental degradation have seen unprecedented dynamics in every sector globally, forcing the world to steadily embrace sustainable measures to contain the adverse climatic effects. Sustainable marketing is one of these measures, which aims at encouraging consumers to embrace environmentally friendly products and services. Unlike traditional marketing, where the main aim was to maximize sales through transforming non-consumers into consumers, sustainable marketing aims at promoting responsible consumption with the aim of not only enhancing sales, but also conserving the environment. While large organizations, particularly multinationals, have been at the forefront of embracing sustainable marketing, this has not been the case for small and medium enterprises. These enterprises face a wide range of challenges, and their focus is mainly driven by short-term success rather than long-term sustainability. Available evidence shows that SMEs are among the main contributors to environmental degradation, despite their minimal efforts to conserve the environment through initiatives like sustainable marketing. On the other hand, consumer information has been known to play an essential role in determining the effectiveness of marketing strategies and approaches, including sustainable marketing. This, however, remains scantily evaluated in the Kenyan context, especially among small and medium enterprises, showing contextual, conceptual, methodological, and geographical gaps. This study therefore sought to evaluate the role played by consumer information in the embrace of sustainable marketing among small and medium enterprises in Kenya. Through an explanatory research design, the study surveyed 200 SMEs in Nairobi County using a structured questionnaire. The findings revealed that consumer information seeking among the SMEs was integral in steering sustainable marketing. Moreover, consumer awareness creation was integral in informing the consumers on products and services' qualities and features thus steering sustainable marketing. The study concluded that sustainable marketing had not been effectively embraced among most of the SMEs in Kenya, and this was significantly caused by ineffective collection of consumer information, as well as engagement of consumers to understand their needs and preferences.*

**Keywords:** Consumer Information, Consumer Information Seeking Approaches, Consumer Awareness Creation, Sustainable Marketing, Sustainable Development, Small and Medium Enterprises

## Introduction

### Background of the Study

In the current 21st century, information has been considered as one of the fundamental drivers of success in every discipline and sector. Access, availability, flow, accuracy, and effectiveness of information are major enablers of people's relationships and behaviors, organizational effectiveness, and the overall interactions in society. In marketing, just like in other disciplines, information is one of the building blocks that enable marketing processes and activities to be actualized (Yang & Baker, 2024). Marketing plays an essential role in determining and stimulating consumer behaviour, which comprises the perceptions, beliefs, and actions of consumers. On the other hand, the effectiveness of marketing strategies and activities to stimulate and influence consumer behaviour highly relies on consumer awareness. According to Jin et al. (2020), consumer awareness can be divided into two dimensions, where one dimension focuses on the buyer's knowledge of the products or services offered by a given organization, including the information and characteristics of the given product/service. The other dimension is the organization's knowledge of the preferences, needs, and expectations of the consumer regarding different products, services or brands. The two dimensions of consumer awareness are interrelated, whereby when an organization is aware of what the customers want, it can create awareness of the given product or service to targeted customers, thus enhancing consumer awareness. According to Massie et al. (2023), one of the best ways to adequately meet consumer needs is to understand what the customer prefers, and this can be achieved through access to consumer information. Therefore, consumer information is the availability of data such as patterns, preferences, and tastes about targeted consumers. When an organization has access to consumer information, it becomes easier to respond to consumer needs proactively, thus being in a better position to be competitive and lead to customer satisfaction (Tulloch et al., 2021).

The world has gradually migrated from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which focus on promoting environmentally friendly operations in every aspect of economic and social development. This comes amid the growing concerns over the extreme climatic conditions, such as global warming, that have affected every sector across the globe. As defined by Cheong and Mohammed-Baksh (2021), sustainability is the concept of promoting environmentally friendly development where available resources are responsibly utilized with a mind to future generations. Achieving sustainability calls for, among other aspects, continuous consumption of products and services that have minimal impacts on the environment. Marketing is one of the effective approaches to enhancing sustainability through sustainable marketing.

As defined by Cuculeski et al. (2016), sustainable marketing encompasses the process of promoting products and services that are environmentally friendly in a way that is environmentally responsible and ethically conscious, while ensuring long-term profitability. It integrates principles of sustainability into every aspect of marketing, balancing economic, social, and environmental objectives. Achieving sustainable marketing is a major step towards enhancing the overall sustainability agenda and promoting the long-term success of organizations. According to Bernytė (2018), sustainable marketing emphasizes the promotion of products and services that are eco-friendly, minimize waste, and reduce carbon footprints. It involves companies adopting sustainable practices in their operations, from sourcing raw materials to packaging and distribution (Qalati et al., 2024).

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are the majority of establishments in both developed and developing economies, comprising more than 60% of all businesses globally (Testa et al., 2020). These enterprises, therefore, play a crucial role not only in economic growth but also in sustainable development, as they influence most consumer behaviors. On the other hand, Yuliat and Simanjuntak (2024) noted that the effectiveness of sustainable marketing and its ability to significantly contribute to environmental conservation depend on its widespread embrace by most of the organizations (Ichihashi, 2020). Therefore, the embrace of sustainable marketing in small and medium enterprises would be a major enabler to the continued effectiveness of sustainable marketing towards the overall sustainable development. According to Morgan-Daniel et al. (2020), while SMEs have previously been reviewed in the context of entrepreneurship, the dynamics in the operating environment, including the current climatic changes, call for SMEs to proactively embrace sustainable measures such as sustainable marketing. This study, therefore, sets out to address the access to consumer information among the SMEs and how this would enable them to embrace sustainable marketing.

### Statement of the Problem

A report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shows that while SMEs are the majority of businesses globally, they are the least in embracing sustainable practices, including sustainable marketing. This implies that most SMEs promote products and services that are environmentally unfriendly and use methods and approaches that are not environmentally sustainable. This does not only affect the global environmental goals and efforts, but also affects the long-term performance and success of the SMEs. As noted by Sudi (2024), most SMEs mainly focus on being disruptive and on survival, thus their process and activities, such as marketing, rarely focuses on sustainability. While most SMEs in Kenya have been characterized by a high failure rate, they have been among the key contributors to unsustainable practices. Available evidence shows that consumer information is a major contributor to sustainable marketing. According to Peterson et al. (2021), with access to consumer information, organizations are capable of identifying the needs and preferences of their target consumers and marketing products and services that align with these needs. Testa et al. (2020), on the other hand, noted that consumer information strongly contributes to an organization's ability to align its marketing strategies with the expectations of consumers, thus making the entire marketing process more effective. While the literature shows access to consumer information has a strong impact on marketing effectiveness, including sustainable marketing, this has not been empirically proven in a Kenyan context, particularly among SMEs. It is on this merit that this paper sought to assess the role played by consumer information on the effectiveness of sustainable marketing among SMEs in Kenya.

### Objectives

The paper was guided by the following specific objectives:

- To examine the consumer information-seeking approaches adopted by small and medium enterprises in Kenya
- To examine the extent of consumer awareness creation by small and medium enterprises in Kenya
- To assess the extent of the embrace of sustainable marketing among small and medium enterprises in Kenya
- To determine the relationship between consumer information and the embrace of sustainable marketing among small and medium enterprises in Kenya.

## Literature Review

### Sustainable Marketing

Sustainable marketing integrates environmental, social, and economic concerns into marketing strategies, balancing profitability with long-term ecological and social well-being. Several theoretical concepts have aligned with the prospects of sustainable marketing, and these concepts include corporate social responsibility (CSR), stakeholder theory, and the triple bottom line. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as outlined by Chamidah et al. (2020), emphasizes the role of businesses in contributing to societal goals that go beyond profit maximization. In the context of sustainable marketing, CSR focuses on how companies, such as SMEs, can integrate social and environmental concerns into their marketing strategies to meet the expectations of various stakeholders (consumers, communities, and regulatory bodies). This drives companies to adopt practices that not only protect the environment but also provide societal benefits. The stakeholder theory by Freeman (1984), on the other hand, asserts that businesses should account for the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders. In sustainable marketing, this involves marketing efforts that address the needs and expectations of a wide range of stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and environmental entities (Kong, Witmaier & Ko, 2021). Triple Bottom Line (TBL) by Elkington (1994) urges SMEs to focus on three pillars: people (social responsibility), planet (environmental sustainability), and profit (economic viability). This theory is crucial for sustainable marketing, as it underpins the idea that companies must balance financial performance with environmental protection and social equity. Bruce, Shurong, Ying, Yaqi, Amoah, and Egala (2023) also underscore the aspect of green marketing, which focuses specifically on promoting products and services based on their environmental benefits. It involves the development and marketing of goods that are environmentally friendly, such as those that reduce resource consumption, minimize waste, or have a lower carbon footprint. Green marketing often ties into the concept of ethical consumerism, where consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by environmental considerations.

One of the integral aspects that has been regarded as a key driver of sustainable marketing is consumer preferences and ethical consumerism. Research consistently shows that consumers are increasingly concerned with the sustainability of the products they purchase. A study by Gupta and Agrawal (2018) found that environmental and social responsibility significantly influence purchasing decisions, particularly among millennials and Gen Z consumers. They are more likely to buy products from brands that prioritize sustainable practices, such as using eco-friendly packaging or sourcing ethically produced materials. According to Santos et al. (2022), brands adopting sustainable marketing practices benefit from enhanced customer loyalty and improved brand reputation. Companies that communicate their sustainability initiatives effectively are perceived as more trustworthy and reliable, which translates into stronger customer relationships and repeat purchases. Varadarajan (2020) addressed sustainable marketing as a crucial enabler of sustainable innovation and competitive advantage, where companies that integrate sustainability into their core business processes, rather than treating it as an afterthought, tend to outperform competitors. This suggests that sustainability is not just about compliance but can drive innovation in product development and operations, helping companies to differentiate themselves in the marketplace. Musona, Puumalainen, Sjögrén, and Vuorio (2021) further alluded that companies are expected to act ethically, ensuring fair trade practices, decent labor conditions, and positive community impact. Ethical consumerism, which has seen substantial growth, is closely tied to sustainability, as consumers are

increasingly looking for brands that align with their values. Masocha (2021) noted that brands that successfully communicated their commitment to ethical practices-built trust and loyalty among consumers.

The literature on sustainable marketing underscores the growing importance of integrating environmental and social responsibility into marketing strategies. As alluded to by Hysa, Karasek, and Zdonek (2021), sustainable marketing involves educating consumers about the environmental and social impacts of their purchasing decisions. Brands that are transparent about their sustainability efforts and actively engage customers in these practices (e.g., recycling programs) tend to foster stronger consumer relationships. Iannuzzi (2024) noted that engaging consumers through sustainability not only enhances brand image but also encourages responsible consumption. Companies that successfully raise awareness about sustainability issues often benefit from enhanced customer loyalty and advocacy. This also promotes the long-term perspective whereby sustainable marketing shifts the focus from short-term profits to long-term sustainability. It encourages businesses to think beyond immediate sales and consider the broader impact of their activities on future generations and the planet. This requires a holistic approach to business strategy, integrating sustainability into product development, pricing, distribution, and communication strategies. According to Jung, Kim, and Kim (2020), taking a long-term view enables companies to build resilience against future market fluctuations, regulatory changes, or shifts in consumer preferences towards sustainability. It also ensures the long-term viability of the business itself by maintaining resources for future use.

### **Consumer Information**

Consumer information plays a crucial role in marketing as it helps businesses understand customer needs, preferences, and behaviors, enabling them to craft more effective marketing strategies. Literature on consumer information in marketing highlights the essence of consumer information in marketing decision-making, as it allows marketers to provide relevant data that simplifies decision-making for customers (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2021). Online platforms, particularly in e-commerce, have transformed this interaction by offering detailed product information, reviews, and comparisons. This enhances transparency and trust, which are essential for customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. According to Sharma (2021), enhanced access to consumer information has enhanced personalized engagement, whereby, as a result of digitalization, companies increasingly focus on using consumer data to offer personalized experiences. Social media and e-commerce platforms enable businesses to tailor their messaging, promotions, and services to individual preferences, thereby increasing engagement. This interaction is crucial for firms looking to stay competitive in a global market. According to Yuliat and Simanjuntak (2024), consumer information enables personalized marketing, where businesses tailor their messages, products, and services to meet the specific needs and preferences of individual customers. By analysing data such as purchase history, browsing behavior, and demographics, marketers can craft customized experiences that resonate with consumers. Personalized marketing increases engagement, conversion rates, and customer satisfaction, as consumers are more likely to respond positively to offers that are relevant to their needs (Qalati et al., 2024). Through the consumer information, organizations have been able to empower consumers such that when consumers are better informed, they become more selective, demanding higher quality and transparency from brands (Cuculeski et al., 2016). This shift requires marketers to not only provide accurate information but also engage in ethical marketing practices.

Studies on consumer behavior emphasize that access to detailed information affects the psychological aspects of buying decisions (Massie et al., 2023). Factors such as perceived risk, convenience, and social proof can be mitigated or enhanced based on the quality of information provided by marketers. This, in turn, shapes long-term customer relationships and brand loyalty. According to Bernytė (2018), consumer information drives the evolution of marketing strategies by improving decision-making processes, enhancing personalization, and shaping consumer expectations. The ongoing challenge for businesses is to effectively harness this data in a way that fosters trust and delivers value.

While assessing the role played by consumer information in marketing, Yang and Baker (2024) established that with access to detailed consumer data, marketers can create highly targeted advertising campaigns. The authors noted that this involves segmenting the audience based on factors like age, location, interests, and behavior to ensure that advertisements reach the right audience. Targeted advertising maximizes the efficiency of marketing budgets by reducing wastage. Instead of a broad, generalized approach, companies can focus on reaching potential customers who are more likely to engage with their products or services. Product development and enhancements also depend on consumer information, which provides valuable insights into market trends, customer preferences, and unmet needs (Yuliat & Simanjuntak, 2024). By analyzing this data, businesses can make informed decisions during product development, creating products that are better aligned with customer expectations. This leads to the development of products and services that solve real problems for consumers, increasing the chances of success in the market. It also reduces the risk of product failure, as businesses are more in tune with what consumers want.

According to Jin et al. (2020), understanding consumer behavior allows companies to enhance the customer experience by improving the customer journey at every touchpoint. This could be through personalized communication, streamlined purchasing processes, or after-sales support tailored to individual needs. A superior customer experience increases customer satisfaction, which in turn boosts retention rates and brand advocacy. Positive experiences also lead to repeat purchases and higher customer lifetime value (CLV). A study by Santos et al. (2022) also noted that consumer data is essential for predictive analytics, which allows businesses to forecast future trends, customer behaviors, and demand patterns. By leveraging machine learning and data analysis tools, marketers can predict which products or services are likely to be in demand. This, as elaborated by Testa et al. (2020), helps businesses optimize inventory, pricing, and promotional strategies, ensuring that they meet consumer demand without overstocking or missing sales opportunities. It also allows for more proactive marketing strategies, such as offering the right products at the right time to capitalize on predicted demand.

### **Consumer Information and Sustainable Marketing**

Consumer information plays a crucial role in sustainable marketing, significantly influencing how businesses design their strategies, engage with customers, and create value towards enhancing sustainable environmental practices. The availability and use of consumer information have become increasingly important due to advancements in technology, data analytics, and digital platforms. Through the use of consumer information, companies can better derive effective approaches to sustainably market their products and services.

The extent to which consumers are informed about sustainability efforts significantly impacts their purchasing decisions, trust in brands, and overall engagement with companies promoting sustainable

practices. This also applies to the extent to which the organizations are aware of the consumer preferences and tastes. According to Ichihashi (2020), informed consumers are more likely to consider environmental and social factors in their purchasing decisions. As consumers become more aware of sustainability issues, such as climate change, pollution, and ethical labor practices, they increasingly prefer brands that adopt sustainable marketing. The study indicates that a well-informed consumer base enhances the effectiveness of sustainable marketing by driving ethical consumerism. This creates pressure on businesses to maintain transparency in their environmental and social commitments. A study by Young et al. (2010) further supports this by showing that consumers who are provided with detailed product information, including its environmental impact, are more likely to make sustainable choices. Their research reveals that companies must make sustainability information accessible and understandable to empower consumers to make ethical decisions.

Leonidou and Skarmeeas (2015) highlighted that consumer information plays a dual role in fostering trust. On one hand, transparent communication about sustainability initiatives builds credibility and strengthens consumer trust. On the other hand, insufficient or misleading information, such as greenwashing, can result in consumer skepticism and erode brand reputation. Their study points out that consumers who are well-informed about a company's genuine efforts in sustainability are more likely to reward the brand with loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Similarly, Hartmann and Ibáñez (2006) noted that brands that effectively communicate their sustainability achievements, such as reducing carbon emissions or implementing ethical sourcing practices, tend to build stronger emotional connections with consumers. This emotional connection, reinforced by accurate and accessible consumer information, enhances brand loyalty.

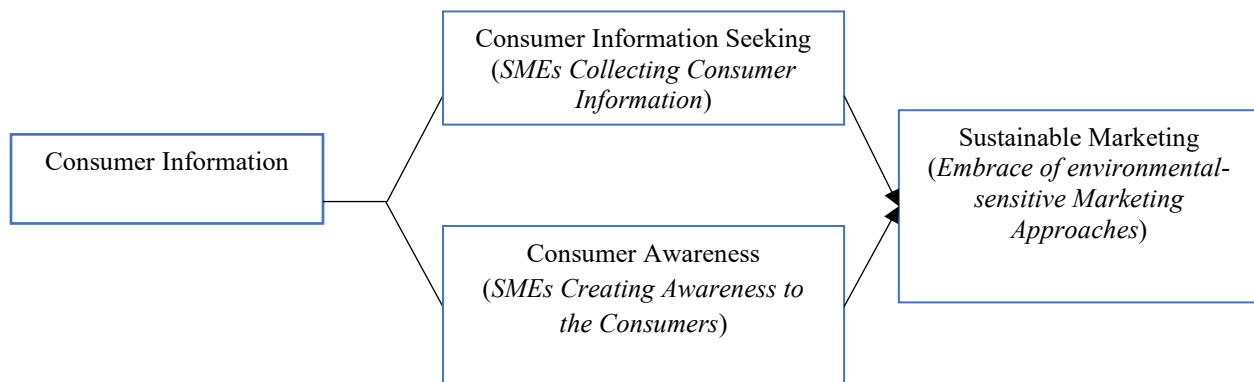
Morgan-Daniel et al. (2020) argue that consumer information plays a pivotal role in shaping brand perception in the context of sustainable marketing. Their research indicates that consumers who perceive brands as environmentally responsible are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward those brands, which can significantly influence purchase intentions. Well-disseminated consumer information about sustainable practices leads to higher consumer engagement and stronger brand perception. Tulloch et al. (2021), on the other hand, suggest that the provision of clear and verifiable information regarding a brand's sustainability efforts directly affects consumer confidence in sustainable products. The study finds that when consumers are informed about the specific environmental benefits of a product, such as biodegradable packaging or energy efficiency, they are more inclined to pay a premium for these goods, validating the role of consumer information in supporting premium pricing for sustainable products.

Polonsky et al. (2012), while exploring the detrimental effects of insufficient or inaccurate consumer information, established that while sustainable marketing campaigns can attract eco-conscious consumers, poorly substantiated claims or greenwashing can lead to heightened consumer skepticism. This skepticism undermines the effectiveness of sustainable marketing campaigns, particularly when consumers feel that companies are exaggerating their environmental efforts. The study highlights the need for companies to provide transparent, evidence-based information about their sustainability initiatives to avoid skepticism and maintain consumer trust. Kumar et al. (2017) extend this by pointing out that in the age of information, consumers are increasingly conducting their research to verify corporate claims about sustainability. This shift underscores the importance of providing reliable, easily accessible information. Companies that mislead consumers risk significant damage to their brand equity and long-term profitability, while those that offer accurate and comprehensive information can enhance consumer loyalty.

Ichihashi (2020) examined how digital platforms, particularly social media and e-commerce, have amplified the role of consumer information in sustainable marketing. Their study revealed that online reviews, user-generated content, and company-provided product descriptions have become vital sources of information for consumers. These digital touchpoints allow consumers to share and access detailed information about the sustainability of products and brands, thereby increasing transparency and consumer empowerment. Carrington et al. (2014) also focused on digital marketing's role in disseminating sustainability information. Their research demonstrated that when companies leverage online platforms to educate consumers about sustainability, they can influence purchase decisions more effectively. Social media campaigns that highlight a brand's sustainability efforts can increase awareness and engagement, further amplifying the impact of sustainable marketing. The literature consistently shows that consumer information is a key determinant of the effectiveness of sustainable marketing. Transparency, accuracy, and accessibility of information influence consumer trust, brand perception, and purchase behavior. Companies that provide reliable information about their sustainability initiatives can foster stronger consumer loyalty, increase purchase intentions, and enhance their competitive edge. Moreover, as Musona et al. (2021) allude, when organizations have the right information on their consumers based on consumer trends, purchasing power, tastes, and preferences can best incorporate targeted sustainable marketing.

### Conceptual Framework

The study was based on the following conceptual framework. The main independent variable is consumer information, which is further conceptualized using two major concepts: consumer awareness (the ability of SMEs to create awareness among the consumers) and consumer-information seeking (the ability of SMEs to seek/collect information from consumers). Through these efforts (consumer awareness and consumer information seeking), it is expected that consumers will be more interested in eco-friendly goods and services, while at the same time embracing efforts by the SMEs to sustainably market their products and services. Therefore, the dependent variable is sustainable marketing, which is the projected outcome as a result of consumer information.



### Methodology

The study embraced an explanatory research design to examine the effect of consumer information on the effectiveness of sustainable marketing in small and medium enterprises in Kenya. The study targeted small and medium enterprises in Nairobi County, Kenya. Using a stratified random sampling, the study sampled 200 SMEs in Nairobi County. The SMEs were surveyed using a structured questionnaire, and the obtained data were analysed using inferential and descriptive statistics.

## Findings

### Response Rate

The study obtained a response rate of 77.5%, where 155 questionnaires were duly filled out and returned for analysis. This was considered adequate for the analysis.

### Demographic Results

The demographic results revealed that 36.1% of the SMEs surveyed were operating in the retail of first moving consumer goods, 25.2% of the SMEs were operating in the banking and insurance sector, 15.5% were in the manufacturing and value addition sector, 13.5% of the SMEs were in the transport and logistics services sector, while 9.7% of the SMEs were undertaking other services. The results further revealed that 30.3% of the SMEs had less than 10 employees, 34.8% had between 10 and 20 employees, while 8.4% had more than 40 employees. Further, 39.4% of the SMEs had operated for a period of between 2 and 5 years, 25.2% had operated for less than 2 years, while 14.8% had operated for more than 10 years. The findings show diversity in the SMEs, implying that the findings would be a good representation of the entire sector.

*Table 1: Demographic Results*

|                     |                                  | <i>F</i> | %     |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Category of SME     | Banking and Insurance            | 39       | 25.2% |
|                     | Retail in FMCGs                  | 56       | 36.1% |
|                     | Manufacturing/Value Addition     | 24       | 15.5% |
|                     | Transport and Logistics Services | 21       | 13.5% |
|                     | Other Services                   | 15       | 9.7%  |
| Number of Employees | Below 10                         | 47       | 30.3% |
|                     | 10 - 20                          | 54       | 34.8% |
|                     | 21 – 30                          | 19       | 12.3% |
|                     | 31 – 40                          | 22       | 14.2% |
|                     | Above 40                         | 13       | 8.4%  |
| Period in Operation | Below 2 Years                    | 38       | 25.2% |
|                     | 2 – 5 Years                      | 61       | 39.4% |
|                     | 6 – 10 Years                     | 32       | 20.6% |
|                     | Above 10 Years                   | 23       | 14.8% |

### Consumer Information Seeking

The first objective of the study was to assess the extent to which the SMEs accessed customers' information through consumer information seeking as a key approach in understanding customer preferences and behaviour. The findings, as shown in Table 1, revealed that most of the SMEs did not collect key consumer information (Mean = 2.74, Std. Dev. = 1.006). The results indicate that the enterprises were somewhat inconsistent in collecting key consumer information regarding buying behaviors. This suggests that while some businesses may actively gather this data, others might not prioritize it. According to Warinda et al. (2020), in the current digital era, when enterprises fail to adequately collect consumer information, they risk missing out on important insights that could make their sustainable marketing efforts more effective. The findings further revealed that the majority of the respondents disagreed that their respective enterprises

undertook consumer surveys to understand behaviours and preferences (Mean = 2.51, Std. Dev. = 1.031). This low engagement level with surveys means many SMEs might not have accurate, up-to-date insights into what drives consumer behavior, particularly with regard to sustainability.

The findings further revealed that most of the SMEs that collected consumer information did so on a voluntary basis (Mean = 3.63, Std. Dev. = 0.994). The findings reflect positively on businesses' commitment to ethical data practices, which is increasingly important in today's privacy-conscious consumer environment. According to Masocha (2021), ensuring that consumer data is collected ethically can enhance the effectiveness of sustainable marketing by building credibility and trust. The findings also revealed that the enterprises were somewhat engaged in using online platforms to collect consumer information, but there is significant room for improvement (Mean = 2.88, Std. Dev. = 0.912). Digital platforms provide a scalable and efficient way to gather consumer insights, and companies that invest in these tools can gain better data for enhancing their sustainable marketing strategies.

On an analysis and utilization of consumer data, it was established that most of the enterprises did not extensively analyze or utilize the consumer data they collect (Mean = 2.36, Std. Dev. = 1.077). This finding indicates a major gap in the process, as simply collecting data without analysing it limits the potential impact on sustainable marketing efforts. As indicated by Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. (2021), without proper analysis of consumer data collected, businesses miss opportunities to refine their sustainable marketing strategies and may fail to capture eco-conscious consumers. The findings reveal several key areas where enterprises can improve their collection and use of consumer information to enhance the effectiveness of their sustainable marketing. While privacy and voluntary data collection are well handled, there are significant gaps in the active gathering, analysis, and utilization of consumer data. By investing in consumer surveys, embracing online platforms, and analysing the data they collect, enterprises can create more targeted and effective sustainable marketing campaigns, thereby aligning with consumer preferences and increasing engagement.

*Table 2: Consumer Information Seeking*

| Statements                                                                                       | N   | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|-----------|
| Our enterprise collects key consumer information regarding their buying behaviors                | 155 | 2.74 | 1.006     |
| The enterprise often undertakes consumer surveys to understand their behaviors and preferences   | 155 | 2.51 | 1.031     |
| Any information collected from consumers is done voluntarily without infringing on their Privacy | 155 | 3.63 | 0.994     |
| The enterprise has embraced online platforms that enable ease collection of consumer information | 155 | 2.88 | 0.912     |
| The enterprises analyse and utilize any data collected on consumer behaviours and preferences    | 155 | 2.36 | 1.077     |

### Consumer Awareness

The second objective of the study was to establish the extent to which the SMEs promoted consumer awareness as one of the critical aspects of consumer information towards steering sustainable marketing. The findings, as shown in Table 2, revealed that most of the SMEs were creating awareness regarding their products and services, as shown by a mean of 3.76 and a standard deviation of 0.941. On giving customers

feedback on key information regarding their products and services, most of the enterprises did not provide adequate feedback regarding key information about products and services (Mean = 2.92, Std. Dev. = 1.034). This gap in communication can hinder the effectiveness of sustainable marketing, as providing clear and transparent information is essential for building trust and credibility among consumers (Ijomah et al., 2024). The findings revealed that the majority of the SMEs encouraged their customers to give their feedback on how they rated the products and services (Mean = 3.59, Std. Dev. = 0.997). As noted by Kong et al. (2021), engaging customers in dialogue is crucial in sustainable marketing, as it helps businesses understand consumer preferences and concerns, particularly regarding sustainability. Encouraging feedback can also foster a sense of community and participation in sustainable practices. Most of the enterprises were also found to have online platforms, such as social media accounts and websites, where information regarding their products and services was made available to the customers (Mean = 3.42, Std. Dev. = 1.003). According to Cavalcante et al. (2021), the presence of online platforms is crucial for sharing detailed information about sustainability initiatives, as consumers increasingly rely on digital sources for information about brands. The findings suggest that while enterprises were making efforts to create awareness and engage with consumers, there were notable gaps, particularly in providing feedback and leveraging online platforms to share key product and service information. As illustrated by Peterson et al. (2021), sustainable marketing's effectiveness largely depends on consistent, transparent communication and active consumer engagement, particularly in areas like product information feedback and the use of digital channels. Companies that improve in these areas are likely to see stronger consumer trust, higher engagement, and a more effective sustainable marketing strategy.

*Table 3: Consumer Awareness Creation*

| Statements                                                                                                 | N   | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|-----------|
| Our enterprise frequently creates awareness of its products/services to the consumers                      | 155 | 3.76 | 0.941     |
| The enterprise gives adequate feedback to customers regarding the key information of our products/services | 155 | 2.92 | 1.034     |
| The enterprise encourages customers to give their feedback on how they rate our products and services      | 155 | 3.59 | 0.997     |
| The enterprise has available online platforms that share key information about our products/services       | 155 | 3.42 | 1.003     |

### **Sustainable Marketing among SMEs in Kenya**

The study sought to establish the extent to which the SMEs had embraced sustainable marketing in their marketing practices. The findings, as shown in Table 3, revealed that most of the SMEs did not encourage their customers to purchase environmentally friendly products (Mean = 2.13; Std. Dev. = 1.041). This low level of engagement may indicate either a lack of consumer demand for green products or a failure by SMEs to promote such products effectively. Without this encouragement, sustainable marketing initiatives may struggle to gain traction. The majority of the SMEs did not actively create awareness around environmental issues such as recycling (Mean = 2.49; Std. Dev. = 1.102). It was also established that most of the SMEs did not embrace sustainable marketing channels (mean = 2.36; Std. Dev. = 0.993), which indicates that the use of environmentally sustainable marketing channels and methods, such as eco-friendly advertising, digital marketing with a low carbon footprint, and the avoidance of print materials that contribute to waste, is relatively low among SMEs.

The findings further revealed that most of the SMEs did not effectively embrace corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities (Mean = 2.71; Std. Dev. = 1.077). CSR is a critical component of sustainable marketing, as it demonstrates a company's commitment to social and environmental issues beyond just profit-making. Activities like community clean-ups, charity events, or partnerships with environmental organizations can enhance a company's reputation and consumer trust. The findings indicate that while a few SMEs in Kenya have begun adopting sustainable marketing practices, significant gaps remain, with the majority yet to embrace sustainable marketing. Most enterprises do not prioritize promoting environmentally friendly products, creating awareness of sustainability issues, or using green marketing channels. To improve the effectiveness of sustainable marketing, SMEs must invest more in raising environmental awareness, adopting eco-friendly practices, and engaging in CSR activities. These efforts could enhance their brand image and attract the growing segment of environmentally conscious consumers, ultimately benefiting both their business and the environment (Peterson et al., 2021).

*Table 4: Embrace of Sustainable Marketing among SMEs*

| Statements                                                                                             | N   | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|-----------|
| Our enterprise encourages customers to buy environmentally friendly products                           | 155 | 2.13 | 1.041     |
| The enterprise creates awareness of environmental issues, such as the need for recycling               | 155 | 2.49 | 1.102     |
| The enterprises use sustainable marketing channels and methods that are not harmful to the environment | 155 | 2.36 | 0.993     |
| The enterprise has always taken part in corporate social responsibility activities                     | 155 | 2.71 | 1.077     |

### Relationship Between Consumer Information and Sustainable Marketing in SMEs

The fourth objective of the study was to examine the relationship between consumer information and sustainable marketing among SMEs in Kenya. This was assessed through the use of correlation analysis and a regression model.

#### Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was carried out to examine the relationship between consumer information and sustainable marketing among SMEs in Kenya. Pearson Correlation coefficient (r) was used. The results, as shown in Table 4, revealed that the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) for access to consumer information was 0.874, implying that there is a strong (87.4%) correlation between consumer information seeking and embrace of sustainable marketing among SMEs. The Pearson Correlation coefficient for the relationship between consumer awareness creation and embrace of sustainable marketing was 0.873, which implies that consumer awareness creation had a strong correlation with the embrace of sustainable marketing among SMEs in Kenya.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis

|                              |                     | Sustainable Marketing | Consumer Information Seeking | Consumer Awareness Creation |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Sustainable Marketing        | Pearson Correlation | 1                     |                              |                             |
|                              | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                       |                              |                             |
|                              | N                   | 155                   |                              |                             |
| Consumer Information Seeking | Pearson Correlation | .874**                | 1                            |                             |
|                              | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                  |                              |                             |
|                              | N                   | 155                   | 155                          |                             |
| Consumer Awareness Creation  | Pearson Correlation | .873**                | .859**                       | 1                           |
|                              | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                  | .000                         |                             |
|                              | N                   | 155                   | 155                          | 155                         |

### Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was carried out to establish the statistical relationship between independent variables (consumer information seeking, consumer awareness creation) and sustainable marketing among SMEs in Kenya. The model summary revealed that R-square ( $r^2$ ) for the model was 0.884, implying that 88.4% of the variation in sustainable marketing among SMEs would be as a result of consumer information through consumer information seeking and consumer awareness creation. The F-statistic of 547.677 revealed that the model was statistically significant. The regression coefficients revealed that consumer information seeking as one of the aspects of consumer information significantly influenced sustainable marketing among SMEs in Kenya ( $\beta = 0.269$ ;  $P=0.000<0.05$ ). Consumer awareness creation was also found to significantly influence sustainable marketing among SMEs in Kenya ( $\beta = 0.219$ ;  $P=0.000<0.05$ ).

Table 6: Regression Analysis

| Model                                        |  | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig. |
|----------------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
|                                              |  | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      |
| (Constant)                                   |  | .005                        | .062       |                           | .077  | .939 |
| Consumer Information Seeking                 |  | .267                        | .044       | .264                      | 6.028 | .000 |
| Consumer Awareness Creation                  |  | .219                        | .043       | .239                      | 5.046 | .000 |
| <i>R-Square = 0.884</i>                      |  | <i>F = 547.677</i>          |            |                           |       |      |
| a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Marketing |  |                             |            |                           |       |      |

### Discussion of Findings

The study results indicate that consumer information significantly influences sustainable marketing among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya. The findings portray that despite the growing need for sustainable marketing through the creation, communication, and delivery of value to customers in a manner that meets current consumer needs while preserving environmental, social, and economic resources for future generations, most SMEs have minimal awareness of the entire concept. This aligns with the

assertions by Mendrofa (2024), who noted that while the world is shifting from traditional marketing, which primarily focuses on increasing sales and profitability, to sustainable marketing that integrates ethical, environmental, and social considerations into business operations and marketing strategies, most of the small enterprises, especially in developing countries like Kenya, are far from embracing sustainable marketing. As noted by Rustam et al. (2020), the inability of SMEs to embrace sustainable marketing is mainly tied to limited awareness and a lack of information on the need for a more responsible market and how to carry out this form of marketing. This, as Sudi (2024) elaborates, has seen SMEs miss the opportunity to meet the changing customer needs and minimize operational costs due to their inability to embrace a marketing approach that promotes responsible production and consumption patterns while building long-term relationships with stakeholders.

The findings revealed that consumer information seeking had a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainable marketing ( $\beta = 0.264$ ,  $B = 0.267$ ,  $t = 6.028$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This implies that a unit increase in consumer information-seeking behavior leads to a corresponding increase of 0.267 units in sustainable marketing among SMEs. The positive relationship suggests that consumers who actively search for information regarding products, environmental impacts, ethical sourcing, and sustainability attributes are more likely to influence firms to adopt and promote sustainable marketing practices. This finding supports the argument that informed consumers exert pressure on businesses to provide transparent, environmentally responsible, and socially conscious products and services. As noted by Purwoko et al. (2023), access to information is fundamental in promoting sustainable marketing, as consumers require accurate, transparent, and reliable information regarding product sourcing, manufacturing processes, environmental impacts, and social responsibility initiatives. As Yawson (2020) argues, information accessibility reduces information asymmetry between businesses and consumers, fostering trust and informed decision-making; thus, when consumers can easily obtain sustainability-related information, they are better positioned to evaluate products and reward firms that engage in sustainable practices.

The findings also revealed that consumer awareness creation had a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainable marketing ( $\beta = 0.239$ ,  $B = 0.219$ ,  $t = 5.046$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The results indicate that increasing efforts to educate and sensitize consumers about sustainability issues contribute significantly to the adoption of sustainable marketing practices. SMEs that invest in awareness campaigns, educational content, and sustainability communication are likely to enhance consumer understanding and encourage responsible consumption patterns, thereby strengthening sustainable marketing outcomes. Although consumer awareness creation has a slightly lower standardized beta coefficient than consumer information seeking, its influence remains substantial and statistically significant. As noted by Sudi (2024), awareness initiatives seek to educate consumers about the environmental and social impacts of their purchasing decisions, enabling them to make informed choices. This implies that through efforts such as campaigns, product labeling, sustainability reports, and digital communication platforms, businesses can increase consumer understanding of sustainable products and practices. As consumers become more aware of sustainability issues, they are more likely to support organizations that demonstrate environmental responsibility and ethical conduct.

The findings support the literature by Gao et al. (2019), who argued that informed consumers are increasingly demanding environmentally and socially responsible products, compelling firms to integrate sustainability into their marketing strategies. Similarly, Mendrofa (2024) observed that access to relevant

product information enhances consumer decision-making and encourages organizations to adopt transparent and sustainable business practices. The results also support the findings of Sheth and Parvatiyar (2021), who found that consumers who actively seek sustainability-related information are more likely to support green products and influence firms toward sustainable market offerings. Hasanein and Rashwan (2026) emphasized that awareness campaigns play a crucial role in shaping sustainable consumption behavior and encouraging firms to adopt sustainability-oriented marketing approaches. Likewise, research by Vedprakash et al. (2025) established that consumer awareness regarding environmental and social issues positively affects purchasing behavior and motivates businesses to strengthen sustainable marketing initiatives. The findings demonstrate that consumer information seeking and consumer awareness creation are important drivers of sustainable marketing among SMEs in Kenya.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that consumer information plays a significant role in enhancing sustainable marketing among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya. The findings indicate that SMEs were yet to effectively leverage sustainability in their marketing strategies, with minimal efforts in promoting environmentally friendly products, raising awareness about recycling, and using sustainable marketing channels. SMEs also showed limited participation in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. The findings demonstrate that both consumer information seeking and consumer awareness creation have positive and statistically significant effects on sustainable marketing. The results indicate that consumers who actively seek information regarding products, environmental impacts, ethical sourcing, and sustainability practices are more likely to influence SMEs to adopt sustainable marketing strategies. Similarly, consumer awareness creation contributes significantly to sustainable marketing by educating consumers on sustainability issues and encouraging responsible consumption behavior. The results suggest that consumer information is a critical factor in shaping sustainable marketing outcomes among SMEs. This implies that businesses operating in increasingly competitive and environmentally conscious markets cannot overlook the importance of providing relevant, accurate, and accessible information to consumers. Sustainable marketing is strengthened when consumers are knowledgeable about sustainability-related issues and when organizations actively engage in awareness-building initiatives.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations to Practice

To the SMEs through the owners and management, there is a need to invest in effective consumer information systems that provide accurate, transparent, and timely information regarding product features, sourcing practices, environmental impacts, and social responsibility initiatives. Businesses should leverage digital platforms, social media, websites, and product labeling to communicate sustainability information to consumers. SMEs, through the owners and managers, should also develop consumer awareness programs through educational campaigns, workshops, and community engagement activities to increase understanding of sustainable consumption practices. Such initiatives can strengthen consumer trust, improve brand reputation, and enhance the adoption of sustainable marketing practices.

### Recommendations to Policy

The government, policymakers, and regulatory agencies have a duty to play in enhancing sustainable marketing among SMEs by establishing frameworks that encourage transparency and disclosure of sustainability-related information by businesses. Government institutions, in collaboration with industry associations and consumer protection agencies, should promote public awareness campaigns on sustainable consumption and environmental responsibility. Furthermore, there is a need for both county and national governments to come up with policies that incentivize SMEs to adopt sustainable marketing practices, such as tax incentives, certification programs, and capacity-building initiatives. The government should also support the development of digital infrastructure and consumer education programs that facilitate access to reliable sustainability information, particularly for SMEs operating in resource-constrained environments.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should examine additional dimensions of consumer information that may influence sustainable marketing, such as digital information accessibility, consumer trust in sustainability claims, information quality, and social media engagement. Researchers may also investigate other organizational and environmental factors that could moderate or mediate the relationship between consumer information and sustainable marketing, including firm size, technological capability, organizational culture, and market competition. Since this study focused on SMEs in Kenya, future research could undertake comparative studies across different sectors, regions, or countries to determine whether the observed relationships vary across contexts. Such research would contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which consumer information supports sustainable business development.

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