

## GREEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Green entrepreneurial innovation involves developing products and processes that reduce environmental impact while meeting market needs. The broad objective of this study is to access the effect of green entrepreneurship on operational efficiency of SMEs in Kogi State, Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study consists of 22,715 registered SMEs in Kogi State that is registered with CAC as at 2020. The study employed multi-staged sampling technique and Taro Yamani formula was used to determine a sample size of 379. The method of data analysis was Multiple Regression Analysis with the aid of SPSS version 22. The study found that green entrepreneurial innovation has positive and significant effect on operational efficiency of SMEs in Kogi State, Nigeria with a t-statistics value of (34.408) and p-value of (.000) and that green entrepreneurial marketing has positive and significant effect on operational efficiency of SMEs in Kogi State, Nigeria with a t-statistics value of (4.249) and p-value of (.000). The study concluded that green entrepreneurship impacts operational efficiency of SMEs in Kogi State, Nigeria. The study recommended that Government agencies, financial institutions, and development partners should provide technical support, innovation grants, and tax incentives to facilitate the research, development, and implementation of green solutions that contribute to long-term profitability and competitiveness. Entrepreneurs should be trained in green branding, eco-labeling, and digital marketing techniques that appeal to environmentally conscious consumers.*

**Keywords:** Green Entrepreneurship, Green Entrepreneurship Innovation, Green Entrepreneurship Marketing, Green Entrepreneurship Inclination, SMEs and Performance.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the global business landscape has increasingly embraced sustainable practices, leading to the emergence of green entrepreneurship. This approach integrates environmental considerations into business operations, aiming to balance profitability with ecological responsibility. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which constitute a significant portion of businesses worldwide, are pivotal in this transition.

Green entrepreneurial innovation involves developing products and processes that reduce environmental impact while meeting market needs. A study on SMEs in Thailand's automotive parts industry found that green innovation positively influences both economic and environmental performance (Asadi et al., 2021). Similarly, green entrepreneurial inclination, defined as an entrepreneur's proactive stance towards environmental sustainability and has been linked to enhanced firm performance. Research indicates that firms with a strong green orientation are better positioned to achieve sustainable growth (Jiang et al., 2018). Green entrepreneurial marketing, which focuses on promoting eco-friendly products and practices, can also enhance a company's reputation and profitability. However, some scholars argue that the costs associated with implementing green initiatives may outweigh the benefits, particularly for resource-constrained SMEs (Borghesi et al., 2015).

In Nigeria, SMEs are crucial to economic development, contributing significantly to employment and GDP. The adoption of green entrepreneurship practices among Nigerian SMEs has been a subject of recent research. Adebajo et al. (2023) found that green entrepreneurial practices, including innovation and marketing, positively affect the sustainability of manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria.

However, challenges persist. A study by Eneh (2010) highlighted that a significant number of Nigerian SMEs fail to survive beyond a few years, often due to an unstable business environment and inadequate sustainable strategies. Additionally, the initial costs of adopting green technologies and practices can be prohibitive for many SMEs, limiting their ability to implement such initiatives (Arena & Azzone, 2012). This underscores the need for supportive policies and access to financing to encourage green entrepreneurship.

A primary challenge is the high cost associated with green technologies and equipment. Many SMEs in Nigeria operate with limited capital, making substantial investments in sustainable technologies financially burdensome (Professions.ng, 2024). This financial constraint hinders their ability to implement environmentally friendly practices effectively. Additionally, there is a notable lack of awareness and expertise regarding green entrepreneurship among Nigerian SME owners. This knowledge gap results in a reluctance to adopt sustainable practices, as entrepreneurs may not fully understand the long-term benefits or implementation strategies (Professions.ng, 2024).

Access to funding and investment poses another significant barrier. Traditional financial institutions often perceive green businesses as high-risk ventures, leading to difficulties in securing necessary capital (Professions.ng, 2024). This financial exclusion limits the capacity of SMEs to invest in green innovations that could enhance profitability. Policy inconsistencies and regulatory burdens also play a role in deterring green entrepreneurship. Complex licensing procedures and inconsistent enforcement of environmental regulations create an unpredictable business environment, discouraging SMEs from pursuing green initiatives (Phillips Consulting, 2024).

It is in the light of the above-mentioned problems this study investigates the effect of green entrepreneurship on operational efficiency of SMEs in Kogi State, Nigeria.

In realizing the objectives of this study, the following questions are formulated to be answered by this study.

- i. To what extent does green entrepreneurial innovation affect operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises in Kogi State, Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent does green entrepreneurial marketing affect operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises in Kogi State, Nigeria?

This study intended to evaluate the effect of green entrepreneurship on operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises in Kogi State, Nigeria.

. The Specific objectives include:

- i. To examine whether green entrepreneurial innovation significantly affect operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises in Kogi State, Nigeria.
- ii. To explore whether green entrepreneurial marketing significantly affect operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises in Kogi State, Nigeria.

To address the research question designed for this study, the following hypotheses was formulated and tested in null form;

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Green entrepreneurial innovation does not have significant effect on operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises in Kogi State, Nigeria.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Green entrepreneurial marketing does not have significant effect on operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises in Kogi State, Nigeria.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Conceptual Review

#### Concept of Green Entrepreneurship

Scholars have conceptualized green entrepreneurship through complementary perspectives. Brahmabhatt and colleagues (2017) characterize eco-entrepreneurs as risk-taking innovators who create sustainable business solutions that simultaneously drive economic development and ecological preservation. Their framework highlights how these change agents combine market opportunities with responsible resource utilization. Complementing this view, Farinelli et al. (2011) position environmental entrepreneurship as a transformative force that pioneers sustainable production methods and introduces ecological innovations to mainstream markets. Together, these scholarly works portray green entrepreneurs as catalysts for sustainability who reconcile profit motives with planetary stewardship through cutting-edge business approaches.

This study utilizes Brahmabhatt et al.'s (2017) conceptualization of green entrepreneurs as risk-taking innovators who create novel products and business frameworks that simultaneously drive economic progress and environmental sustainability. This perspective proves especially applicable to Nigeria's developing

economy, where such dual-focused innovation is critical for balancing ecological preservation with much-needed economic advancement.

### **Green Entrepreneurial Innovation**

Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) characterize green entrepreneurial innovation as the proactive identification and exploitation of market opportunities that advance sustainability through environmentally conscious business practices. Their framework emphasizes the deliberate incorporation of ecological priorities into corporate strategy, demonstrating how innovation serves as a key driver of both environmental and economic value.

Similarly, York and Venkataraman (2010) describe green entrepreneurial innovation as the process of identifying and exploiting opportunities to create goods and services that alleviate environmental degradation. This definition emphasizes the proactive role of entrepreneurs in addressing environmental challenges through innovative solutions.

The definition provided by Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) is adopted. They define green entrepreneurial innovation as the pursuit of business opportunities that contribute to sustainability by integrating environmental considerations into core business strategies. This definition aligns with the strategic objectives of Nigerian enterprises seeking to harmonize economic growth with environmental stewardship.

### **Green Entrepreneurial Marketing**

Investopedia (2021) explains that green marketing involves creating and promoting products by emphasizing their eco-friendly attributes, whether these environmental benefits are objectively verified or simply believed to exist by consumers. Similarly, Shopify (2019) described eco-conscious marketing as the strategic promotion of goods and services designed to minimize environmental harm or create ecological benefits, emphasizing how such initiatives can drive sustainable business practices through creative promotion techniques.

This study employs Investopedia's (2021) conceptualization of sustainable product promotion, which characterizes eco-conscious marketing as the process of creating and promoting merchandise by emphasizing its ecological benefits, whether substantiated or perceived. This framework resonates particularly with Nigerian businesses aiming to balance commercial success with planetary conservation efforts.

### **Operational Efficiency of SMEs**

Ibidunni et al. (2021) described operational efficiency in SMEs as the capacity to optimize resource use, ensuring maximum productivity with minimal expenditure while maintaining service standards. This concept reflects the fundamental objective of small and medium enterprises: sustaining competitiveness through cost-effective and strategic management of inputs and outputs.

Afolabi and Laseinde (2022) highlight operational efficiency as a measure of how successfully a business transforms resources into quality outputs. This concept involves not just minimizing expenses but also

enhancing processes, streamlining operations, and strategically leveraging both technological tools and workforce potential. Their research suggests that for Nigerian SMEs operating under difficult economic conditions, achieving operational efficiency is particularly crucial - serving as a key determinant of financial viability despite persistent challenges like poor infrastructure and limited funding access.

This study employed Ibidunni et al.'s (2021) conceptualization of operational efficiency as SMEs' capacity to optimize resource utilization by generating maximal output with minimal input expenditure, while consistently maintaining service standards. The framework proves particularly relevant for evaluating Nigerian SMEs' operational performance, as it equally prioritizes cost-effectiveness and quality maintenance—critical success factors in Nigeria's competitive, resource-scarce business landscape.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Sustainable Entrepreneurship Theory**

The theory was developed by Dean and McMullen (2007), provides a framework that integrates sustainability and entrepreneurial activities. The theory posits that entrepreneurship is a crucial mechanism for addressing environmental challenges while ensuring economic growth. It suggests that entrepreneurs identify and exploit opportunities that contribute to both environmental sustainability and business profitability. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which focuses primarily on profit maximization, sustainable entrepreneurship incorporates ecological and social concerns into business strategies to create long-term value (Dean & McMullen, 2007).

The core idea of Sustainable Entrepreneurship Theory is that businesses can generate economic returns by solving environmental problems. This aligns with the increasing global shift toward sustainability, where consumers, investors, and policymakers demand eco-friendly products and services (Cohen & Winn, 2007).

A key assumption of the theory is that market failures, such as negative environmental externalities, create opportunities for sustainable entrepreneurs to introduce innovative solutions (Dean & McMullen, 2007). This means that entrepreneurs who recognize and exploit these gaps can establish successful businesses while promoting sustainability. Another assumption is that regulatory policies and consumer awareness influence the profitability of sustainable enterprises.

Despite its contributions, Sustainable Entrepreneurship Theory has some limitations. First, it assumes that sustainability-driven entrepreneurs will always have access to financial and technological resources, which is often not the case, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria (Adeola & Animashaun, 2021).

### **Adoption of Theory**

This study is anchored on Sustainable Entrepreneurship Theory. The theory assumed that entrepreneurship is a crucial mechanism for addressing environmental challenges while ensuring economic growth. It suggests that entrepreneurs identify and exploit opportunities that contribute to both environmental sustainability and business profitability. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which focuses primarily on profit maximization, sustainable entrepreneurship incorporates ecological and social concerns into business strategies to create long-term value.

## Empirical Review

Nnabugwu and Odieli (2023) investigated the effect of green entrepreneurial practices on pro-environmental behavior among SMEs in Anambra State. The study covered a sample of 327 SMEs and employed a survey research design, utilizing questionnaires as the primary data collection method. Multiple regression analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25.0. The findings revealed that green entrepreneurial initiatives, innovation, and marketing have significant positive effects on pro-environmental behavior among SMEs. The study concluded that adopting green entrepreneurial practices enhances environmental behavior and recommended continuous engagement in such initiatives to maintain eco-friendly business operations.

Kifordu et al. (2023) examined the impact of green business strategies on the performance of SMEs in South-South Nigeria. The study focused on 278 SMEs and utilized a survey research design with data collected through questionnaires. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and linear regression were employed as estimation techniques. The results indicated that green innovation strategy, environmental orientation strategy, green product differentiation, and green product distinctiveness positively and significantly affect business performance. The study concluded that green business strategies substantially enhance SME performance and recommended that business leaders develop systems that align with green practices to achieve strategic goals.

Alshebami (2023) explored the interactions among green innovation, self-efficacy, entrepreneurial orientation, and economic performance in Saudi Arabian small enterprises. The study targeted 284 small entrepreneurs across various regions, employing a survey research design with data collected via online questionnaires. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used for analysis. The findings revealed that both green entrepreneurial self-efficacy and green entrepreneurial orientation positively relate to green innovation, which in turn mediates the relationship between these factors and economic performance. The study concluded that fostering green innovation enhances economic performance and recommended that small enterprises focus on developing innovative green products and services to gain a competitive advantage.

Ncube and Dlamini (2019) assessed the influence of green marketing initiatives on the profitability of SMEs. The study focused on 150 SMEs in Johannesburg and covered the period between 2017 and 2019. A survey research design was adopted, with primary data collected through interviews and structured questionnaires. The study used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression as the main estimation technique. The results showed that green marketing positively impacted SMEs' profitability through increased customer retention and cost reduction strategies ( $\beta = 0.69$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The study concluded that green marketing is a key driver of financial performance and recommended that SMEs leverage sustainable practices to build consumer trust and market share.

Kumar and Sharma (2018) examined the role of green entrepreneurial marketing in enhancing SME profitability. The study covered the period between 2017 and 2018 and used a cross-sectional research design. Data were gathered from 200 SMEs through structured interviews and surveys. The study applied multiple regression analysis using SPSS. Findings showed that green marketing initiatives, particularly eco-friendly branding and sustainable packaging, significantly improved financial performance ( $\beta = 0.78$ ,  $p <$

0.01). The study concluded that green marketing is a viable strategy for SMEs seeking competitive differentiation and higher profitability. It recommended that businesses develop innovative green marketing campaigns to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized a survey methodology to collect quantitative data via questionnaires, examining the relationship between green entrepreneurship practices and operational efficiency among SMEs in Kogi State, Nigeria. The survey approach was selected for its ability to capture authentic, real-world business conditions and practices directly from enterprise operators, providing empirically grounded insights into actual operational dynamics.

The population of this study comprises of 22,715 operators of registered SMEs which include all the three senatorial districts in Kogi State that are registered with CAC as at 2020 which was sourced from (SMEDAN, 2020). This SMEs are spread across the three senatorial districts in Kogi State.

In this study, a multi-staged sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, was utilized. Taro Yamani formula was used to determine the sample size of 379.

The study made use of 5-point Likert- scale questionnaire for responses which was assigned a value of 1 to strongly agree, 2 to agree, 3 to undecided, 4 to disagree, 5 to strongly disagree.

SPSS version 22.0 was utilized for data analysis, employing multiple regression to estimate the model and evaluate the study's null hypotheses. Data corresponding to the study's objectives were coded into SPSS version 22.0.

**Model Specification**

The dependent variable is Operational Efficiency of SMEs (OES), while the independent variables are Green Entrepreneurial Innovation (GEIN) and Green Entrepreneurial Marketing (GEMK). To achieve all the hypotheses, multiple regression was used to estimate the model. The model is presented thus:

$$OES = f(GEIN \& GEMK)$$

$$OES_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 GEIN_i + \beta_2 GEMK_i + \mu_i \text{-----} (1)$$

Where: OES = Operational Efficiency of SMEs (Dependent Variable);

$\beta_0$  = a constant and  $\beta_{1-2}$  = coefficients of independent variables;

GEIN = Green Entrepreneurial Innovation (Independent Variable);

GEMK= Green Entrepreneurial Marketing (Independent Variable);

$\mu$  = Stochastic error term;

$i$  = Cross sectional; and

*f* = Functional relationship.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

A total of three hundred and seventy-nine (379) copies of the questionnaire were administered to registered SMEs owners in Kogi State, two hundred and seventy-two (272) representing (71.77%) copies of the questionnaires were correctly filled and returned while one hundred and seven (107) representing (28.23%) were not returned. The conclusion was drawn based on the two hundred and seventy-two (272) copies of the questionnaire that were correctly filled and returned.

**Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability Test**

The Cronbach’s Alpha test showed a satisfactory result on each of the study variables as presented below.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.973	12

Source: Researcher’s Computation Using SPSS 21.0 Version

**Model Summary**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.983 <sup>a</sup>	.966	.956	.24813

The regression results demonstrate that green entrepreneurial innovation and green entrepreneurial marketing collectively account for 96.6% of the observed variation in SME operational efficiency within Kogi State ( $R^2 = 0.966$ ). When adjusted for model complexity, these predictors explain 95.6% of operational efficiency variance (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.956$ ), suggesting that approximately 4.4% of influencing factors remain unaccounted for by the current variables.

**ANOVA Output**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	473.250	3	157.750	2562.177	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	16.500	268	.062		
	Total	489.750	271			

a. Dependent Variable: OES

b. Predictors: (Constant), GEMK, GEIN

The regression model demonstrates exceptional statistical significance ( $F = 2562.177, p < 0.001$ ), confirming its validity at the 95% confidence level. These robust results provide strong empirical support for the model's reliability in informing strategic business decisions.

**Test of Hypotheses**

Model		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	-.146	.035		-4.175	.000
	GEIN	.645	.019	.629	34.408	.000
	GEMK	.134	.032	.126	4.249	.000

a. Dependent Variable: OES

The coefficients was used to explain the hypotheses for this study.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**H<sub>01</sub>: Green entrepreneurial innovation does not have significant effect on operational efficiency of SMEs in Kogi State, Nigeria**

The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between green entrepreneurial innovation and SME operational efficiency in Kogi State ( $t = 34.408, p < 0.001$ ). At the 5% significance level, these results provide strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis (no significant effect) and support the alternative hypothesis that green entrepreneurial innovation significantly enhances operational efficiency among Kogi State SMEs.

**H<sub>02</sub>: Green entrepreneurial marketing does not have significant effect on operational efficiency of SMEs in Kogi State, Nigeria**

The analysis further demonstrated a statistically significant positive impact of green entrepreneurial marketing on SME operational efficiency in Kogi State ( $t = 4.249, p < 0.001$ ). Given these results at the 5% significance level, we reject the second null hypothesis (which proposed no significant relationship) and accept the alternative hypothesis confirming that eco-conscious marketing practices significantly improve operational efficiency among these enterprises.

**Discussion of Findings**

This study demonstrates that sustainable business innovations significantly enhance operational efficiency among Kogi State's SMEs, where each advancement in eco-conscious practices corresponds to measurable

improvements in operational performance. The growing importance of environmental entrepreneurship as a catalyst for sustainable economic development is particularly evident in Nigeria's SME sector, where businesses are progressively implementing ecological business models and green product development. This transformation serves dual purposes: responding to increasing environmental pressures while creating new commercial prospects. The expansion of sustainable enterprise has accelerated investments across key areas including clean energy adoption, circular waste solutions, and sustainable agricultural practices. These findings corroborate Nnabugwu and Odieli's (2023) research confirming the operational benefits of green innovation, particularly in developing economies facing both ecological challenges and growth opportunities.

This study established that environmentally-conscious marketing strategies significantly improve operational effectiveness among SMEs in Kogi State, with analysis indicating that enhanced sustainable promotion corresponds to greater operational performance. The landscape of ecological marketing has transformed dramatically, evolving from a challenging specialty practice to a mainstream competitive strategy. Previously, promoting sustainable offerings encountered substantial barriers including customer distrust, minimal public understanding, premium pricing compared to traditional options, and insufficient market interest. Eco-friendly products were often viewed as either premium commodities or unrealistic alternatives, limiting their market penetration to a narrow environmentally-aware demographic. However, the current marketplace features an extensive array of viable sustainable solutions - ranging from cost-effective solar technologies and compostable materials to energy-efficient appliances and sustainable personal care products - making ecological choices both accessible and appealing to mainstream consumers. These results align with Kumar and Sharma's (2018) empirical work demonstrating the operational advantages of green marketing initiatives.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study provides compelling evidence that sustainable business practices significantly enhance operational efficiency among Kogi State's SMEs. The analysis confirms that both eco-innovation and environmental marketing strategies positively and substantially improve business efficiency, highlighting how ecological consciousness can drive operational excellence. As market demand shifts toward sustainable offerings, SMEs adopting green practices gain competitive advantages through optimized processes and resource utilization. These findings ultimately establish that environmentally-responsible entrepreneurship serves as a key determinant of operational efficiency for small and medium enterprises in Nigeria's evolving business landscape.

The study recommended the following:

- i. Government agencies, financial institutions, and development partners should provide technical support, innovation grants, and tax incentives to facilitate the research, development, and implementation of green solutions that contribute to long-term profitability and competitiveness.
- ii. Entrepreneurs should be trained in green branding, eco-labeling, and digital marketing techniques that appeal to environmentally conscious consumers.

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