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Identifying the Antecedents and consequences of sustainable green marketing strategies for Eco- friendly products

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Abstract

This research aims to identify the determinants and outcomes of a sustainable green marketing strategy model for environmentally friendly products in the Iraqi food industry. This is achieved through the development of an explanatory model based on Grounded Theory. The study employed a qualitative approach, collecting data through semi-structured interviews with 15 experts in marketing and the food industry. These experts possessed at least 15 years of practical experience and were selected using purposive sampling to ensure theoretical saturation. The data were analyzed using open, pivotal, and selective coding, enabling the development of the study's conceptual model. The results identified four main antecedents of sustainable green marketing strategies: organizational factors, market dynamics, environmental and legal factors, and stakeholder support. The central phenomenon in sustainable green marketing was identified as the mechanism linking these determinants to the outcomes. The study also demonstrated that implementing sustainable green marketing strategies leads to a range of significant outcomes, including impacts on behavior and culture, organizational and economic aspects, environmental and social aspects, and brand building. The research presents a qualitative model that explains the mechanism for adopting sustainable green marketing strategies in the food industry sector, and contributes to enriching the scientific literature by providing a theoretical and applied framework that companies and decision-makers can use to develop sustainable marketing practices and enhance the competitiveness of environmentally friendly products in Iraq.

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1. Introduction

Environmental sustainability is currently a major priority for businesses of a variety and activities (Gelderman et al., 2021). Many of these businesses have used sustainable practices and green marketing strategies to emphasize their environmental performance and foster long-term success (Hussain et al., 2023). In this context, the food sectors, have progressively begun to embrace green marketing approaches, focusing on sustainable practices, in recognition of the potential negative environmental consequences of these industries that must be effectively remediated (Kaur et al., 2022). Green marketing contributes to cleaner industrial production by promoting products that do not harm the environment or human health (Esmaelnezhad et al., 2023). The mission of green marketing is to create a sustainable market in which consumers recognize the importance of adopting eco-friendly products (Alhamad et al., 2023) and are willing to participate in improving the environment by adjusting their purchasing preferences toward modern green products (Niketh et al., 2022). Thus, the marketing function within organizations performing a pivotal role in promoting cleaner production and sustainable consumption (Thakkar, 2021). Green marketing encompasses all marketing processes that address human needs in an environmentally responsible manner, from production, packaging, and distribution to the development of new ideas and innovations (Karimi et al., 2022). Therefore, the concept of green marketing goes beyond advertising or sales, encompassing all initiatives aimed at reducing the environmental impact of products (Pancić et al., 2023). Studies indicate that organizations that adopt green marketing strategies often focus first on product characteristics and then on their environmental benefits, while the integration of these two is supposed to be a key feature of an effective green strategy (Rahman et al, 2023). The literature shows that companies that embrace green transformation as a strategic orientation practice green marketing as part of their daily organizational culture, making them better able to integrate the environmental dimension into their plans and objectives (Zhu, S. et al., 2023). Green marketing has become a central focus of modern marketing practices, with increasing governmental and societal demands for adopting green strategies across various sectors (Chen, G., et al., 2024). Through these strategies, companies seek to achieve competitive advantages and improve their profitability within a framework of environmental commitment (Amoako et al., 2022). Green marketing has also evolved into one of the most effective marketing tools in response to the growing demand for eco-friendly products (Biercewicz, K., 2024). Organizations are adapting their strategies by using recyclable materials, eco-friendly packaging, and digital distribution to reduce negative environmental impacts (Ahmed et al., 2023). These practices reflect consumers' growing concern for environmental issues, which has made corporate policies more environmentally oriented (Majeed et al., 2022). Green marketing has also transformed from a small activity into a growing global movement aimed at raising environmental awareness and enhancing the functional value of green products in the minds of consumers (Kar, S. et al., 2022). Despite several studies examining green marketing and its practices in global contexts, the relationship between green marketing strategies and societal cultural patterns remains unclear and limited in analysis (Schmitt, F., 2024). Most previous studies have focused on the environmental and economic aspects of green practices, without delving into the role that societal culture plays in shaping consumer behavior and institutional orientations toward adopting these strategies (Reddy et al., 2023). This lack of understanding of the cultural dimension makes it imperative to examine how societal values and beliefs interact with the principles of sustainability and environmental marketing (Xue, J et al., 2023).

As consumers become more environmentally aware, organizations are developing new products or improving existing ones to meet environmental and consumer needs (Shabbir, S., 2020). This trend is supported by governments and society's efforts to protect the environment and encourage the use of eco- friendly products (Kim, N, et al., 2023). Today, green marketing is a form of social and environmental responsibility for organizations seeking to meet consumer needs in sustainable ways (Khursheed et al., 2022). In this context, research indicates that pro-environmental consumer behavior varies across cultures and societies, as culture constitutes a frame of reference for individuals' perceptions of the environment and their commitment to sustainable behavior (Zhang et al 2021). However, the true reasons for consuming sustainable products, whether individual or collective, remain unclear (Cam, L. et al., 2023). In the Iraqi context, this topic is particularly important, as the concept of green marketing is relatively new to the local market, particularly in the food sector, which is one of the sectors with the greatest impact on the environment (Munaf et al., 2022). Iraqi organizations face challenges related to low levels of environmental awareness among consumers, weak integration between marketing strategies and sustainable practices, and a lack of sufficient attention to the cultural factors that guide green purchasing behavior (Almoussawi et al., 2022). Therefore, studying the relationship between societal culture and green marketing strategies is essential to understanding how to build environmentally friendly marketing approaches that are compatible with the cultural specificities of Iraqi society (Aljadyawi et al., 2024). According on the previously mentioned, this study aims to design a model for sustainable green marketing strategies for eco- friendly products with emphasis on the cultural patterns of society, thus contributing to It considers the cultural and social factors that influence consumer awareness and behavior about environmental concerns, and it attempts to assist food sector industries in adopting practices that are more aligned with sustainability criteria.

2. Literature review

Green Marketing

Green marketing is a modern concept that has gained increasing importance in marketing thought, as a result of global environmental pressures and shifts in consumer behavior toward greater awareness of sustainability (Andersén et al., 2020). Green marketing has been defined in the literature in a variety of ways, depending on the schools of thought and perspectives that have addressed it. (Giantari et al., 2021) defined it as all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchange aimed at satisfying consumers' wants and needs while minimizing negative impact on the environment. (Fuchs et al., 2020) believes that green marketing extends beyond the product to encompass the entire marketing system, including production, distribution, consumption, and waste management, within the framework of an integrated philosophy of environmental responsibility. Some researchers suggest that green marketing represents a strategic shift in management thought, seeking to balance an organization's economic goals with environmental protection by integrating sustainable development principles into the marketing mix (Zubair et al., 2020). Others focus on its social and ethical dimensions, viewing it as a tool for encouraging more responsible consumption patterns that contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities (Irtisamul et al., 2024). Researchers have differed on the scope of green marketing. Some believe it only concerns environmentally friendly products, such as recyclable or low-emission materials, while others believe the concept is broader, encompassing organizational practices, supply chain policies, and green innovation in services and operations (Meet et al., 2023). Some thinkers argue that

green marketing cannot be separated from the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), as an organization's commitment to the environment is a dimension of social responsibility (Yadav et al., 2024). At the reverse aspect, some research has looked into the link between green marketing and green customer behavior (Vangeli et al., 2023). contends that customers' incentive to buy green items is tied to their appraisal of the product's environmental worth and the conviction that their purchase contributes to environmental protection (Roh et al., 2022). contend that this behavior is impacted by a variety of psychological and social variables, including environmental awareness, ethical values, and faith in the authenticity of green advertising (Nguyen et al., 2023). Most researchers agree that green marketing represents a long-term management approach that seeks to achieve environmental efficiency and sustainable profitability simultaneously by strengthening the relationship between the organization, society, and the environment. Despite the varying definitions and approaches, the essence of the concept lies in directing marketing efforts toward achieving environmental value alongside economic and social value, thus contributing to the achievement of comprehensive sustainability goals (Kumari et al., 2022).

Green Marketing Strategies

Green marketing strategies are a fundamental concept addressed in contemporary marketing literature, representing a radical shift in marketing management philosophy toward integrating environmental values into market activities (Tzanidis et al., 2024). Green marketing strategies refer to the set of plans and policies adopted by organizations to develop products and provide services that reduce negative environmental impact, while simultaneously responding to the expectations of consumers who are increasingly aware of environmental issues (Suttikun et al., 2023). As (Sheykhhan et al., 2024) noted that these strategies represent an integrated system encompassing production, distribution, pricing, and promotion, all of which align with the goals of environmental protection and natural resource conservation. The literature confirms that green marketing strategies differ from traditional practices in that they focus on ethical dimensions and environmental responsibility, rather than just profit-making. Also (Ismail et al., 2023) explained that the essence of a green strategy is building a sustainable relationship between an organization and society by delivering true environmental value, which requires a long-term commitment to environmental innovation and efficient resource management. (Green et al., 2023) also sees these strategies as a tool for changing consumer behavior and motivating them toward environmentally conscious purchasing decisions by promoting environmental awareness in marketing messages and highlighting the environmental benefits of a product (Long et al., 2024). Theoretical approaches to defining the nature of green marketing strategies have varied. Some researchers have focused on the product dimension, arguing that the primary starting point is the design of environmentally friendly products that can be recycled or that use biodegradable raw materials (Wu et al., 2024). Others have focused on the communication dimension of these strategies, noting that the effectiveness of green marketing depends largely on the credibility and clarity of advertising messages in expressing the environmental values of the product (Chen et al., 2024). In contrast, (Tsai et al., 2020) argue that green marketing strategies cannot be reduced to product or promotional practices, but must be built on a comprehensive corporate philosophy that encompasses organizational culture, administrative leadership, and internal policies that encourage environmental behavior within the organization. The success of implementing these strategies depends on integrating environmental values into all administrative and marketing decisions, so that the environmental dimension becomes part of the corporate identity (Li et al., 2021). Other studies have examined

the relationship between the target market and green marketing strategies, indicating that differences in consumer cultural and social patterns influence the type of strategy appropriate for each market (Shahin et al., 2024). Organizations operating in markets with high environmental awareness tend to adopt aggressive strategies based on innovation and direct interaction with consumers, while organizations in emerging markets tend to adopt incremental strategies that focus on raising awareness and building trust in green brands (Liu et al., 2024). The literature also indicates that the success of green marketing strategies requires three key components: organizational leadership that supports environmental orientations, a corporate culture based on responsibility, and integration between different departments to ensure effective implementation of environmental policies. Research has also shown that organizations that adopt these strategies achieve a sustainable competitive advantage by improving their market reputation and strengthening consumer loyalty (Lou et al., 2024). Despite the multiple theoretical approaches, researchers agree that green marketing strategies represent a key approach to achieving a balance between economic efficiency and environmental conservation. They are no longer merely a promotional tool, but rather an essential part of an organization's overall strategy, reflecting its commitment to environmental and human values and its drive toward a more sustainable and responsible future (Aytekin et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

This research is utilized of Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) methodology, one of the most prominent inductive qualitative approaches concerned with constructing a theory emerging from the field, rather than testing preconceived hypotheses. This methodology is important in studies seeking to explain complex social phenomena and understand the processes underlying organizational and cultural practices and behaviors (Thornberg et al., 2023). This approach is perfectly aligned with the objective of this research, which is to design a model for sustainable green marketing strategies for environmentally friendly products, focusing on the cultural patterns of society. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is appropriate for the nature of the research questions, which focus on "how" and "why" rather than "quantity." These questions seek to build a deep understanding of individuals' experiences and perceptions, rather than rely on statistical generalization. From a purpose perspective, the research is exploratory and developmental research, as it seeks to generate a new theoretical framework on the relationship between green marketing strategies and cultural frameworks in Iraqi society. In terms of application, it is applied research, aiming to provide practical outcomes that can be employed in a real-world business environment to promote the shift toward sustainable marketing practices. The research relied on semi-structured interviews to collect data, allowing sufficient flexibility to guide the dialogue while maintaining the depth of the content. Interviews were conducted with fifteen experts from academics and marketing managers in food industries sector, and each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded after obtaining the participants' prior consent, while adhering to the principles of confidentiality, privacy, and research ethics (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher adopted the snowball sampling method in selecting participants, given the difficulty of defining the research community in advance. Experts were gradually nominated until theoretical saturation was reached, i.e., the point at which new interviews did not add additional qualitative concepts or ideas. The research stages were implemented according to the Strauss & Corbin (1998) model, updated in recent literature (Kenny et al., 2014). This model consists of three interconnected analytical stages:

open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding stage, the transcribed data from the interviews were analyzed to extract initial concepts that reflect the experts' meanings and experiences. In the axial coding stage, concepts were grouped into interconnected categories that represent the main dimensions of the phenomenon under study. In the selective coding stage, the categories were combined into an integrated theoretical framework to define the core category, which is: Building an integrative model of sustainable green marketing strategies according to the cultural patterns of Iraqi society. MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2024 was used to organize the text data, facilitate coding, and extract conceptual relationships in a systematic and precise manner, enhancing the reliability and accuracy of the analysis. Credibility and dependability were verified through peer review, and some results were presented to the participants themselves to confirm the validity of the interpretations. Table 1 below represents the characteristics of the experts participating in the interviews.

Table1: characteristics of the experts

Expert ID	Job position	Education	age	gender	Esperance (years)
E1	University professor	PhD	57	Male	20
E2	University professor	PhD	53	Male	23
E3	University professor	PhD	50	Female	25
E4	University professor	PhD	55	Male	22
E5	University professor	PhD	60	Male	25
E6	University professor	PhD	53	Female	21
E7	University professor	PhD	60	Male	30
E8	University professor	PhD	55	Female	27
E9	University professor	PhD	45	Male	24
E10	Marketing Manager	MSc	50	Female	20
E11	Sales & Marketing Manager	MSc	55	Male	17
E12	Sales & Marketing Manager	MSc	47	Female	15
E13	Marketing Manager	MSc	65	Male	30
E14	Sales & Marketing Manager	MSc	50	Female	20
E15	Sales Manager	MSc	50	Female	20

4. Results

Following an examination of the theoretical basis and the identification of research topics, a semi-structured interview was developed. This strategy, which comprises asking a structured series of questions followed by the use of additional questions to investigate deeper and more information, was utilized to allow respondents to describe their opinions. The interviews began with three questions, and the interviewees received the three-question interview form and guidance:

Question 1: What are the antecedents of sustainable green marketing strategies with an emphasis on cultural patterns society?

Question 2: What is the Central phenomenon of sustainable green marketing strategies with an emphasis on cultural patterns society?

Question 3: What are the consequences of sustainable green marketing strategies with an emphasis on cultural patterns society?

The first step was coded after collecting interviews with the Research Expert Panel. The data that were similar to each other were dedicated to appropriate concepts. After the data labeling operation, it was done to get a better understanding of the microanalysis that is more accurate and careful. Comparison analysis arrangements were used in microanalysis. This aimed to find possible meanings in the interviewees' words. With this method, the concepts began to be categorized, and each category was classified into more abstract categories. In the open coding process, 15 interviews took place with 387 initial codes (concept). During central coding, the concepts extracted from the open coding phase were merged based on orientations, proportion, nature, and semantic load. These concepts were filtered and duplicates were excluded.

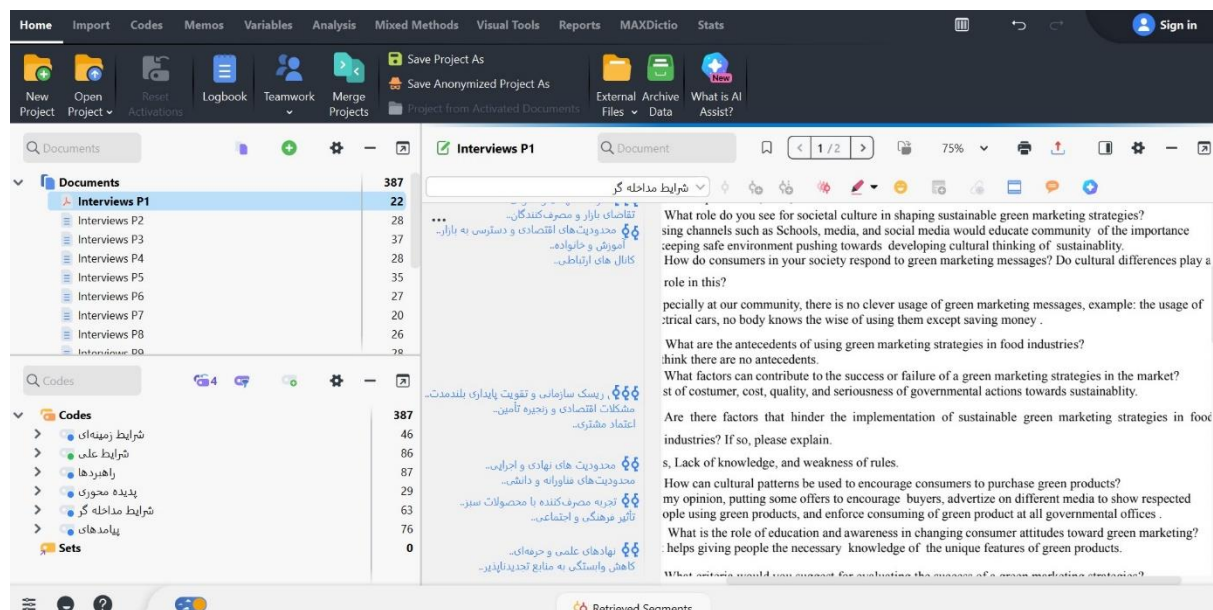


Figure (1): Outcomes of MAXQDA software Analysis

Axial coding is the second stage of analysis in grounded theory. The purpose of this stage is to establish relationships between the categories produced in the open coding stage. In this stage, by screening, eliminating duplicate codes and integrating synonymous codes, the indicators extracted from the interview texts are categorized. The relationship of other categories with the axial category can be realized in six headings, which are: causal conditions of the axial phenomenon, strategies and actions, intervening conditions, background conditions and consequences. Strauss and Corbin (1997) Finally, through axial coding, the results in Table 2 were achieved.

Table 2: Antecedents and Consequences Of sustainable green marketing strategies

Factors	Category	Concepts
Antecedents	Organizational factors	1. Employee support and awareness
		2. Optimizing internal operations
		3. Organizational capabilities and resources
		4. Green positioning and branding
		5. Market and consumer demand

	Market Dynamic factors	Trends and competitive pressure .6
		Economic constraints and market access .7
	Environmental and Legal Factors	Sustainable supply and natural resources .8
		Environmental and ecological pressures .9
		Institutional and legal requirements .10
	Stakeholders support	Scientific and professional institutions .11
		Investors and stakeholders .12
Central phenomenon	Sustainable green marketing	Consumer environmental awareness .13
		Innovation in products and services .14
		Green packaging .15
		Cultural and social impact .16
		Consumer experience with green products .17
Consequences	Behavior and culture	Behavioral change and transformation of consumption patterns .18
		Changing culture and social norms .19
	Organizational and economic	Operational changes within the organization. .20
		Competitive advantage and increased sales/market share. .21
		Reduced organizational risk. .22
		Creating opportunities for innovation and collaboration with stakeholders. .23
	Environmental and social	Improving environmental performance .24
		Institutionalizing a culture of respect for the environment .25
		Reducing dependence on non-renewable resources .26

	Branding	Repeat purchase .27
		Brand credibility .28
		Customer trust .29
		Customer loyalty .30

Based on the above results, Figure 2 shows the research pattern.

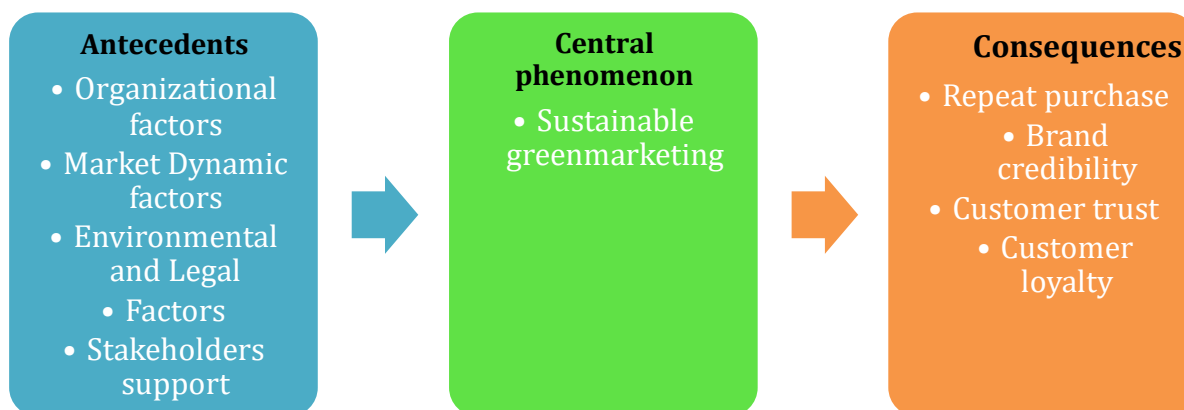


Figure 2: Sustainable green marketing strategies Model for Eco- friendly products.

5. Discussion

The study results showed that the success of sustainable green marketing strategies in the Iraqi food industry does not depend on adopting isolated marketing practices, but rather on the integration of a set of regulatory, market, and environmental determinants, along with stakeholder support, to create an organizational environment capable of adopting sustainability practices and transforming them into a competitive advantage. The results indicated that enhancing employee awareness, developing internal processes, providing organizational resources, and building a green brand constitute the internal foundation for implementing these strategies, while market dynamics, represented by evolving consumer demand, competitive pressures, and economic constraints, contribute to guiding companies towards adopting more sustainable practices. These results are consistent with the systematic review conducted by Yang et al. (2023), which showed that consumers are paying increasing attention to the environmental characteristics of food products across the entire supply chain, and that this trend is an important driver for adopting green marketing strategies. The study also showed that environmental and legal requirements, along with the sustainability of supply chains and the role of scientific and professional institutions and investors, are supporting factors for implementing sustainable green marketing in the food industry. This finding is also supported by the study of Yang et al. (2022), which demonstrated that enhancing consumer awareness of environmental information in advertising leads to improved evaluation of companies and increased intent to purchase environmentally friendly food products. In this context, sustainable green marketing emerged as the central phenomenon linking these determinants and outcomes, by raising consumer environmental

awareness, encouraging innovation in products and services, adopting green packaging, enhancing cultural and social impact, and improving the consumer experience with Eco-friendly products. This finding is consistent with the study by Rahman and Nguyen-Viet (2023), which confirmed that the success of sustainable green marketing strategies depends on enhancing consumer awareness of genuine environmental practices and building brand trust, while reducing greenwashing practices. This resulted in a range of positive outcomes, including a shift in consumer behavior and societal attitudes towards environmentally friendly products, improved organizational and economic performance through internal process development, enhanced competitive advantage, increased market share, reduced organizational risks, and new avenues for innovation and stakeholder collaboration. These strategies also contributed to improved environmental performance, fostered a culture of environmental responsibility, reduced reliance on non-renewable resources, and the development of a credible, trustworthy, and loyal brand, this result is also consistent with the study of Tran (2023), which showed that a positive environmental reputation contributes to building a green mental image and enhancing customer trust and loyalty, which is reflected positively on brand value. This reflects the ability of sustainable green marketing to achieve balanced economic, social, and environmental value, and underscores its importance as a strategic approach to enhancing the sustainability of Iraq's food industry in light of current environmental and economic challenges.

Based on the study's findings, it can be argued that implementing sustainable green marketing strategies in the Iraqi food industry is no longer a marketing option, but rather a strategic necessity imposed by rapidly changing environmental, economic, and social conditions. With growing consumer awareness of environmental issues, increasing regulatory pressures, and intensifying market competition, companies are now required to reformulate their marketing strategies to achieve a balance between economic objectives and environmental and social responsibility. The study's results also indicate that the success of these strategies requires adopting a holistic vision that goes beyond focusing solely on green products. This vision should encompass developing an organizational culture, investing in innovation, strengthening collaboration with stakeholders, and building long-term relationships with consumers based on trust, transparency, and sustainable value. This finding is consistent with the study by Kim et al. (2023), which showed that adopting sustainability, environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices enhances consumer confidence in a brand and increases positive word-of-mouth recommendation in the food and beverage sector.. This aligns with recent literature that affirms sustainable green marketing as a strategic approach capable of improving organizational performance and enhancing competitiveness by aligning market demands with sustainable development goals and achieving shared value for the organization, society, and the environment.

In the Iraqi context, these findings are particularly significant given the challenges facing the food industry, including limited resources, environmental pressures, low environmental awareness among some consumers, and ongoing changes in the legislative and economic landscape. Adopting sustainable green marketing strategies contributes to enhancing companies' ability to adapt to these challenges, improving resource efficiency, reducing negative environmental impacts, raising food product quality, and building a positive brand image. This, in turn, increases consumer trust and loyalty and ensures the long-term sustainability of corporate performance. The proposed model also emphasizes that achieving these results depends not on a single factor, but rather on the integration of organizational,

market, environmental, and institutional dimensions within a comprehensive strategic framework. This gives the study both theoretical and practical value, which can be used to guide government policies and food company practices toward adopting a more sustainable model that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals and enhances the competitiveness of the Iraqi food industry both locally and regionally.

Although this study contributed to developing a qualitative model that identifies the determinants and outcomes of sustainable green marketing strategies in the Iraqi food industry, based on a rooted theory approach, it is not without some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. The study was limited to the Iraqi food industry, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other industrial sectors or economic environments with differing regulatory, legislative, and cultural characteristics. Furthermore, its reliance on qualitative data derived from participant opinions means the results are tied to the specific context in which the study was conducted. Therefore, the study recommends that companies operating in the food industry adopt sustainable green marketing strategies as part of their strategic direction. This can be achieved by enhancing environmental awareness among employees, investing in innovation, developing green products and packaging, and building effective partnerships with governmental, scientific, and professional institutions. Such partnerships will contribute to increased competitiveness and the achievement of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. The study also recommends that government agencies develop legislative frameworks and incentives that support sustainable production and consumption, promote environmental awareness among producers and consumers, and encourage investment in environmentally friendly technologies. On the other hand, the study's results open up prospects for future research that could test the proposed model using quantitative or mixed research methodologies to verify the relationships between its components, or apply it in other industrial sectors, or conduct comparative studies between Iraq and other countries, as well as study the impact of mediating or modifying variables, such as digital transformation, green innovation, the circular economy, or organizational culture, which would contribute to developing the model and expanding its application in different contexts.

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