

POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF GREEN MARKETING BASED ON COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE. AN ANALYSIS OF ECOLOGICAL DIFFERENTIATION POTENTIALS FOR POSITIONING IN THE COMPETITIVE CONSUMER GOODS MARKET

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important in the consumer goods market and has a significant influence on the strategic orientation of companies. Especially in highly competitive and saturated markets, companies are faced with the challenge of differentiating themselves from competitors through ecological and sustainable positioning. This thesis examines the possibilities and limits of green marketing in the competitive consumer goods market and analyzes how competitive intelligence (CI) can support companies in identifying and strategically exploiting ecological differentiation potentials. The study is based on a systematic literature analysis that combines theoretical approaches to green marketing, sustainability-oriented consumer behaviour and CI as a strategic analysis tool.

The results show that green marketing can create a wide range of competitive advantages, in particular through sustainable product design, transparent communication, stronger customer loyalty and improved brand positioning. CI enables companies to identify market changes, consumer expectations and competitive dynamics at an early stage and to derive strategic recommendations for action from them. At the same time, the analysis highlights key challenges, including the skepticism of many consumers about sustainability promises, the so-called sustainability attitude-behavior gap, and the risks of greenwashing, which can affect credibility and trust in sustainable brands.

KEYWORDS Green marketing, competitive intelligence, opportunities for differentiation, positioning, competitive consumer goods market.

Problem statement

Despite the growing importance of green marketing, companies continue to face a variety of challenges in implementing sustainable strategies. Increasing competition in the consumer goods market makes it difficult for companies to prevail over competitors in the long term and to secure or expand their market position in the long term (Gillner, 2021). At the same time, companies are expected to authentically integrate ecological values into their entire corporate strategy and to communicate it credibly (Kreutzer, 2023).

Although green marketing offers companies the opportunity to differentiate themselves from the competition, the effect of ecological marketing measures can be impaired by accusations of greenwashing. This is especially true when the credibility of ecological statements by consumers is questioned (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). This creates the challenge for companies not only to use sustainability communicatively, but also to integrate it credibly and strategically into their business processes in order to achieve long-term competitive advantages.

Relevance of the chosen topic

The relevance of the topic results from the increasing importance of sustainability and ethical responsibility in the current corporate environment. As moral and social issues are increasingly coming into focus among the population, corporate decisions are being evaluated more critically, which increases public pressure on

companies (Scholz et al., 2018). At the same time, consumers increasingly expect companies to actively take social and ecological interests into account and offer corresponding products (Kreutzer, 2023).

In addition, sustainability has evolved from an originally specialized environmental aspect to a central component of the consumer and mass market (Grimm & Malschinger, 2021). Especially in the competitive consumer goods market, where many products are interchangeable, green marketing is becoming increasingly important as an instrument for ecological differentiation. This allows companies to position themselves strategically and strengthen their competitiveness (Kraus, 2020).

Analysis of recent research and publications

Current research is increasingly investigating the connections between green marketing, sustainable corporate strategies and the competitive environment. Studies show that companies not only use green marketing to market environmentally friendly products, but also use it as a strategic tool to differentiate and strengthen their competitiveness. In particular, consumer behavior, brand perception and regulatory framework conditions play a central role. This is because Generation Z's willingness to pay for environmentally friendly products depends heavily on environmental awareness, perceived product quality and price sensitivity. At the same time, green marketing is described as an approach that systematically integrates ecological sustainability into traditional marketing processes and is intended to promote environmentally conscious consumer behavior (Gomes et al., 2023; Kiyak & Grigoliene, 2023).

In addition, studies emphasize that green marketing can create sustainable competitive advantages through ecological differentiation and building trust. It is emphasized that environmental awareness must be consistently integrated into all marketing areas in order to ensure long-term competitiveness. At the same time, research points to challenges such as greenwashing, which can impair consumer trust and limit the effectiveness of ecological marketing strategies (De Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Duttagupta et al., 2023).

Recent publications also illustrate the importance of CI in sustainability-oriented markets. Research shows that CI strengthens the competitiveness of companies, improves decision-making processes and supports companies in identifying market opportunities, sustainability trends and technological developments at an early stage (Kazemi & Soltani, 2024; Stefanikova et al., 2015). In addition, CI enables the development of innovative sustainable products and environmentally friendly business models (Hair & Sabol, 2024; Kazemi & Soltani, 2024; Kiyak & Grigoliene, 2023).

The theoretical approaches to ecological differentiation are based in particular on the resource-based view and stakeholder-oriented perspectives. Environmentally friendly technologies, sustainable products and expertise in environmental management are considered strategic resources for creating sustainable competitive advantages (Li et al., 2024). At the same time, it is emphasized that long-term relationships with consumers and other stakeholders as well as the analysis of ecological trends and competitive developments are crucial for successful market positioning (Moravcikova et al., 2017; Kazemi & Soltani, 2024; Hair & Sabol, 2024).

Despite increasing research, several research gaps remain. Previous studies have mainly focused on the short-term effects of green marketing, while long-term effects have so far only been investigated to a limited extent

(Rathore, 2018). In addition, there is a lack of practice-oriented research on the implementation of green marketing strategies, especially in digital marketing and in emerging and developing countries (Alkhatib et al., 2023; Rathore, 2018). In addition, the connection between CI and green marketing in the consumer goods market has so far been researched only to a limited extent (Kazemi & Soltani, 2024).

Purpose of the article

The aim of this article is to analyze green marketing in the context of the highly competitive consumer goods market and to work out its significance for the ecological differentiation of companies (Baca & Reshidi, 2025). The study examines the extent to which sustainable marketing strategies can contribute to the creation of competitive advantages and what prerequisites are necessary for successful implementation. A special focus is on the challenges associated with the implementation of green marketing (Vuong et al., 2024).

In addition, CI is included in the analysis as a supporting strategic tool. The aim is to show how companies can identify sustainable opportunities at an early stage and use them in a more targeted manner through the systematic collection and evaluation of market and competitive information (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

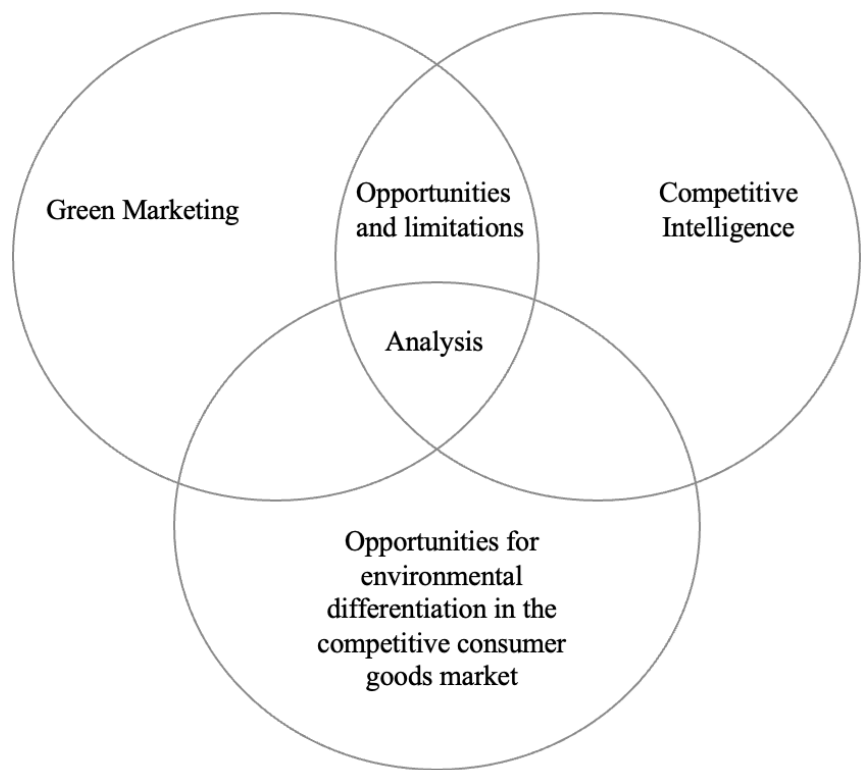


Fig. 1: Research Fields
Source: Illustrated by author

The overlap of the three areas describes the analysis of ecological differentiation potentials in the competitive consumer goods market with the inclusion of green marketing and CI as shown in Figure 1.

The focus is on the question of how companies can use sustainable properties of their products in a targeted manner to stand out from competitors. Green marketing provides the strategies for environmentally oriented positioning and communication, while CI provides information about market trends, competitive behavior and customer needs.

The common intersection shows both the possibilities and the limitations of this analysis, as companies can create competitive advantages through credible sustainability, but must take into account risks such as greenwashing, high costs or limited consumer acceptance (Persakis et al., 2025). This creates a sound basis for strategic decisions in the consumer goods market.

Presentation of the main research material and results obtained

The present systematic study is based on a comprehensive literature review on green marketing, CI and ecological differentiation in the competitive consumer goods market. A total of 17 scientific studies were included in the synthesis, which were identified from an initial database of 1,229 hits using a PRISMA-based selection process (Page et al., 2021). The literature was evaluated in several systematic steps, including screening, full-text analysis and thematic synthesis. The aim was to identify key ecological differentiation potentials and the role of CI in the context of sustainable marketing strategies.

The results first show that green marketing plays a central strategic role in the consumer goods market, as it enables companies to differentiate themselves from competitors through ecological differentiation and to tap into new target groups (Kazemi & Soltani, 2024; Moravcikova et al., 2017). It becomes clear that product-related, process-related, packaging-related and communicative measures in particular represent relevant fields of differentiation. The literature shows that ecological product design, transparent value chains and credible communication in particular are key success factors for achieving sustainable competitive advantages. At the same time, it is emphasized that companies are only successful if environmental awareness is consistently integrated into all marketing activities (Moravcikova et al., 2017; Kiyak & Grigoliene, 2023).

In addition, the results make it clear that green marketing has both opportunities and limitations. The key potentials include in particular a stronger market positioning, higher customer loyalty, increased sales and cost advantages through resource-saving processes. At the same time, however, the studies also show limitations, in

particular due to greenwashing risks, lack of comparability of environmental labels, and uncertainties on the consumer side, which can reduce the effectiveness of ecological communication strategies (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Duttagupta et al., 2023).

Another central part of the results concerns the role of CI. The literature shows that CI makes a significant contribution to the development and implementation of green marketing strategies by systematically analyzing market, competitor and customer information and making it usable for strategic decisions (Kazemi & Soltani, 2024; Stefanikova et al., 2015). In particular, CI enables the early identification of market trends, sustainable innovation potential and ecological differentiation opportunities. This allows companies to improve their strategic positioning in a targeted manner and build sustainable competitive advantages (Hair & Sabol, 2024; Kazemi & Soltani, 2024).

The results also show that CI goes beyond mere information gathering and supports the strategic implementation of sustainable insights in particular. This enables companies to identify ecological risks and opportunities at an early stage, derive appropriate measures and develop sustainable business models. In addition, CI helps to reduce greenwashing risks by systematically considering external environmental and stakeholder information (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Duttagupta et al., 2023).

Overall, the analysis makes it clear that sustainable competitiveness in the consumer goods market is largely determined by the interaction of green marketing and competitive intelligence (De Oliveira Lima et al., 2024). While green marketing enables the communicative and strategic implementation of ecological differentiation, CI provides the necessary database for well-founded decision-making and market positioning (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Conclusions

The thesis shows that green marketing in the consumer goods market is an important instrument for the strategic positioning of companies (De Oliveira Lima et al., 2024). Especially against the backdrop of increasing sustainability requirements and increasing competition, ecological differentiation is becoming increasingly important. It becomes clear that green marketing does not only consist of individual advertising measures but must be firmly integrated into the corporate strategy and the entire marketing mix (Özgün-Ayar & Selvi, 2025).

A key finding of the analysis is that the success of green marketing depends heavily on credibility and transparency. Sustainability measures can only create long-term trust if they are authentically implemented and communicated in a comprehensible way. Otherwise, there is a risk of accusations of greenwashing and a loss of confidence among consumers (Persakis et al., 2025).

In addition, the work shows that there is often a discrepancy between the environmental awareness of many consumers and their actual purchasing behavior (Laheri, 2025). Companies are therefore faced with the challenge of making sustainable products understandable, credible and attractive. At the same time, green marketing can help to achieve competitive advantages, increase brand strength and open up new target groups, especially in saturated markets (De Oliveira Lima et al., 2024).

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