

**Exploring Antecedents of Green Marketing Orientation in Pakistani SMEs: A Exploratory Study**Zahoor UL Haq¹, Dr. Syed Tanveer Hussain Shah², Dr. Syed Mohsin Ali Shah³

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Abstract

In the developing economies such as Pakistan, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are experiencing growing demands on the environment and cannot implement the sustainability concept because of resource limitations, weak institutions, and disjointed supply chains. Although the role of Green Marketing Orientation (GMO) is increasingly becoming important, little is known about how SMEs adopt it in such situations. This paper will be based on the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV), Institutional Theory and Stakeholder Theory and will examine the antecedent factors of the adoption of GMO in Pakistani SMEs. Semi-structured interviews and 2 focus group discussions that involved 27 SME owners-managers working in various industries were used to collect data that was analyzed with the help of a six-stage thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke. The result shows that adoption of GMO is a configurational interaction between three antecedent groups namely: personal, organizational, and environmental (where corporate social responsibility, stakeholder demands, and government policies lead to the adoption). The research builds on NRBV by demonstrating that SMEs form green capabilities via interrelated and not disjointed drivers in institutional voids. In practice, it raises the importance of specific green finance, sharing platforms, and facilitating the incentives to permit sustainable competitiveness of SMEs in the new markets.

Keywords: GMO, SMEs, Pakistan, Antecedents, NRBV, Thematic Analysis

Introduction

Over the past years, the increasing environmental awareness of consumers, regulators, and world markets has compelled companies to consider sustainability as a part of their strategic and marketing activities. Against the changing environment, (GMO) has become a tactical asset that incorporates the ecological values into marketing philosophy, decision making, and operations of firms (Papadas et al., 2019). GMO does not just stop at symbolic environmental assertions, but rather it constitutes a methodical approach to synchronizing marketing strategy with environmental responsibility and future competitiveness. Although the main focal of the research in developed

economies has been to focus on the results of GMO performance, such as improved brand recognition, innovation, and market performance (Leonis et al., 2013; Papadas et al., 2022), relatively little is known regarding its adoption driving factors, especially in the emerging markets. In a country such as Pakistan, where SMEs account to more than 40 percent of the GDP and almost 80 percent of the jobs (SMEDA, 2023), it is crucial to learn what is behind GMO adoption. The latter firms are forced to work under severe financial limitations, institutional flaws, and disjointed supply chain (Durrani et al., 2024), which complicates the execution of sustainability-oriented strategies in particular. In literature, the antecedents of GMOs tend to be perceived in a discrete and isolated manner, focusing on either leadership commitment, regulatory power or stakeholder involvement (Papadas et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2023). In the emerging economies, however, these factors hardly ever operate in the absence of others. Rather, GMO adoption is likely to result as a product of configurational dynamics, in which personal foresight and environmental values, organizational commitment and culture, and external stakeholder and institutional pressures have a synergistic relationship. Sustainability in these environments does not simply come out of the plenty of the resources but a strategic alignment of the constrained internal and the demands of external legitimacy.

Research Gap

In spite of the increasing interest in sustainable marketing, there is a lack of empirical studies on antecedents of GMO in resource-limited and institutionally weak locations. Previous studies have rarely analysed the contribution of individual, organizational, and environmental conditions to the formation of GMO adoption, especially through the lens of SME owner-managers that act in institutional vacuity. These are complicated interdependencies that are needed to develop the contextualized theory of sustainable marketing in the emerging economies such as Pakistan.

Study Contribution

The research fills this gap by explaining the personal, organizational, and environmental antecedents of GMO in Pakistani SMEs in a qualitative research design that includes interviews and focus group discussions. It combines the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV) (Hart, 1995), Institutional Theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), and Stakeholder Theory to show how internal and external forces are unified to facilitate the adoption of GMOs. The research also uncovers the manner in which resource-constrained SMEs develop green capabilities and match stakeholder and institutional expectations amid the financial and regulatory constraints. This study contributes to the theoretical knowledge on the formation of green marketing orientation in complex institutional settings by revealing the interaction between personal leadership futuristic, organizational climate culture, and pressures of external stakeholders.

Study Objectives and Structure

The primary objective of this study is to **identify and explain the antecedents that drive GMO adoption among Pakistani SMEs**, emphasizing how personal, organizational, and environmental factors interact in resource-constrained settings. Specifically, the research aims to:

1. Explore the role of personal factors such as leadership foresight, environmental awareness, and innovative mindset in fostering GMO;
2. Examine organizational drivers including executive commitment and pro-environmental culture; and
3. Analyze environmental influences, including stakeholder pressures and institutional forces, which shape GMO adoption.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant theoretical foundations and prior literature on GMO antecedents. Section 3 outlines the qualitative methodology. Section 4 presents

the findings organized by personal, organizational, and environmental antecedents. Section 5 discusses these results through the lenses of NRBV, Institutional Theory, and Stakeholder Theory, followed by Section 6, which concludes with practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Literature Review

Overview

The previous research has enumerated various antecedents of Green Marketing Orientation (GMO) (Papadas et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2023). To a large degree, however, this research has concentrated on companies operating in developed economies in which the antecedents have been seen as independent, linear changes, as opposed to interdependent ones. Such linear models are inapplicable in emerging economies, where SMEs experience acute financial constraint, institutional weaknesses and fragmented supply chains (Durrani et al., 2024), since the complex, configurational nature of GMO adoption cannot be described in this manner. It is important to understand the interaction between personal, organization and environmental antecedents to influence GMO adoption in such settings. The given research paper, therefore, explores configurational logic by which internal capabilities and external pressures are brought together so that SMEs could become able to inform their marketing strategies with ecological values.

Personal Antecedents

Personal antecedents reflect the **leadership-level traits and cognitive orientations** that initiate a firm's environmental commitment. In SMEs, where strategic direction often depends on owner-managers, these individual-level factors are decisive. Strategic foresight enables SME leaders to anticipate regulatory, technological, and consumer trends, aligning firm strategy with emerging sustainability imperatives (Rohrbeck et al., 2015). Environmental awareness fosters ethical responsibility and moral motivation toward environmental stewardship (Pacevičiūtė & Razbadauskaitė-Venskė, 2023), while innovative thinking drives the development of eco-friendly products and processes even under constraints (Bhardwaj et al., 2023). A market-driven mindset also motivates SME leaders to view sustainability not merely as compliance but as a source of differentiation and competitiveness (Cao et al., 2023). However, as emerging-economy evidence remains limited, it is unclear how these personal attributes interact with organizational systems and external pressures to enable GMO under institutional voids. This study therefore emphasizes the need to explore how personal foresight and environmental values operate as triggers for organizational and strategic transformation.

Organizational Antecedents

Organizational antecedents determine whether personal intent translates into **structured, institutionalized sustainability practices**. Among these, **executive environmental commitment** is central to embedding sustainability within business strategy and marketing decisions (Mahamuni & Tambe, 2014; Fraj et al., 2013; Shi & Yang, 2018a; Gull et al., 2023b). When top management signals environmental commitment, it legitimizes resource allocation toward green initiatives and motivates employees to adopt sustainable practices. Equally critical is a **pro-environmental organizational culture**, which normalizes ecological values across the workforce and sustains long-term behavioral change (Shi & Yang, 2018b). In SMEs, where formal structures and procedures are often limited, such cultural reinforcement plays a pivotal role in maintaining environmental orientation (Yasir et al., 2020). However, most prior studies treat commitment and culture separately, overlooking their synergistic relationship. This research argues that commitment without supportive culture leads to symbolic compliance, while culture without leadership reinforcement lacks strategic direction, highlighting the configurational interdependence of these organizational drivers.

Environmental Antecedents

Environmental antecedents encompass the external institutional and stakeholder **forces** that shape firms' sustainability decisions. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives enhance **legitimacy and trust** among external stakeholders (Papadas et al., 2019; Shaukat & Ming, 2022), while **stakeholder pressures**, from customers, suppliers, NGOs, and international buyers—push firms toward adopting environmentally responsible practices (Agan et al., 2013; Chan, 2013). Government legislation and environmental policies can also influence SME environmental strategies (Polonsky, 1994; Zhang et al., 2021; Zhu & Tan, 2022). Yet, in Pakistan and similar emerging economies, regulatory enforcement remains weak and inconsistent, reducing coercive pressures. In contrast, **normative and mimetic pressures**, arising from professional networks, industry associations, and global supply chains, are increasingly influential (Zhao et al., 2023). Existing research often assumes these external drivers exert uniform influence, but in reality, **stakeholder and institutional pressures interact dynamically with firms' internal capacities**. For SMEs with limited resources, such interactions determine whether external expectations translate into genuine environmental orientation or remain symbolic.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives, **the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV)**, **Institutional Theory**, and **Stakeholder Theory**, to explain how personal, organizational, and environmental antecedents collectively shape GMO in Pakistani SMEs.

Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV)

The NRBV (Hart, 1995) extends the traditional resource-based view (Barney, 1991) by emphasizing that firms can achieve sustainable competitive advantage through capabilities that minimize environmental harm and promote long-term ecological efficiency. Central to NRBV are the principles of **pollution prevention**, **product stewardship**, and **sustainable development**, which together build distinctive, inimitable green capabilities (Hart & Dowell, 2011). In SMEs, intangible resources such as leadership commitment, strategic foresight, and pro-environmental culture represent **path-dependent capabilities** that substitute for financial and technological resources (Lutfi et al., 2023). This perspective underpins the role of internal strengths in overcoming external constraints.

Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014) explains how organizational behavior is shaped by **coercive**, **normative**, and **mimetic** pressures. Coercive pressures stem from regulatory frameworks and state policies, normative pressures arise from professional and societal expectations, and mimetic pressures emerge as firms emulate competitors or multinational partners to gain legitimacy. In emerging economies like Pakistan, **regulatory (coercive) pressures are weak**, shifting influence toward **normative and mimetic forces**, for example, sustainability requirements from international buyers or industry associations. Thus, institutional conformity becomes a strategic necessity for SMEs seeking legitimacy and market access in global supply chains (Zhu & Tan, 2022; Gull et al., 2023b).

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997) posits that firms respond to the interests and demands of diverse stakeholder groups based on their **power**, **legitimacy**, and **urgency**. Stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, investors, and employees influence corporate environmental behavior, especially when their support is critical to firm survival. In the SME context, **stakeholder salience is contingent** on survival imperatives rather than formal authority. International buyers and customers with sustainability requirements often exert disproportionate influence, while local regulators and community groups remain less impactful

due to weak enforcement or limited awareness (Zhang et al., 2021). Integrating this theory helps explain how SMEs in emerging markets **selectively prioritize** stakeholder expectations aligned with their strategic and resource realities.

Integrative Theoretical Lens

Together, NRBV, Institutional Theory, and Stakeholder Theory provide a **multi-level and complementary framework** for analyzing GMO antecedents. NRBV highlights the role of **internal green capabilities**, Institutional Theory explains **external conformity and legitimacy-seeking behaviors**, and Stakeholder Theory captures **relational dynamics** influencing SME sustainability choices. This integration allows for a **context-sensitive understanding** of how resource-constrained SMEs in Pakistan navigate internal values and external pressures to develop a sustainable marketing orientation.

Methodology

Research Design and Context

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory design (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to investigate the antecedents of Green Marketing Orientation (GMO) in Pakistani SMEs. SMEs contribute over 40% to GDP and 80% to employment (SMEDA, 2023) but face financial constraints, weak institutions, and fragmented supply chains (Durrani et al., 2024), making sustainability adoption challenging. The study followed a constructivist approach, emphasizing participants' lived experiences in shaping GMO practices.

Sampling and Data Collection

Using **purposive sampling**, **27 SME owner-managers** from manufacturing, services, and retail sectors participated, comprising **13 semi-structured interviews** and **2 focus group discussions (FGDs)**. Participants were decision-makers such as owners, CEOs, and senior managers. Data were collected in **English and Urdu**, audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed.

Data saturation was achieved after 13 interviews, and FGDs confirmed thematic stability (Guest et al., 2006; Saunders et al., 2018).

Sector	Firm Size (Employees)	Role of Participant	Number of Participants
Manufacturing	20–250 (Medium)	Owner / CEO	6
Manufacturing	10–50 (Small)	Manager / Partner	3
Services	10–100 (Small–Medium)	Owner / Manager	8
Retail / Trading	5–50 (Small)	Owner / Manager	6
Mixed (FGDs)	5–200 (Small–Medium)	SME Owners / Managers (mixed)	4
Total	—	—	27

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis based on 6 steps by Braun and Clarke (2006) method was applied to data, which was supplemented with theoretical advice provided by the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV), Institutional Theory, and Stakeholder Theory. Transcription and focus group transcripts were transcribed, translated when needed, and coded in NVivo. The first descriptive codes were gradually clustered into superior categories that depicted three antecedent clusters namely personal, organizational, and environmental as found in the literature. The analysis has produced 9 major themes to include Strategic Foresight, Environmental Awareness, Innovative Thinking and Market-Driven Mindset (personal antecedents), Executive

Environmental commitment and Pro-Environmental Culture (organizational antecedents) and Corporate Social Responsibility, Stakeholder Pressures and Government Legislation (environmental antecedents). The analysis determine that the personal foresight, awareness and innovative orientation of SME owner-managers played an important role in launching green marketing activities. Organizational mechanisms, especially leadership commitment and an enabling environmental culture maintained and institutionalized these intended intentions. The adoption of GMOs was further encouraged by external pressures (i.e. pressure by stakeholders, the CSR expectations, and changing regulatory frameworks) but this effect was not uniform across all sectors and market exposure. To achieve the issue of analytical rigor and credibility, the study involved triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. These measures increased credibility of the results and thematic saturation. In general, the discussion shows that the adoption of Green Marketing Orientation (GMO) among Pakistani SMEs is influenced by personal initiatives, organizational capability, and environmental pressures, not the linear and isolated ones.

Antecedent Category	Sub-Themes	Main Theme
Personal	“Anticipating regulation,” “Seeing green opportunity,” “Predicting consumer trends”	Strategic Foresight
Personal	“Concern for pollution,” “Ethical responsibility,” “Personal awareness of environment”	Environmental Awareness
Personal	“Creative solutions,” “Using technology for green products,” “Experimenting with ideas”	Innovative Thinking
Personal	“Adapting to customer demand,” “Competitive positioning,” “Capturing green opportunities”	Market-Driven Mindset
Organizational	“CEO/owner support,” “Leadership encouragement,” “Commitment from top”	Executive Environmental Commitment
Organizational	“Green values,” “Staff participation,” “Embedding sustainability in culture”	Pro-Environmental Culture
Environmental	“CSR for community,” “Environmental philanthropy,” “CSR as legitimacy strategy”	Corporate Social Responsibility
Environmental	“Customer demand,” “Supplier requirements,” “NGO activism”	Stakeholder Pressures
Environmental	“Government regulations,” “Inspections,” “Weak enforcement but regulatory influence”	Government Legislation

Findings

The findings reveal a **multi-level and interdependent structure** of antecedents shaping **Green Marketing Orientation (GMO)** in Pakistani SMEs. These antecedents, **personal, organizational, and environmental**, operate synergistically within broader **institutional and stakeholder contexts**, aligning with and extending insights from the **Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV), Institutional Theory, and Stakeholder Theory**.

Personal Antecedents

At the personal level, four key antecedents emerged: **strategic foresight, environmental awareness, innovative thinking, and a market-driven mindset**. SME owner-managers demonstrated **strategic foresight** by anticipating regulatory shifts and sustainability trends, enabling proactive rather than reactive adaptation. **Environmental awareness** reflected a moral and ethical sense of responsibility toward ecological conservation.

Innovative thinking encouraged experimentation with green technologies, materials, and practices, despite financial limitations. A **market-driven mindset** motivated managers to align sustainability initiatives with customer preferences and emerging market opportunities. Collectively, these findings underscore that GMO adoption is often initiated through **managerial cognition and intent**. In resource-constrained contexts like Pakistan, such personal orientations function as **intangible strategic capabilities**, compensating for limited financial and technological assets and laying the groundwork for firm-level environmental transformation.

Organizational Antecedents

Two interrelated organizational factors were central to GMO adoption: **executive environmental commitment** and a **pro-environmental organizational culture**. **Executive commitment** was evident when leaders devoted time, attention, and scarce resources to green initiatives, signaling authenticity and purpose. However, this commitment translated into sustained organizational change only when supported by a **green culture** that embedded environmental values into daily practices. SMEs fostering **employee engagement, cross-departmental collaboration, and green knowledge sharing** were more successful in institutionalizing GMO. The modeling behavior of owner-managers played a pivotal role, when leaders personally demonstrated environmental values, employees were more likely to internalize and replicate them. Over time, these shared values evolved into a **distinctive, path-dependent capability**, consistent with NRBV's view of culture as a source of sustained competitive advantage.

Environmental Antecedents

Externally, three major antecedents influenced GMO: **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), stakeholder pressures, and government legislation**. **CSR engagement** enhanced legitimacy and built reputational capital by signaling environmental commitment to customers and partners. **Stakeholder pressures**, especially from international buyers, customers, NGOs, and industry associations, emerged as the strongest motivators, particularly for export-oriented SMEs that viewed compliance with global environmental standards (e.g., ISO 14001) as essential for market access. In contrast, **coercive pressures** from government regulation were perceived as weak due to inconsistent enforcement and institutional voids. Nevertheless, respondents recognized that growing environmental audits and policy reforms are beginning to strengthen regulatory influence. This reflects a **transitional institutional environment**, where market-based and normative pressures currently dominate but formal institutions are gradually gaining traction.

Theoretical Insights

NRBV Perspective

The findings support NRBV by showing that Pakistani SMEs develop **intangible, non-replicable green capabilities**—such as visionary leadership, sustainability-oriented culture, and employee environmental awareness, that serve as strategic assets in resource-scarce contexts (Hart, 1995; Hart & Dowell, 2011). These internal capabilities substitute for limited tangible resources and underpin long-term competitiveness.

Institutional Theory Perspective

Contrary to the assumption of regulatory centrality, the study finds that **normative and mimetic pressures**, arising from professional networks, industry peers, and transnational supply chains, carry greater weight than coercive state pressures. Export-oriented firms, in particular, adapt to **global institutional logics** that substitute for weak domestic governance.

Stakeholder Theory Perspective

The results refine stakeholder theory by demonstrating **contextualized stakeholder salience**. Pakistani SMEs selectively prioritize stakeholders based on survival relevance rather than formal legitimacy. International customers, global buyers, and internal champions (pro-environmental owners/managers) exert strong influence, while local regulators and communities remain peripheral due to weak enforcement and limited consumer demand for green products.

Summary of Findings

Overall, GMO adoption in Pakistani SMEs emerges from a **configurational interplay** of internal and external drivers. **Personal foresight** initiates change, **organizational culture** sustains it, and **stakeholder expectations** legitimize it. Rather than following a linear, cause–effect model, GMO evolves through the **synergistic interaction of leadership intent, organizational capability, and environmental pressures**.

Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of how **personal, organizational, and environmental antecedents** interact to shape **Green Marketing Orientation (GMO)** in Pakistani SMEs. Rather than operating in isolation, these antecedents function **configurationally**, meaning their effects are mutually reinforcing. **Personal foresight and awareness** ignite the intent to act sustainably, **organizational commitment and culture** institutionalize that intent, and **environmental pressures** grant legitimacy and external validation. Together, these dynamics reveal that GMO adoption is not a linear progression but a **systemic process** shaped by the interaction of individual values, organizational structures, and contextual influences.

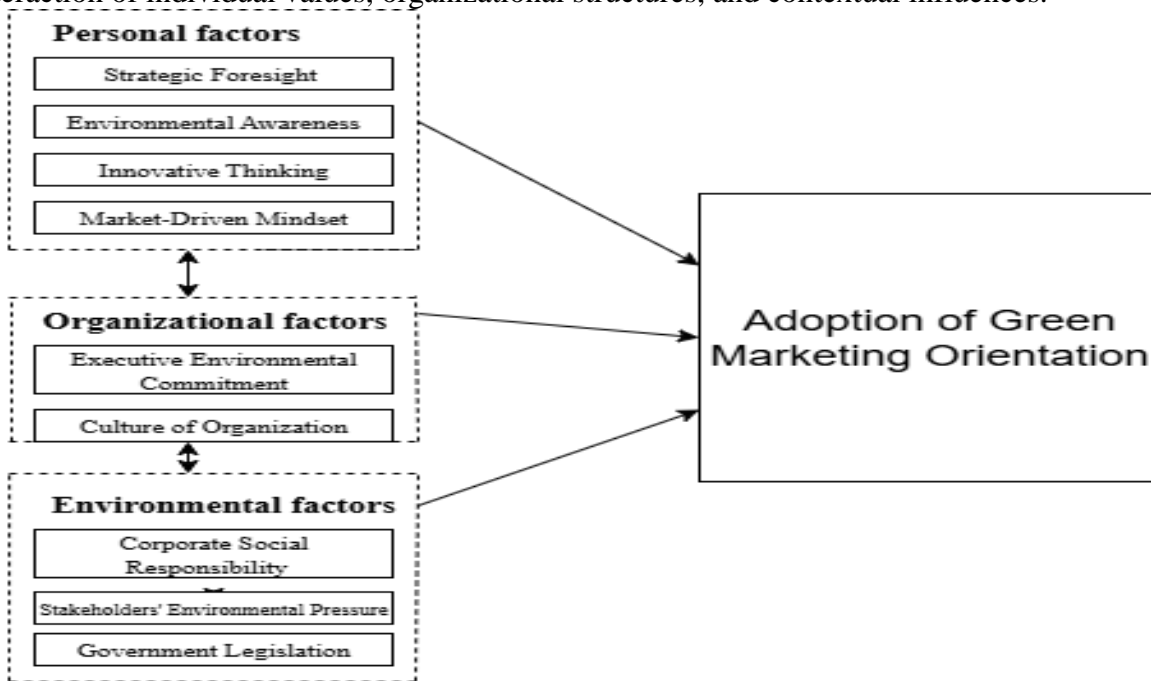


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

Integrating Theoretical Perspectives

The Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV), the Institutional Theory and the Stakeholder Theory would be integrated to present a multi-level explanation of the GMO adoption. The results are validated through the NRBV approach that SMEs may become sustainable despite the lack of financial and technological resources by utilizing intangible assets including leadership commitment, strategic foresight, and culture pro-environmental. These internal capabilities serve as an alternative to resource abundance which supports NRBV to state that environmental

capabilities are a cause of sustained competitive advantage in the environment of the emerging economies. The premise of coercive regulatory pressures being the chief stimuli to environmental action is refuted through the application of Institutional Theory. Normative and mimetic pressures, which are created by the peers of the industry, transnational supply chains, and global sustainability standards have more influence in the weak regulatory environment in Pakistan. This implies that market and network-based solutions do not eliminate the progress of the environment, rather, institutional voids are filled by the ineffective formal institutions. The research, in the context of the Stakeholder Theory, indicates that SMEs are selective about prioritizing the stakeholders depending on the survival needs and power-dependence relations. Disproportional influence is applied by international consumers and internal advocates (owners/managers) and peripheral influence by local regulators and communities. Such a subtle prioritization is an extension of traditional stakeholder models that indicate how the salience of stakeholders in emerging markets is contextually determined by resource constraint and market pressure. All these theoretical integrations highlight the fact that GMO in SMEs contextual adaptation of existing theories is important to understand. In the developing economies, there are transformations in environmental practices, and these transformations involve the logic of hybridity, between internal motivation, organizational adaptations, and external pressures of legitimacy.

Interpreting Findings in Light of Literature

Personal Antecedents

The study highlights **strategic foresight, environmental awareness, innovative thinking, and a market-driven mindset** as key personal-level drivers of GMO. These findings align with prior research emphasizing foresight in anticipating sustainability challenges (Rohrbeck et al., 2015) and managerial environmental awareness as a moral and strategic asset (Pacevičiūtė & Razbadauskaitė-Venskė, 2023). However, this study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating that foresight and awareness must be **accompanied by innovation and market orientation** to be effective in resource-constrained settings. Thus, personal antecedents in SMEs are both **value-driven and opportunity-oriented**, blending ethical commitment with pragmatic adaptation.

Organizational Antecedents

At the organizational level, **executive commitment** and a **pro-environmental culture** emerge as critical enablers for translating intent into sustained practice. Previous studies (Fraj et al., 2013; Shi & Yang, 2018a) emphasize the role of leadership in sustainability adoption, while more recent work (Gull et al., 2023b) highlights the importance of cultural reinforcement in SMEs with limited formal structures. This study adds that **commitment alone is insufficient** unless supported by a culture that normalizes sustainability across daily routines and employee behavior. The interplay between leadership and culture thus reinforces a **configurational logic**, where multiple organizational factors combine to institutionalize GMO practices.

Environmental Antecedents

Externally, **corporate social responsibility (CSR), stakeholder pressures, and government legislation** shape the adoption of GMO. The findings corroborate evidence that CSR enhances legitimacy (Papadas et al., 2019; Shaukat & Ming, 2022) and that stakeholder influence is central to SME sustainability (Agan et al., 2013; Chan, 2013). However, the study also challenges existing assumptions by showing that **stakeholder and market pressures outweigh regulatory influence** in Pakistan due to weak enforcement and institutional gaps (Zhu & Tan, 2022). This suggests that environmental advancement in such contexts depends more on **voluntary and relational mechanisms** than on formal regulation.

From Linear to Configurational Understanding

Most previous studies treat antecedents of GMO as **independent, linear predictors** of environmental performance. This research advances a **configurational perspective**, showing that personal, organizational, and environmental antecedents are **interdependent and complementary**. For example, **personal foresight** without **organizational commitment** remains aspirational, while **organizational culture** without **external legitimacy** lacks direction and recognition. This **systemic view** moves beyond reductionist models, illustrating that GMO adoption in SMEs is a **dynamic process of alignment**, between values and strategies, internal resources and external expectations, and local constraints and global opportunities. In essence, this study reveals that the path toward Green Marketing Orientation in Pakistani SMEs is **neither top-down nor bottom-up**, but **emergent and interactive**. The interplay among personal foresight, organizational culture, and environmental pressures forms a cohesive ecosystem through which SMEs cultivate sustainable competitiveness. These findings reinforce and extend established theoretical frameworks, while offering a **contextually grounded understanding** of how green marketing capabilities evolve within emerging economy constraints.

Theoretical Contributions

This study advances the theoretical understanding of **Green Marketing Orientation (GMO)** by confirming established insights, challenging conventional assumptions, and extending the boundaries of existing frameworks, specifically the **Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV)**, **Institutional Theory**, and **Stakeholder Theory**, to the context of **SMEs in an emerging economy**. The findings illuminate how personal, organizational, and environmental antecedents interact configurationally to shape GMO adoption.

Confirming Prior Knowledge

The study reinforces key propositions of the **Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV)**, demonstrating that environmental capabilities, such as **strategic foresight, leadership commitment, and a green organizational culture**, function as valuable strategic resources that contribute to sustained competitive advantage (Hart, 1995; Hart & Dowell, 2011). These capabilities enable SMEs to mitigate environmental risks and capitalize on emerging green opportunities. Additionally, the findings affirm the relevance of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997), revealing that the salience of customers, international buyers, and supply chain partners strongly motivates GMO adoption. Particularly for export-oriented SMEs, alignment with stakeholder expectations becomes both a strategic and survival imperative.

Challenging Prevailing Assumptions

While Institutional Theory traditionally emphasizes coercive pressures, such as government regulations, as primary drivers of environmental practices (Scott, 2014), this study challenges that assumption within the Pakistani SME context. The findings reveal that regulatory enforcement remains weak due to institutional voids and fragmented governance. Instead, normative and mimetic pressures, particularly from industry peers, international buyers, and professional associations, serve as the dominant forces shaping environmental behavior. This shift highlights the adaptive agency of SMEs that respond to informal and market-based pressures when formal institutions are ineffective.

Extending Existing Frameworks

NRBV Extension

The study broadens the NRBV by illustrating that in **resource-constrained environments, intangible assets**, such as managerial foresight, pro-environmental values, and organizational

learning, can substitute for limited financial and technological resources. This extension underscores how SMEs build green capabilities through **cognitive and cultural capital**, not merely through physical or technological means.

5.6.2 Institutional Theory Extension

The research refines Institutional Theory by demonstrating that in **weak governance contexts, global institutional logics**, emanating from international supply chains, export markets, and global sustainability norms, can **substitute for domestic regulatory pressures**. This highlights a form of “institutional borrowing,” where external legitimacy is derived from compliance with transnational rather than local expectations.

Stakeholder Theory Refinement

The findings reveal that SMEs in emerging economies prioritize stakeholders selectively. International buyers and internal champions (such as owner-managers) hold disproportionate influence, while local regulators and communities remain peripheral. This selective engagement reflects power–dependence asymmetries and survival-driven pragmatism. It refines Stakeholder Theory by emphasizing that stakeholder salience in emerging economies is shaped more by market power and dependency relationships than by normative considerations of fairness or inclusivity.

Integrated Theoretical Insight

Collectively, these findings underscore that the antecedents of GMO cannot be adequately explained by theories conceptualized within developed-country settings. Instead, they must be contextualized to reflect the realities of emerging economies, where institutional weaknesses, resource scarcity, and global linkages jointly shape strategic behavior. The interplay between personal, organizational, and environmental antecedents provides a holistic theoretical lens:

- Personal foresight and environmental awareness ignite intent toward green practices.
- Organizational commitment and culture transform that intent into institutionalized routines.
- External stakeholder and market pressures confer legitimacy and reinforce adoption.

In sum, this study contributes to the contextual evolution of NRBV, Institutional Theory, and Stakeholder Theory, offering a nuanced framework for understanding how SMEs in emerging economies strategically navigate environmental sustainability despite institutional voids and resource limitations.

Implications

Theoretical Contribution

This study extends the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV) by demonstrating how resource-constrained SMEs in institutionally weak contexts can still develop and sustain green capabilities. Unlike traditional NRBV applications that assume mature institutional environments, this study shows that SMEs in emerging economies can strategically align personal initiative, organizational commitment, and environmental pressures to cultivate **Green Marketing Orientation (GMO)**. By emphasizing the configurational interplay among these antecedents rather than a linear cause–effect relationship, the study contributes to a more context-sensitive and dynamic understanding of how green capabilities emerge under constraints.

Practical Implications

The findings provide several actionable insights for policymakers, SME managers, and industry associations seeking to strengthen sustainable marketing practices in emerging economies such as Pakistan.

Personal Antecedents → Leadership and Skills Development

Because strategic foresight and environmental awareness are key personal drivers of GMO, SME managers need targeted skill development rather than generic environmental training.

- **Leadership development programs** should emphasize tools for **strategic foresight**, enabling managers to anticipate environmental regulations, evolving customer preferences, and sustainability trends.
- **Capacity-building workshops** should include **life-cycle assessment (LCA)** and **eco-design principles**, enabling SMEs to evaluate and minimize the environmental impact of materials, production processes, and product end-of-life.
- Partnering with universities and green entrepreneurship hubs can help integrate sustainability competencies into managerial training programs.

Organizational Antecedents → Institutionalizing a Pro-Environmental Culture

To translate leadership commitment into sustained practice, environmental values must be embedded within organizational routines and culture.

- Policymakers and SME development agencies should promote green certification schemes that reward firms not only for compliance but for embedding sustainability in everyday decision-making.
- **Peer learning and benchmarking networks** can allow SMEs to share success stories, templates for environmental reporting, and strategies for overcoming internal resistance to change.
- Internal reward systems recognizing eco-innovation and energy efficiency achievements can further reinforce pro-environmental behavior.

Environmental Antecedents → Leveraging Stakeholders and Regulatory Mechanisms

Given that **stakeholder pressures** currently exert stronger influence than formal regulation in Pakistan, effective strategies should capitalize on these informal drivers while strengthening institutional frameworks.

- **Buyer–supplier partnerships** and **industry consortiums** should be encouraged to share access to green technologies, renewable energy infrastructure, and sustainable supply chain solutions.
- **Export promotion policies** could link incentives with adherence to international environmental standards (e.g., ISO 14001, EU Green Deal compliance), pushing SMEs toward globally recognized sustainability benchmarks.
- Governments should shift from prescriptive regulations to **performance-based incentives**, such as **tax rebates, green subsidies, and low-interest loans** for verified reductions in carbon emissions or waste generation (Lutfi et al., 2023).

By combining **individual foresight, organizational institutionalization, and stakeholder collaboration**, SMEs can progressively embed green values into their business models. For policymakers, the key is to **enable rather than enforce**—providing resources, incentives, and learning opportunities that empower SMEs to pursue sustainable competitiveness. For practitioners, the findings highlight that GMO is not a one-time strategic decision but a continual capability-building process, evolving through innovation, collaboration, and leadership commitment.

Conclusion

This study uncovers a set of interrelated antecedents, personal, organizational, and environmental, that collectively drive the adoption of Green Marketing Orientation among Pakistani SMEs. Specifically, strategic foresight, environmental awareness, and innovative thinking emerge as key personal factors that trigger green intent. At the organizational level, executive commitment, pro-environmental culture, and corporate social responsibility institutionalize this intent into consistent practice. Externally, stakeholder pressures and government legislation provide legitimacy and direction for green marketing adoption. The findings emphasize that GMO adoption in SMEs is configurational rather than linear, it results from the dynamic interplay between internal capabilities and external expectations. By situating these insights within the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV), the study advances theoretical understanding of how resource-constrained firms in emerging economies cultivate green capabilities for sustainable advantage.

Limitations of the study

Although the given qualitative research provides important information on the antecedents of Green Marketing Orientation (GMO) among the Pakistani SMEs, it possesses a number of limitations. First, its purposive sample, 13 interviews and 2 focus groups of 27 SME owner-managers do not allow it to be generalized to the rest of the SME population. Second, the use of self-reported data might have created the social desirability bias because participants might have exaggerated their environmental commitment. Third, the cross-sectional design does not allow the evolution of GMO adoption to be seen in detail and instead gives a one-point picture of it. Fourth, the thematic analysis was conducted very thoroughly, although it is possible that the interpretation of the researcher has affected the coding and the development of the themes, which is a typical weakness of qualitative studies. Fifth, the fact that it is based on the institutional and resource-constrained specificities of Pakistan might not be transferred to other economies with other environmental policies or market structures. Lastly, although the qualitative stage determined the relationship between antecedents of GMO, it did not provide statistical tests.

Future Research Directions

Quantitative verification of the configurational model of antecedents found in the current research, including personal, organizational, and environmental could be done in future researches with more comprehensive SME samples and more powerful tools, like Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or fsQCA, to statistically test the causal pathways and mediation effects. The longitudinal studies would be able to record the evolving nature of these antecedents in relation to the policy, regulation and pressure of stakeholders and provide a dynamic perspective on Green Marketing Orientation (GMO) adoption. Comparison of studies in emerging economies would help determine which antecedents are universal and which particular to the context and sectoral studies might identify whether there are industry-specific differences in green orientation and innovation practices. The other open opportunity is to investigate the place of digitalization. Further studies would be interested in the ways in which digital tools, platforms, and data analytics can help the SMEs in resource-restricted environments to address information asymmetries, coordination gaps, and resource barriers during the application of GMO - a theme subtly emerging within the references of participants around the use of digital tools by participants. Lastly, sequential or convergent mixed-method designs could be used which would combine the richness of qualitative with the generalizability of quantitative data and would improve both theoretical and practical applicability. Generally, these guidelines further the contribution of this study by recommending empirically-based, context-specific, and technology-conscious researches into the relationship between how SMEs achieve sustainable competitiveness with GMO in developing economies.

Appendix 1

Interview Protocol

A **semi-structured interview guide** was developed to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences. The protocol was informed by the study's theoretical framework (NRBV, Institutional Theory, and Stakeholder Theory) and prior literature on Green Marketing Orientation (Papadas et al., 2019; Leonidou et al., 2013).

Key themes and sample questions included:

1. Personal Factors

- Probed SME owner-managers' strategic foresight, environmental awareness, and innovative thinking.
- Example: "How do your personal values or experiences shape your views on adopting environmentally friendly business practices?"

2. Organizational Factors

- Explored the role of executive commitment **and** pro-environmental organizational culture.
- Example: "In what ways has your organization encouraged or discouraged adopting green marketing practices?"

3. Environmental Factors

- Investigated stakeholder pressures, CSR engagement, and government regulations.
- Example: "What external pressures (customers, suppliers, government, NGOs) influence your decisions to adopt green practices?"

The guide also included follow-up prompts to encourage participants to provide concrete examples and reflections, thereby ensuring depth and richness of responses.

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