



Griffith College

EXPLORATION OF SUSTAINABLE MARKETING STRATEGIES BASED ON KERALA CLOTHING SMES

Research dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

MSc in Accounting and Finance Management

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Dissertation Supervisor: **Dr. GEORGE LATRIDIS**

Student Name: JOSNA ELIZABETH JOSE

Date of submissions : 06th September 2024

Declaration

Candidate Name: Josna Elizabeth Jose

Student number: 3120968

I certify that the dissertation entitled: **EXPLORATION OF SUSTAINABLE MARKETING STRATEGIES BASED ON KERALA CLOTHING SMES**

submitted for the degree of: **MSc in Accounting and finance management** is the result of the my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.



Candidate signature:

Date: 06-09-2024

Supervisor Name: Dr. George Latridis

Acknowledgment

I am glad to participate in this research topic “Exploration of sustainable marketing strategies based on Kerala clothing SMEs” which has not yet been explored by other researchers. I am always thankful to my supervisor, elders, and beloved family for guiding me to achieve my goal. I would also like to mention the support and guidance I have received from my supervisor in completing the entire dissertation.

Name: **Josna Elizabeth Jose**

Date: **06/09/2024**

Abstract

Chapter 1: This study aims to explore Sustainable marketing strategies based on the Kerala clothing SME organizations. It concentrates on understanding the importance of the Sustainable marketing approach of clothing organizations of Kerala and discusses several types of sustainable business practices and marketing strategies development organizations of Kerala. After that, the study discussed the importance of Sustainable marketing including organizations. In this respect to understand the key facts of the study, the study has established important objectives and Research questions to pursue the research process.

Chapter 2: A sustainable marketing strategy is a process that prioritizes social, economic, and environmental positive impact and develops products that focus on social and environmental impact. It helps companies to handle sustainability issues and is devoted to social accountability. Sustainable marketing is a method that promotes products that can lower the social and environmental impact. To discuss the importance of Sustainable marketing strategies in the clothing business the study has discussed two important theories the corporate sustainability theory and the green economic theory

Chapter 3 examines the sustainable marketing strategies of Kerala's clothing SMEs, employing surveys and company records to analyze their impact on customer behavior and business outcomes, supporting informed decision-making. Positive philosophy emphasizes the structure of research and enhances the rigor and reliability of research findings. Understanding the idea of Sustainable marketing strategies and developing ways to improve statistical tools and techniques allows generalizing findings by enhancing the research's external validity.

Chapter 4 is associated with data collected from the participants analyzed with relevant references. The primary objective of graphical analysis is to explore sustainable marketing strategies to identify growth opportunities by clothing SMEs in Kerala. The primary quantitative analysis states that technological advancement, especially AI, is promoting the marketing strategies of the clothing industry.

Chapter 5 concluded the overall research process by establishing the main fact of the research topic by aligning the research objectives and research questions with each chapter to explain the importance of sustainable marketing strategies for clothing SMEs of Kerala. In addition, this chapter evaluates how a sustainable marketing strategy can help the clothing industry of Kerala. In this chapter, the researcher also gave important recommendations to improve the research process and indicate the study's main research gap. Finally, the study explains the future scope of the research process to explore Sustainable-marketing strategies for the clothing SME industries of Kerala.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Sustainable marketing promotes socially responsible products and services and follows sustainable strategies to reduce the harmful environmental impact. Through the sustainable marketing process business, organizations promote their mission and vision of the organization, not the product or service.

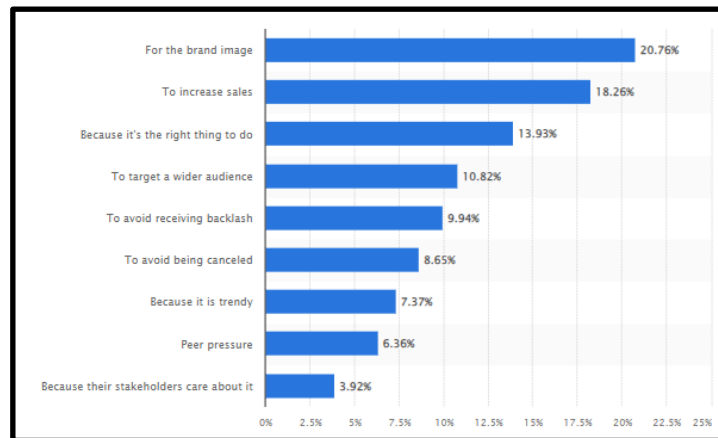


Figure 1.1.1: Main reason to invest in sustainable marketing in Europe

(Source: Majidi, 2022)

The above graph explains the reason business organizations referred to follow sustainable marketing strategies in the UK, Belgium, Germany, Spain, and France. The survey took place in July 2022 where almost 20-21% of respondents said that business organizations invest in sustainable marketing strategies to improve their brand image. Whereas almost 18% responded that the main reason is to follow a sustainable marketing strategy to increase sales, and almost 13 to 14% of respondents stated that the sustainable marketing strategy followed by business organizations is the right process for marketing strategy (Majidi, 2022). Falih Chichan and Alabdullah (2021) opined that business organizations follow a sustainable marketing approach from the customer's perspective. As business organizations are always trying to prioritize their customers by following the sustainable marketing approach, the organization sprays their organization and mission work for the good of the customers. The present and future generations believe in the sustainable world process and practice to protect the planet's damage. According to a survey, it is important to mention that different industrial processes are responsible for almost Global emissions by 10% and it creates almost 20% of wastewater all over the world. It is a known fact that clothing manufacturing organizations increase the

damage to the environment. According to a survey, almost 86 to 87% of fabric manufacturing is responsible for landfills (Release, 2022). However, it can be understood that the present trends in fashion organizations support fast fashion which is affecting the surroundings severely. The survey states that the apparel industry is responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. In the 2021 survey, the apparel industry alone contributes almost 897 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions to the environment. A girl predicted that this amount of carbon emission could be increased by 1.3 billion metrics within 2030, which needed to be controlled to increase the sustainability in the environment (Smith, 2024).

Kerala is one of the most important states of India and is famous for its rich handloom traditions. To increase the sustainable practice in the manufacturing of clove materials as well as their marketing process Kerala always chooses the sustainable choice through the Handloom clothing. When utilizing natural fibers like feel, cotton always reduces the environmental impact. The clothing industry in Kerala supports slow fashion and enhances sustainable and ethical practices in the business. In this respect, these Handloom organizations provide information about the supply chains, what materials they are using, and the environmental initiatives adopted by them (Medium, 2024).

1.2. Research Rationale

According to a survey in 2022, it can be stated that customers prefer sustainable approaches from business organizations 39% (Smith, 2024).

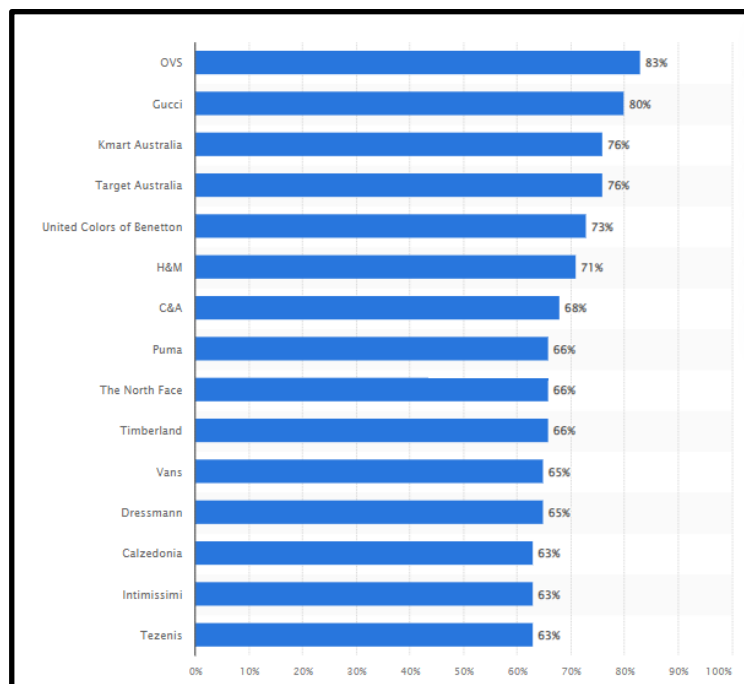


Figure 1.2.1: Transparent fashion organizations

(Source: Smith, 2024)

As fashion, organizations are contributing to the environment's harmful impact so nowadays, different fashion organizations are starting to follow sustainable practices in their business and marketing. The above graph indicates a list of several fashion organizations that follow transparent practices throughout their business. In this respect, Italian fashion retailer OVS became the highest scoring transparent fashion organization, and the transparency index of this organization is almost 83% OVS maintain their transparency through their business practice then H&M differences by almost 12%. Who are the fashion organizations that are trying to become more sustainable Birthday mostly faces challenges due to their supply chain management (Smith, 2024).

India has a strong Heritage at the time of manufacturing silk and other clothing products and the Weavers of India follow sustainable processes at the time of manufacturing. This country was once a wholesale Monopoly in Cotton manufacturing. However, India especially Kerala follows a slow or circular fashion to reduce the harmful impact on the environment. One of the famous fashion organizations of Kerala follows slow fashion and manufactures products from leftover stock fabrics and pre-loved vintage items (Prakati, 2022). As Kerala has a tradition of manufacturing Handloom fabrics also, they manufacture garments for Organic cotton linen bamboo. These kinds of fabrics can be manufactured with less harmful chemicals, reducing the environmental footprint. Clothing SME organizations of Kerala also follow up cycle and recycle clothing manufacturing process to reduce waste material and to increase the circular fashion economy. Different brands in Kerala manufacture clothing items from recycled fibers (Medium, 2024). The important aspects of Sustainable marketing of SMEs of Kerala are they also provide information regarding their supply chain and materials. They try to increase the life cycle of the garments and sell that product in online marketplaces and vintage boutiques. In the view of Sheth, and Parvatiyar (2021), the sustainable marketing approach always considers the concern of surroundings and economic and social scenarios. Social communication always permits the consumers to connect with the business as well and it affects their purchase decisions, showing the Kelleon manufacturing units try to maintain their sustainable approach to reach potential customer base (Neha and Kumar, 2024). As well as another, important reason is business organizations of Kerala which deal with clothing manufacturing intend to maintain their brand image through their marketing practice to gain the trust of the potential customer base.

1.3. Problem Statement

However, the Kerala SME clothing manufacturing industry follows a circular economy and sustainable approaches to business practice, but this industry faces challenges due to several reasons.

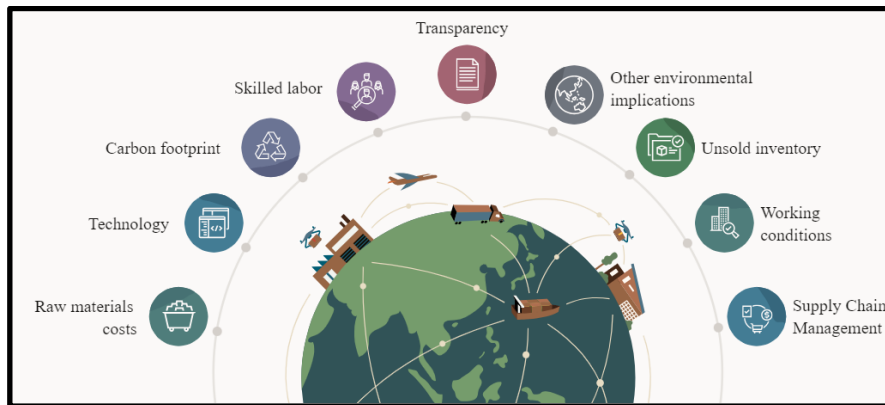


Figure 1.3.1: 9 Sustainability challenges in a clothing manufacturing organization

(Source: Oracle, 2024)

High raw material costs increase the manufacturing rate. Fabric required 62 70% of the total cost at the time of manufacturing the garments. To follow the sustainable approach with organic cotton, bamboo, and linen the product price because high cost of raw materials (Oracle, 2024). For example, organic cotton requires less water and is more sustainable, but the price of the Cotton is almost \$500 to 700 US dollars per ton. In addition, the price of general cotton is almost 225 US dollars to 345 US dollars per ton (Oracle, 2024).

To improve the fashion brand, it is important to depend on **digital technology** to create a more sustainable marketing approach (Oracle, 2024). In this respect, different fashion brands pay the influencers 10000 US dollars for the one-post promotions.

However, the fashion industry is responsible for almost 10% of **carbon emissions** in the world and responsible for landfills. On the other hand, customers discard almost 92 million tons of clothes every year (Oracle, 2024). The fashion industry also suffers due to the shortage of skilled laborers. However, the fashion industry also unable to maintain transparency India's operation process faces challenges is due to the supply chain management. In the view of Hofmann *et al.* (2022), stated that the clothing organizations of India will design and implement attractive or meaningful campaigns to enhance the brand positioning, as well as business organization is unable to develop significant marketing efforts to win the trust and hearts of the consumers. In the country, clothing business organizations are unable to meet the demands of the consumers and hurt sentiments. However, the SME organizations of Kerala support the

circular economy or slow process but the generation Z preparing fast fashion struggling with purchasing eco-friendly clothing products (Timesofindia, 2024). However, lack of education and awareness of the harmful impact of fast fashion on the environment, Ham Hindi working conditions, and inventory problems also make the situation difficult for the fashion manufacturing organizations of Kerala.

1.4. Research Aims & Objectives

Aims

The study aims to discuss sustainable business practices that can be reflected in the marketing strategies of clothing organizations. Try to discover how the clothing SME organizations of Kerala follow sustainable marketing strategies and impact their potential customer base.

Objectives

- To understand the idea of Sustainable marketing strategies and develop ways of improving its efficiency.
- To recognize sustainable marketing strategies received by Kerala-based clothing SMEs
- To discuss the challenges faced by Kerala's best clothing SMEs at the time of developing sustainable marketing strategies.

1.4. Research Questions

The study's main research question is what is the process followed by clothing SME organizations of Kerala to implement sustainable marketing strategies?

1.5. Research Significance

The study tries to discuss the exploration of Sustainable marketing strategies for clothing SME organizations based in Kerala. In this respect, the study tries to understand the important aspects of fashion and their contribution to the environment. Also, it is important to mention that the fashion organization is mostly polluting the environment by polluting water, increasing carbon emissions and green greenhouse gas submission. Hence, clothing manufacturing organizations need to follow a sustainable marketing approach to satisfy the consumers and maintain a positive brand image. The study also tries to discuss how Kerala SME clothing manufacturing organizations follow sustainable business practices. They follow the slow fashion and manufacture Handloom garments. However, they also use organic cotton, and linen raw materials and maintain clarity in the business process which they try to reflect through their

marketing strategies. However, the fashion industry faces different kinds of Sustainable challenges.

1.6. Proposed Methodology

To understand the sustainable marketing strategies for the SME clothing organizations, test in Kerala the study preferred to use mixed methods. In this respect, the researcher preferred to gather both primary and secondary sides of data which the researcher intended to analyze with the help of quantitative data analysis processes. The researcher would like to analyze the quantitative data by developing a thematic analysis and analyzes the numerical data.

1.7. Research Structure

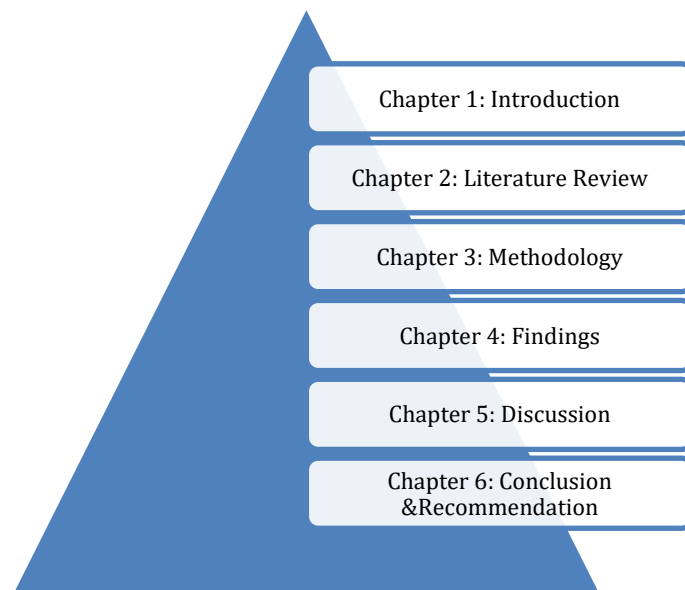


Figure 1.7.1: Research Structure

(Source: Created by the author)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

A sustainable marketing strategy is essential in clothing manufacturing organizations as fashion brands affect the environment negatively. Vilakazi *et al.* (2020) commented that nowadays people have become environment conscious importance of Sustainable marketing strategies has become relevant. As consumers slowly became conscious of the environmental impact the first fashion giants like Indicted, Gap Inc., and H&M started to take several initiatives that improved the sustainable manufacturing process in clothing. Respect these kinds of organizations that use quality materials to launch sustainable marketing strategies and fashion principles. Consumer responses also became positive when fashion organizations followed sustainable marketing campaigns. However, Dacono *et al.* (2020) stated that sustainable marketing campaigns increase the positive effect on the consumers and their perception regarding the brand. In this way, business organizations can gain the loyalty and craft of the customers, which is required to generate revenue. As the same organizations of Kerala always value their audience they develop audience-based marketing strategies and a positive and sustainable brand image by following sustainable business practices.

2.2 Concept of Sustainable Marketing Strategies and ways for improving its effectiveness

A sustainable marketing strategy is a process that prioritizes a positive impact and develops products that focus on social, economic, and environmental impact. It helps companies to handle sustainability issues and is devoted to social accountability. Sustainable marketing is a method that promotes products that can lower the social and environmental impact. As per the view of Purnama, (2024), these strategies are crucial in this competitive business era and companies need to focus on and value customers and the environment. These strategies allow companies to incorporate sustainable principles into their marketing procedures to acquire long-lasting progress and increase brand recognition, reliability, and create positive effects for society and the environment.

Sustainable marketing focuses on promoting products beneficial for society and the environment and boosting business development. According to Tinonetsana, and Musariwa, (2024), sustainable marketing has three pillars are- “*environmental responsibility, social equity, and economic viability*”. The Kerala-based clothing SMEs proactively adopt and

embrace sustainable marketing approaches and are devoted to lowering their carbon footprint from the environment, supporting communities, and promoting economic sustainability.



Figure 2.2.1: The main pillars of sustainable marketing

(Source: Influenced by Kazibudzki, and Trojanowski, 2024)

Kerala's clothing SMEs adopt and embrace sustainable marketing strategies to promote their products that are eco-friendly and socially responsible. Kerala's clothing SMEs emphasize utilizing natural and organic fibers and raw materials like bamboo, cotton, and hemp. These natural materials are eco-friendly and create an inferior impact on the environment rather than artificial fibers. Kerala's clothing SMEs execute a water-saving method in their business operation and dyeing process to promote sustainability and lower water waste issues. As per the opinion of Benli, *et al.* (2024), these SMEs use natural dyes emanating from minerals and plants to mitigate excessive water use and water pollution. They source local materials to support the local economy, and locally originated materials help to lower emissions produced from transportation. They minimize the use of plastics and use eco-friendly products on their packaging to promote sustainability and mitigate environmental impact.

Some ways to improve its effectiveness

Nowadays, people are environmentally conscious and choose brands that prioritize sustainability. Thus, sustainability plays a crucial role, so companies incorporate ***advanced technologies*** and data analytics to align with market trends and consumer preferences (Hossain, *et al.*, 2024). These cutting-edge technologies can help to integrate innovative sustainability practices, inform about customer needs, and monitor engagement metrics to improve the sustainability approach. One of the major ways to improve sustainability is ***consumer***

education about sustainability and the buying decisions that influence society and the environment (Abbate, *et al.*, 224). In this context, companies need to share awareness and fair interaction about sustainability with their consumers to promote sustainability awareness. Companies should share their sustainable products on social media through videos, and blogs to highlight the effectiveness of sustainable choices.

2.3 Current sustainable marketing strategies in Kerala-based clothing SMEs

In this era, sustainable marketing strategies are essential among the clothing sector of Kerala SMEs. Clothing SMEs of Kerala align their products to build a positive influence on the environment (Mende, *et al.*, 2024). These strategies promote sustainable awareness, lower environmental problems, support the community, and promote ethical and sustainable products. Some major sustainable marketing strategies of Kerala-based clothing SMEs are-

Locally sourced raw materials

Kerala's clothing SMEs prioritize locally originated raw materials to support local farmers and the local economy and mitigate carbon emissions produced from transportation. Thus, these Kerala' clothing SMEs source materials from local weavers to manufacture their clothes.

Eco-Friendly Materials

Kerala's clothing SMEs emphasize and adopt environment-friendly materials like bamboo, organic cotton, and biodegradable fabrics. These sustainable raw materials attract environmentally aware customers to the brand. According to Tolentino-Zondervan, and DiVito, (2024), Kerala's clothing SMEs use certifications and levels like OEKO-TEX and GOTS. In this context, these certifications increase the reliability and authenticity of their products among consumers.

Promote Fair Trade Practices

Ethical and fair-trade policies are essential to integrate sustainable marketing. Kerala SMEs underscore their dedication to promoting safe work culture, fair wages, and equal employee treatment. In this context, this strategy helps to develop a healthy work culture where employees feel valued and respected. Additionally, this helps to build reliability and trust among employees and consumers. As stated by Sarma, Attaran, and Attaran, (2024), fair and ethical practices can increase employee retention rates and improve reliability among consumers by implementing ethical and sustainable practices in their clothing products.

Sustainable Packaging

Sustainable packaging is another crucial strategy to promote sustainability. As per the view of Imran, *et al.*, (2024), Kerala’s clothing SMEs focus on eco-friendly packaging systems and replace the use of plastic packaging. In this context, they promote the use of recyclable, eco-friendly, and reusable materials for their product packaging. Kerala’s SMEs utilize cloth bags and recycled paper for their packaging materials. In this context, this strategy helps to lower the production of plastic waste and improves Kerala’s SMEs' recognition in promoting sustainability.

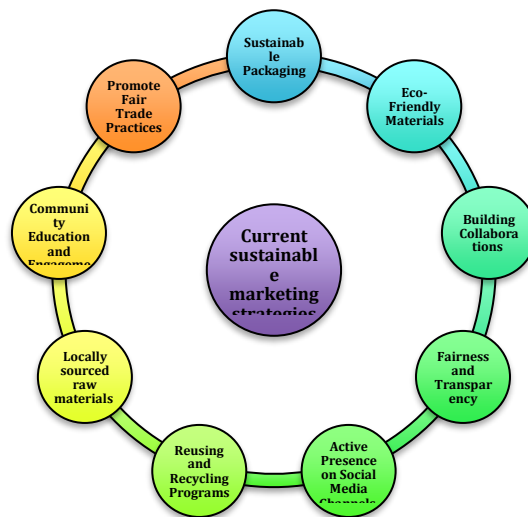


Figure 2.3.1: Current sustainable marketing strategies in Kerala-based clothing SMEs

(Source: Created by Author)

Reusing and Recycling Programs

Kerala’s clothing SMEs promote reuse and recycle initiatives to mitigate waste production. According to Moon, (2024), this method helps SMEs to recycle old clothes retired by consumers and re modify them to reuse clothes. This recycling system reproduces new clothes from old garments and leftover fabrics that effectively mitigate textile waste. It is a unique process to promote sustainability and effectively attract eco-conscious consumers.

Community Education and Engagement

Community education and engagement in sustainability are highly important to promote sustainable practices. Additionally, Kerala’ clothing SMEs need to share awareness through seminars and awareness programs and engage the community to educate them about sustainability. It helps to build environment-aware people who value sustainability and ethical practices.

Active Presence on Social Media Channels

In today's digitalized market, utilizing social media and digital marketing is highly fruitful to spread awareness of sustainability. As per the view of Aripin, Ichwanudin, and Faisal, (2023), Kerala's clothing SMEs build an active presence on social media to exhibit their sustainable techniques. They share their sustainable product features through videos, blogs, and storytelling to make customers aware of their sustainable fashion products. Additionally, they create partnerships with social media influencers to share engaging content based on their sustainable clothing features. This helps to promote their products and attract potential consumers.

Fairness and Transparency in Supply Chain Management

Kerala's clothing SMEs maintain fairness and transparency in their supply chain to facilitate sustainable marketing. Kerala's clothing SMEs increasingly use advanced digital devices to track products. They proactively monitor and track their entire business operation from ethical sourcing to the clothes manufacturing process. This helps to build reliability among consumers who prioritize ethical practice, fairness, and sustainability.

Building Collaborations

Kerala's clothing SMEs create partnerships with NGOs, potential sustainable brands, and environmental corporations to strengthen the influence of sustainable marketing endeavors. This partnership helps SMEs gain resources from partners, create potential audiences, and improve their reliability in sustainability.

2.4 Benefits of sustainable marketing strategies in Kerala-based clothing SMEs

Kerala's clothing SMEs highly emphasize sustainable practices that attract potential environment-aware consumers and boost their product sales. Some benefits of Kerala's clothing SMEs' sustainable marketing strategies are mentioned below-

Increase brand recognition and image

Sustainable marketing practice helps to increase brand reputation and image which is the major benefit of sustainable marketing. People are more aware and conscious of sustainability and the environmental positive impact. In this context, consumers focus on sustainable and ethical sourcing. As per Putra, et al., (2024), clothing SMEs of Kerala build their strong status on the market as ethical and responsible brands by embracing sustainable practices. In this context, this image helps clothing SMEs to develop reliability and loyalty among customers. This favorable image leads to increased new acquisitions, customer retention, and new referrals from existing purchasers that boost their growth.



Figure 2.4.1: Advantages of sustainable marketing

(Source: Influenced by Abbas, 2024)

Improve customer reliability and loyalty

Sustainable marketing cultivates robust connections between clothing SMEs of Kerala and their customers. When buyers comprehend that clothing SMEs of Kerala are devoted to sustainability, consumers are more willing to buy their products which increases the profitability of SMEs. In this context, they engage their customers through industry stories regarding sustainable product features, ethical product sourcing, fair labor policies, and environment-friendly products. This strategy can attract eco-aware consumers and build emotional connections with SMEs. It helps to increase repeat business, acquire new referrals, and reliability.

Increase business efficiency and save cost

Sustainable practices within Kerala-based clothing SMEs help to save costs and increase their operational efficiencies. In this context, SMEs utilize renewable energy to promote energy efficiency, lower waste production, and facilitate recycling and reusing methods that effectively increase business operational efficiency (Anshassi, and Townsend, 2023). Additionally, these strategies effectively save costs for SMEs, promote fairness, and lower environmental issues.

Sustainable strategies differentiate products from competitors

Sustainability helps clothing SMEs of Kerala to boost innovation. These sustainable product features develop creative clothing items that attract potential consumers and drive sales. These innovative and unique product features can differentiate SME products from their competitors. In this context, this differentiation helps SMEs to gain a competitive edge and strengthen their leading position in the clothing industry.

Sustainable marketing enables various advantages for clothing SMEs of Kerala. Sustainable marketing helps them to enrich their brand recognition and reliability, drive cost-saving options, and facilitate an ethical regulatory environment. SMEs can drive innovation, differentiate their clothing items, and encourage communities to positivity and focus on environmental wellness through the adoption of sustainable practices. In this context, these strategies foster business progress and promote sustainability.

2.5 Challenges encountered by clothing SMEs while integrating sustainable marketing

Financial Limitations

Financial burdens and limitations are the main issues of sustainable marketing integration. In this context, incorporating sustainable marketing strategies and practices needs heavy investment and capital that create barriers for SMEs. Sustainable materials sometimes demand high expenses that create financial hurdles for SMEs. In this context, SMEs are directed to operating on limited budgets. Thus, it is difficult to allocate funds for sustainable activities and creates barriers for SMEs in Kerala. The heavy investment is needed for executing sustainable practices, certifications, and tracking supply chain activity. Moreover, utilizing innovative sustainable practices for campaigns needs significant funding that creates concerns for SMEs.

Supply chain issues

Maintaining ethical practices and fairness within the supply chain is a critical barrier for SMEs. it is difficult to source ethical materials that have eco-friendly benefits and high-quality sustainability standards. As stated by Govindan, and Jha, (2024), sometimes, these sustainable raw materials are not properly available locally and demand high prices. In this context, SMEs encounter obstacles in their supply chain operation and obey sustainable practices. Additionally, clothing SMEs in Kerala face barriers in tracking the resources of raw products, promoting fair labor laws, and lowering carbon emissions.



Figure 2.5.1: Challenges of clothing SMEs while integrating sustainable marketing

(Source: Influenced by Singh, and Maheswaran, 2024)

Maintaining regulatory compliance

Clothing SMEs in Kerala face problems in developing the regulatory landscape. Sustainable marketing practices usually need adherence to international and local norms. Additionally, certifications play a crucial role in promoting authentic and reliable practices. Sometimes, SMEs encounter difficulty in acquiring these certifications and obeying the norms due to high cost. SMEs encounter the issues of inadequate essential expertise to promote these regulations which causes powerful financial and legal risks.

Technological limitations

Sustainable practices adoption and execution need advanced technology to bring innovation. However, cutting-edge technology incorporation and access needs heavy investment and proper knowledge. As per the view of Govindan, (2024), these technologies help SMEs to lower waste issues, and preserve water, energy efficiency, and natural dyeing methods. In this context, these advanced technologies incorporation within clothing SMEs can be difficult and need substantial modifications to operational process.

Market competition

High competition is a major barrier for clothing SMEs in Kerala. They face hard competition from their rivals both internationally and locally. Potential branded companies usually have huge capital, advanced technology, and sufficient resources to incorporate sustainable marketing practices. These Potential branded companies highly contribute to the economy.

Sometimes, it is challenging for clothing SMEs in Kerala to compete with these strong opponents and build their position as a sustainable leader. Additionally, Strong competition with branded companies creates obstacles for small organizations to compete with potential companies. In this context, globally renowned brands that have robust sustainable policies can extinguish local clothing SMEs. Thus, it creates difficulty for clothing SMEs to create a strong presence on the market.

Customer awareness

Nowadays, customers are highly conscious of sustainability and ethical practices. Now it has become a global trend towards sustainable clothing items. Thus, clothing SMEs in Kerala need to conduct campaigns to spread awareness about sustainability. Sometimes, SMEs encounter obstacles in enlightening customers regarding the advantages of sustainable apparel. SMEs need proper communication techniques to spread the importance of sustainability. However, inadequate investment can hamper the proper communication process with consumers and create barriers to sharing awareness of sustainability. However, Kerala's people prioritize reasonable pricing over sustainability which makes it difficult for clothing SMEs to provide sustainable products at affordable prices.

Moreover, clothing SMEs in Kerala face barriers to capital investment, supply chain issues, market competition, and maintaining regulatory compliance. They need to incorporate effective strategies to mitigate these challenges.

2.6 Strategies to mitigate these challenges while integrating sustainable marketing in Kerala-based clothing SMEs

Supply Chain Management

- **Local sourcing:** Clothing SMEs in Kerala need to focus on local sourcing from local weavers and suppliers who maintain ethical and sustainable practices. In this context, local sourcing can mitigate carbon emissions produced by transportation as well as local sourcing save costs and support the local economy.
- **Supplier collaboration:** Clothing SMEs in Kerala prefer to work closely with their suppliers. It helps them to track suppliers and whether they maintain sustainable norms. This strong observation ensures that suppliers use eco-friendly fabrics, which leads to building strong connections and collaboration with suppliers.

Technological Advancements

- **Heavy investment in cutting-edge technology:** Clothing SMEs in Kerala prioritize high investment in incorporating advanced technology within their business operation. They implement technologies to strengthen water conservation, energy efficiency, and waste reduction. Sometimes, SMEs are supported by NGOs and the Government to integrate sustainable marketing and embrace technologies.
- **Innovation and R&D:** Clothing SMEs in Kerala emphasize creating an innovative culture. Thus, they invest in R&D initiatives to investigate new and affordable sustainable practices. In this context, Clothing SMEs in Kerala create partnerships with tech companies, local universities, and research corporations to gain extra support and resources.

Financial investment

- **Access to subsidies and loans:** Clothing SMEs in Kerala focus on various funding opportunities from governments like loans, subsidies, and grants which are constructed for sustainable marketing practices. As per Chen, et al., (2024), clothing SMEs collaborate with financial corporations to gain green loans in lower interest to incorporate sustainable marketing in their business operation.
- **Cost-sharing partnership:** Clothing SMEs in Kerala build partnerships with potential organizations. According to Majid, et al., (2023), this strategy helps small SMEs to share a significant portion of the capital needed for implementing sustainable endeavors. This cooperative approach helps small SMEs to buy sustainable raw products in bulk and is also effective in lowering costs.

Certifications and regulations

- **Certification:** Clothing SMEs in Kerala seek assistance from industry consultancy enterprises to mitigate the intricacies of achieving certifications. In this context, as per the opinion of Plakantonaki, et al., (2024), Kerala's clothing SMEs must use certifications and levels like OEKO-TEX and GOTS to increase the authenticity of their sustainable products.
- **Staying Updated:** Clothing SMEs in Kerala must stay informed and updated about sustainability regulations. This timely information about regulations helps SMEs to promote ethical operations and avoid legal penalties. Additionally, Clothing SMEs need to take part in industry seminars and conferences to gain valuable understanding.

Market Competition

- **Niche Marketing:** Clothing SMEs in Kerala need to develop a niche market by emphasizing exceptional, sustainable items that are demanded by customer groups. This strategy helps SMEs to distinguish themselves from enormous opponents.
- **Collaboration:** Clothing SMEs in Kerala participate in industry associations to gain proper access to knowledge, strong partnerships, and resources that can improve competitiveness.

These strategies help Clothing SMEs in Kerala to mitigate challenges and cultivate smooth sustainable marketing within their business operations. Strong collaboration with potential SMEs, proper certification, technological advancement, and proper supply chain management helps to mitigate these barriers.

2.7 Theoretical Underpinning

The Corporate Sustainability Theory

The corporate sustainability theory is mainly and Holistic approach that helps business organizations to create sustainable long-term value for the consumers, employees, and shareholders.

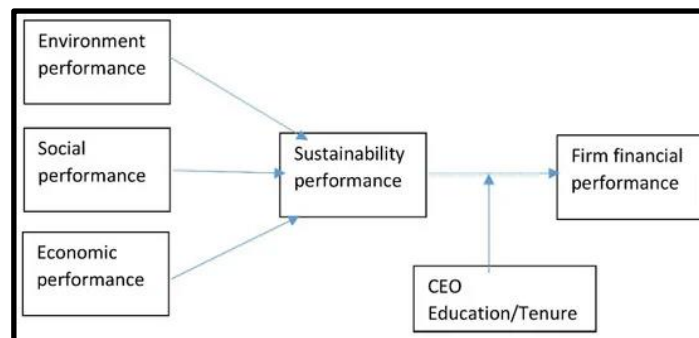


Figure 2.7.1: The Corporate Sustainability Theory

(Source: Arena, 2022)

The corporate social the corporate sustainability theory has three pillars: environmental concern, economic cooperation, and socially responsible practice.

Environmental Concern

Through the environment and concerns business organizations need to follow an environmentally sustainable business approach not only in the marketing process but also in all business processes. Importantly business organizations need to concentrate on reducing the carbon footprint in the environment and reducing water use concern about the wastage from packaging.

Economic Co-operation

To understand that to manage the business process they need to be economically friendly also. Therefore, business organizations need to concentrate on the sustainable business approach. Hence, the business organization not only concentrates on developing profit amount but rather needs to understand the proper governance and risk management (Marlina, 2022).

Socially Responsible Practice

A sustainable business always understands its social responsibility. Business organizations need to understand and support their employees such take holders' shareholders' community and try not to impact them negatively.

The Green Economy Theory

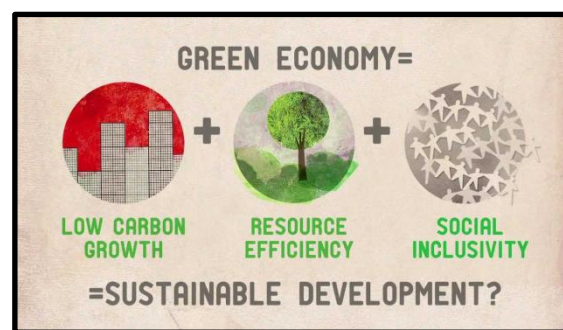


Figure 2.7.2: The Green Economy

(Source: Liu *et al.* 2020)

By following the green economy theory business organizations are built to reduce the environmental impact of sacrifices of ecological animal beings. In this respect, business organizations try to develop a sustainable business approach by developing the environment. Here it is important to mention that the green economy is closely related to the ecological economic system and has a more politically applied focus. By following the green economic theory, business organizations can establish harmonious communication between humans and nature. In the green economic theory became important to discuss alternative energy sources, wildlife, reduce the wastage of water, sustainable agriculture, and establish badminton policies to protect the environment.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

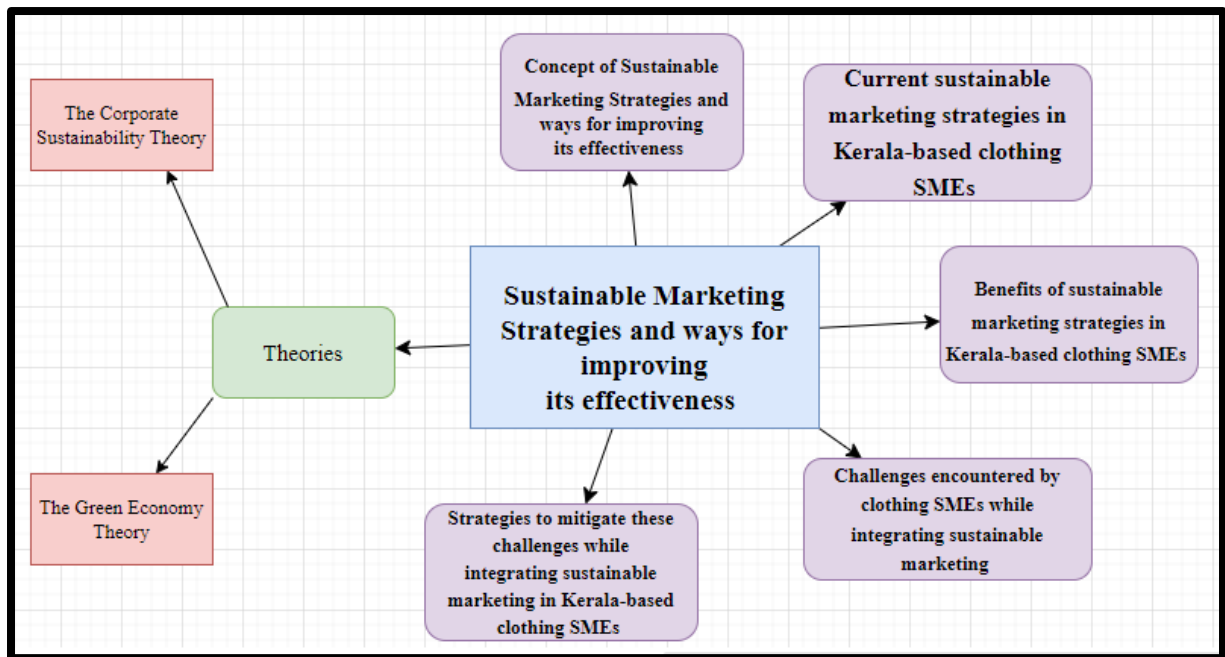


Figure 2.9.1: Conceptual Framework

(Source: Created by Author)

The conceptual framework of this study focuses on the relationship between sustainable marketing strategies and the performance of Kerala-based clothing SMEs. The framework illustrates how sustainable marketing, as guided by corporate sustainability and green economy theories, fosters economic, environmental, and social benefits for SMEs (Gordon et.al). Corporate sustainability theory emphasizes the integration of responsible practices to create long-term value for all stakeholders, including consumers and shareholders, while the green economy theory advocates for reducing the environmental impact of business operations (Zollo, 2018). The framework proposes that sustainable marketing strategies enable SMEs to improve their brand image, attract eco-conscious customers, and ultimately increase competitiveness in the market .

By focusing on sustainability, clothing SMEs are better equipped to mitigate challenges such as limited resources and high raw material costs . The implementation of eco-friendly practices, such as using organic materials and promoting recycling, is central to achieving sustainable growth (Sawant et.al). The framework suggests that these strategies positively influence consumer behavior, fostering brand loyalty and market differentiation . In summary, the conceptual framework positions sustainable marketing as a critical driver for enhancing the overall performance and sustainability of Kerala's clothing SMEs.

2.10 Literature Gap

This research illustrates the significance of sustainability marketing of Kerala-based clothing SMEs. This research is focused on a particular sector which is the clothing industry of Kerala. However, it can explore sustainable marketing practices in other industries. Then it will deliver more broad information about sustainable practices. However, few articles and journals are focused on sustainable practices, so it is hard to gather more data about sustainability.

2.11 Chapter Summary

Through the whole study, it can be concluded that sustainability plays a crucial role in promoting community development and a healthy environment. Sustainable marketing is a method that promotes products that can lower the social and environmental impact. The Kerala-based clothing SMEs embrace sustainable marketing and lower carbon emissions from the environment, supporting communities, and promoting economic sustainability. Kerala's clothing SMEs use sustainable packaging systems to reduce plastic usage. They implement a water-saving system to lower water waste issues and use a natural dyeing process to promote sustainability. This sustainable practice helps Kerala's clothing SMEs to increase their brand reputation and image. SMEs can encourage communities, drive innovation, differentiate their clothing items, and promote environmental wellness by embracing sustainable practices. However, Kerala's clothing SMEs encounter barriers while integrating sustainable practices within their business operations. Sometimes they have limited funds to implement sustainable marketing practices. However, they implement strategies to mitigate these barriers.

Chapter 3: Research Strategy and Methods

3.1 Introduction

Well-defined methodology provides clear guidelines and steps to ensure the process and objectives. Consistency of approach and reliability of research, outlining the clear process by managing time and resources. Systematic ways provide a solid foundation for evaluating options to predict outcomes, the researcher has anticipated risk assessments with mitigation strategies to ensure the exploration of marketing strategies. The researcher has analyzed the different approaches and designs to gather effective data to analyze accountability for future references. The methodology chapter minimizes the risks for the researcher and provides effective methods to handle problems that meet the desired standards (Adaga *et al.*, 2024). Utilizing natural fibers like feel and cotton always reduces the environmental impact Kerala clothing industry supports slow fashion and enhances sustainable and ethical practices in the business. to discover how the clothing SME organizations of Kerala follow sustainable marketing strategies and impact of potential customer base structured approach of methodology scaled and adapted to suit size and types of projects.

3.2 Research Onion

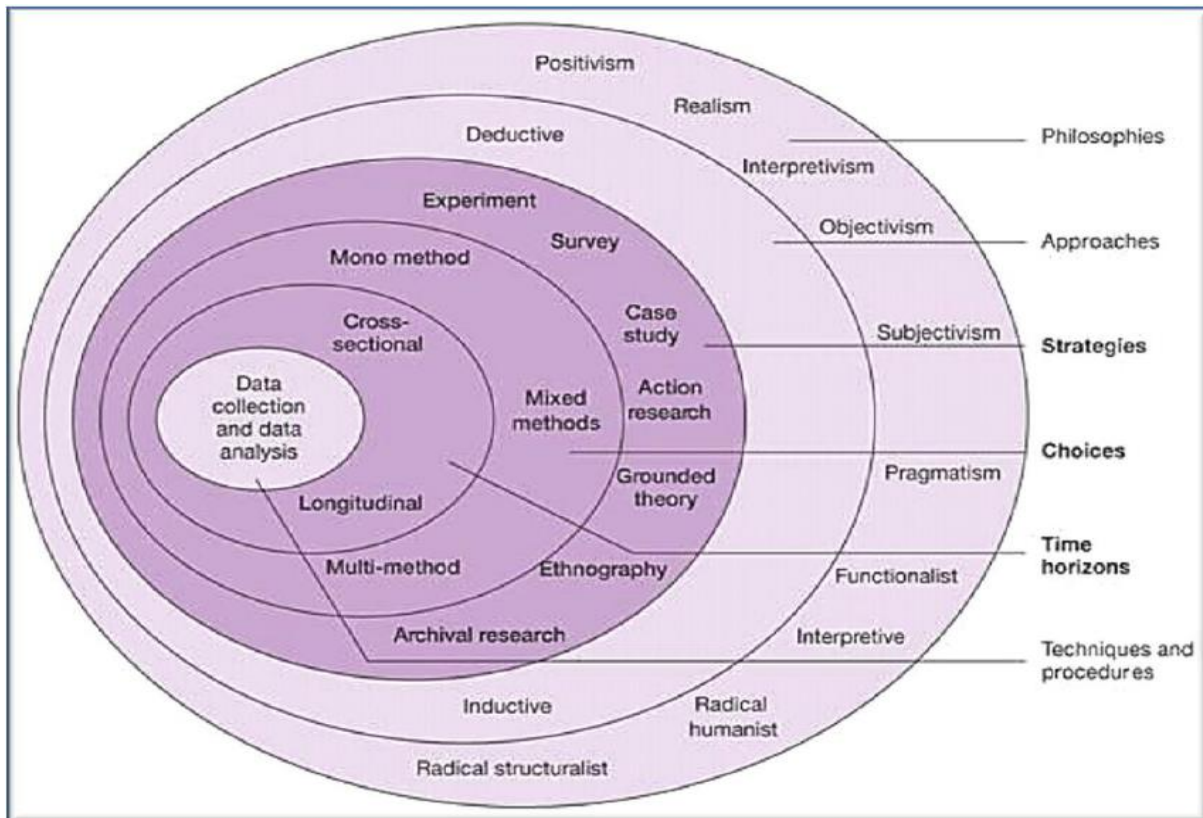


Figure 3.2.1: The Research Onion (Source: (Saunders et al., 2012))

The Research Onion framework, made by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, guides how to design research step-by-step. It starts with Research Philosophy, which shapes how we think about knowledge, then moves to Research Approach, which helps develop theories. Next, Research Strategy lays out a clear plan, and Research Choices decides how to collect and analyze data. Finally, Time Horizons and Data Collection Methods set the timeline and methods for the research. This organized method ensures that research is thorough and well-planned. ((aunders et al., 2012)

3.3 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy defines the nature of knowledge and the process of gathering it. Research philosophy is crucial to interpret and influence methodology. Interpretive, positivism, realism and pragmatism are the three main types of research philosophy. Positivism philosophy promotes objectivity of the research topic, focusing on measurability and phenomena (Millière, 2024). The researcher has chosen positivist philosophy to emphasize the structure of the research and enhance the rigor and reliability of research findings. Hence, the researcher does not use interpretive, close interaction with the topic creates bias, as the researcher's perspective

and study interpretations influence the findings. Precise measures enhance the stratified method of the research by replicating the transparency of the process (Hambali *et al.*, 2024). To understand the idea of Sustainable marketing strategies and develop ways to improve their affectivity, statistical tools and techniques allow to generalize of findings by enhancing the external validity of the research. Interpretive research does not employ statistical methods and limits the ability of quantified data while positivist research provides a durable foundation rather than speculation, policies and decisions emphasize quantified results to assess the impact and effectiveness of Kerala-based clothing SMEs. most importantly positivist philosophy determines cause effective relationships more accurately to discuss the challenges faced by Kerala's best clothing SMEs with a more reliable conclusion.

3.4 Research Design

Research design ensures the research process with systematic and efficient outcomes. There are various types of research designs such as descriptive research design, exploratory research design and explanatory research design (Turin *et al.*, 2024). The researcher has chosen descriptive research to generate rich and nuanced data for comprehensive aspects that affect their purchase decisions, showing the Kelleon manufacturing units to maintain their sustainable approach to reach a potential customer base. The researcher does not use experimental design as it involves interventions by raising ethical concerns about the well-being of participants. Descriptive research establishes the baseline of data against future impacts to measure long-term studies of Sustainable marketing strategies for clothing SME organizations based in Kerala (Weiss *et al.*, 2024). Developing rigorous experimental design involves complex planning for confounding variables and ensuring reliable measurements. To recognize sustainable marketing strategies received by Kerala-based clothing SMEs descriptive research supports decision-making processes in various fields to identify patterns, trends and relationships. Contextual understanding contributes to a better understanding that influences the topic of the research, real-world situations enhance the relevance and practical value of control variables while experimental research focuses on specific variables and conditions to isolate real-world phenomena (Rainforth *et al.*, 2024). The primary limitation of correlational research is determining causality by obscuring the true relationship between variables of interest. Also, correlational studies' misleading overgeneralization without experimental control and detailed description of descriptive research support the decision-making process to guide action and decision fashion manufacturing organizations of Kerala.

3.5 Research Strategy

Research strategy is a systematic plan and subset of research design that encompasses elements of data interpretation. Overall approach and methods of analyzing data entire research process formulating research questions, and research strategy ensure the reliability and validity of the methodology with main components. Qualitative, quantitative and explanatory are the types of research strategies (Lotterhos, 2024). The researcher has chosen a quantitative strategy that employs precise measurement tools by providing detailed data about variables by enhancing the external validity of the results. Numerical data allows concise metrics for testing the hypothesis to inform the decision-making process and facilitates trend analysis with performance assessment. The researcher does not use a Qualitative strategy as it influences data collection and interpretation by categorizing thematic analysis. Also, qualitative research generates a large volume of data which creates difficulties in managing and analyzing systematic data. The experimental design of quantitative research allows for isolation as SME organizations of Kerala support the circular economy, slow process in fast fashion struggling with purchasing eco-friendly clothing products. Quantitative strategy on the other hand has been chosen as it encompasses a range of methods that allow flexibility based on the research topic to enhance the ability to determine causality (Marshall, 2024). Statistical analysis and in-depth understanding automate the analysis process by saving time and effort for Sustainable marketing strategies. to follow a sustainable marketing approach to satisfy the consumers and maintain a positive brand image, numerical data of quantitative research encompasses a range of methods with visualized charts, graphs and tables. The sample size was calculated using a confident interval of 80% and a margin of error of 7%, which gave a sample size of 84. However, due to the constraints on time and resources, the sample size was adjusted to 70 respondents. This resulted in a more convenient data collection process. Even though the initial data gathering was from 70 respondents, after the data cleaning process, 50 responses met the inclusion criteria and used in the final analysis.

3.6 Research Approach

The research approach is a comprehensive plan or strategy of procedure and steps to span the broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection. The research approach encompasses the overall direction of data type to analyze the theoretical framework that underpins the study.

Broadly classified approaches include inductive, deductive and adductive (Nguyen *et al.*, 2024). To explain the concept and variables with cause and effects the researcher has used a deductive approach. slow fashion and manufactures products from leftover stock fabrics and pre-loved vintage items deductive reasoning's provide valuable logical certainty with the ability to draw specific conclusions based on the general principle of India especially Kerala follows a slow or circular fashion to reduce the harmful impact on the environment. Validity, consistency and accuracy of logical fallacies make predictions for the researcher to make decisions and solve the issue. The ability to recognize logical relationships between facts helps the researcher to recognize sustainable marketing strategies received by Kerala-based clotting SMEs based on relationships. The researcher does not use an inductive approach as it is time-consuming and leads to immediate solutions. Also, inductive approaches can be obtained through investigation that leads to chaos and ineffectiveness (Gush *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, the adductive research approach does not eliminate uncertainty while the deductive approach helps the researcher to draw general conclusions to many situations. Adductive conclusions are confined to observations which are weak, incoherent, nonexistent and difficult to interpret the challenges faced by Kerala's best clothing SMEs when developing sustainable marketing strategies.

3.7 Methods and tools for collecting data

Data collection involves gathering details using tools such as surveys and company records. It is vital for obtaining accurate, relevant details to inform research conclusions and support decision-making processes.

Criteria for selecting respondents

The primary data collection tool for this research is structured questionnaires and distributed to selected respondents. The survey includes both closed-ended questions for the quantitative analysis. Moreover, company records, marketing materials and customer feedback forms from the Kerala-based clothing company can review the potential survey data and provide a comprehensive understanding of sustainable marketing strategies and their effects (Taherdoost, 2021). By analyzing the data for this study on the sustainable marketing strategies that employed clothing SMEs in Kerala, a survey method has been used and signifying structured questionnaires to gather primary data. The survey targets customers residing in Kerala who have purchased clothing from Kerala-based SMEs in the previous year. The respondents were selected by Random Sampling method. Respondents are selected based on specific criteria,

such as to being within age range of 18-65 years and having an interest in the ethical and sustainable fashion purchasing clothing at latest once a month and it being aware at least three Kerala based clothing SME bars. This sector focuses on SMEs within the clothing industry that enhance sustainable practices (Harrison *et al.* 2021). Data collection involves close-ended questions, The close-ended question can properly gather quantified data on purchasing habits, brand awareness and attitudes towards sustainability, customer perception and experiences in sustainable fashion.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

| criteria | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Geographical Location | Customers residing in Kerala, India. | Customers outside Kerala. |
| Customer Type | Individuals who have purchased clothing from Kerala-based SMEs in the past year. | Individuals who have not purchased clothing from Kerala-based SMEs. |
| Age Range | Adults aged 18-65 years. | Individuals under 18 or over 65 years. |
| Interest in Sustainability | Customers interested in sustainable and ethical fashion. | Customers are indifferent to sustainability and ethical practices. |
| Purchase Frequency | Customers purchase clothing at least once a month. | Customers who purchase clothing less than once a month. |
| Awareness of SME Brands | Customers are aware of at least three Kerala-based clothing SME brands. | Customers unaware of Kerala-based clothing SME brands. |
| Survey Participation | Willingness to participate in a structured survey questionnaire. 70 customers were surveyed | Unwillingness to participate in a structured survey questionnaire. Population group other than customers |

Table 3.6.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

(Source: Self-created)

The survey includes demographic questions to signify the data. Observations focus on consumer behaviors and preferences regarding sustainable products. The multi-faceted approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how sustainable marketing strategy affects customer behavior and business outcomes in the clothing sector (Friedlander *et al.* 2020). By integrating survey responses with documentary evidence, this research learning aims to signify patterns, trends and relationships that inform the effectiveness of sustainable practices to attract and retain customers. This method allows for robust analysis for quantitative data to provide well-rounded perspectives on sustainable marketing in Kerala's clothing SMEs.

3.8 Techniques for data analysis

To analyze the interpretation of collective data the researcher has used the data analysis method. Exploration of sustainable marketing strategies using a quantitative approach and primary data collection method with survey involves systematic analysis to provide meaningful insights. The study involves descriptive statistics & correlation analysis to understand current practices in Kerala clothing SMEs (Velloza *et al.*, 2024). Predicting factors influence sustainable marketing strategies by providing descriptive statistics and features of data collection which includes measures of central tendency with the average value for survey related to sustainable practices in marketing. Dispersion measures include the range of variance and deviation standards to indicate the viability of SMEs' responses. Frequency distribution includes the count and percentage of SME adaptation that widespread certain strategies for the demographic profile of products and operations to contextualize the findings (Mohammed *et al.*, 2024). Correlation analysis assesses the direction and strength to understand various factors between two variables with sustainable marketing strategies. Pearson correlation coefficient measures the correlation between continuous variables to measure the size of SMEs and sustainable marketing practices.

Spearman's rank correlation test is useful for ordinal data as non-parametric data distributes variables to adopt sustainable practices. To embrace sustainable marketing approaches and be devoted to lowering carbon footprint from the environment, supporting communities, and promoting economic sustainability adaptation of sustainable marketing strategies in green marketing defines the correlation between customer demand and marketing investment for sustainability practice (Chou *et al.*, 2004).

3.9 Research Ethics Issues

Conducting research on sustainable market strategies of Kerala clothing SMEs includes several ethical considerations. Voluntary participation, managing confidentiality of data and anonymity of study are the greatest concerns of the researcher. Addressing ethical issues to uphold the integrity of the study while protecting the rights of participants. The researcher has ensured that the participants are entirely voluntary to achieve high response rates to perceive obligations, so the researcher has provided clear and comprehensive information about the research while including the purpose and potential risks along with benefits (Jeremic Stojkovic *et al.*, 2024). Which improves the informed decisions of the researcher by allowing participants for involvement. Emphasis on voluntary participants without negative consequences. The researcher provides rights to withdraw and avoid coercion influence of participants by ensuring invitations to participants by emphasizing the voluntary nature of the research.

Protecting the confidentiality of the participants is significant in the competitive industry, the researcher has implemented strict procedures to manage anonymized data and remove identifying details from the survey to manage the identity security of the participants. Secure data handling with encrypted files and secure server protects the data of the participants from unauthorized access. Additionally, the researcher has incorporated confidentiality agreement to formalize the commitment to protect the information of participants. Gaining access to authentic data from SMEs poses a challenge due to the lack of available data. The researcher has built trust with participants to manage transparency and protect data from reassuring (Sagitova *et al.*, 2024). Ethical data sourcing obtains proper consent and avoids unauthorized access to data. Reliable data sources include triangulating survey data with industry reports of Kerala SMES.

3.10 Summary

The researcher has included customers residing in Kerala, India who are aware of at least three Kerala-based clothing SME brands and Willing to participate in a structured survey questionnaire. Clothing SMEs of Kerala align their products to build a positive influence on the environment. This method allows for robust analysis of quantitative data to provide well-rounded perspectives on sustainable marketing in Kerala's clothing SMEs. Sustainable raw

materials attract environmentally aware customers to the brand. Spearman's rank correlation test is useful for ordinal data as non-parametric data distributes variables to adopt sustainable practices.

Data collection involves closed-ended questions, while close-ended questions properly gather quantified data on purchasing habits, brand awareness and attitudes towards sustainability. Kerala's SMEs utilize cloth bags and recycled paper for their packaging materials to lower the production of plastic waste and improve Kerala's SMEs' recognition in promoting sustainability. The ability to recognize logical relationships between facts helps the researcher to recognize sustainable marketing strategies received by Kerala-based clotting SMEs based on relationships.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis & Findings

4.1 Introduction

Findings and data analysis are among the most important aspects of research. The data analysis chapter analyzes and interprets the collected data from the resources based on relevant references. Data collected from participants' responses has been briefly analyzed in this chapter. Identification of the marketing strategies of the SMEs of the Kerala clothing industry is this chapter's primary objective. The findings of the primary quantitative analysis have been discussed to answer the research questions by maintaining all the research objectives. Justification in answering the research questions provided in the discussion portion as well.

4.2 Primary Quantitative Analysis

4.2.1 Excel analysis

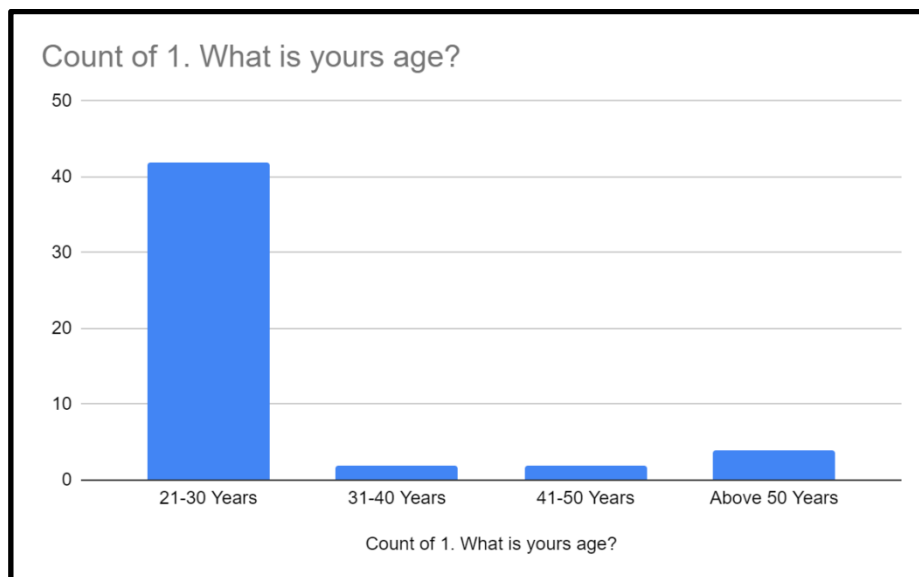


Figure 4.2.1: Age

(Source: MS Excel)

People from every age group participated in the survey. Including people from every age group in the survey is to maintain fair results or outcomes against the survey questions. According to the above figure, most participants are 21-30 years old. The number of participants within this age group was more than 40. The number of participants over 50 years is more than those from the age group of 31-40 years and 41-50 years.

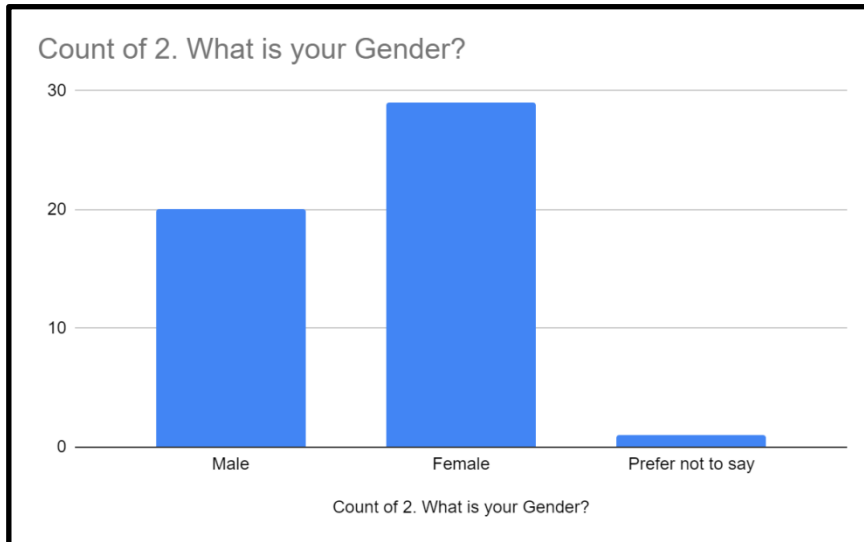


Figure 4.2.2: Gender

(Source: MS Excel)

People from each gender group have participated in the survey process as well. According to the above figure, the number of male participants was 20 which is more than 40%. This factor implies that the number of female participants was more than the number of male participants. As per the above figure, the number of female participants is slightly lower than 30 whereas, the number of respondents who have not disclosed their gender is too low.

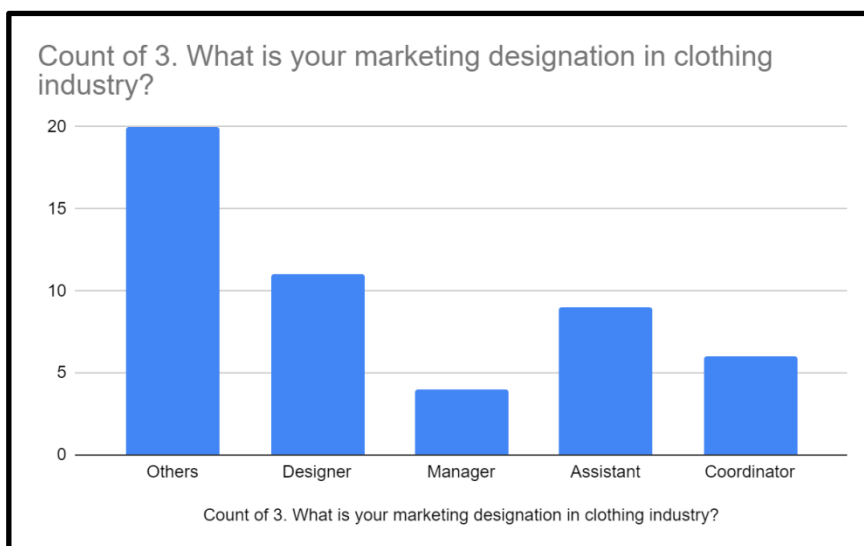


Figure 4.2.3: Marketing designation

(Source: MS Excel)

People from different designations from the marketing group in the clothing industry participated in the survey. According to the figure, most respondents have the designation out

of designer, manager, assistant, and coordinator, including multiple designations or job posts. Apart from that, the number of designers is more than 10 who have participated in the survey. The number of assistants is also close to 10 and the lowest among survey participants. Participation of respondents from all the designations is beneficial to maintain the reliability and validity of this research.

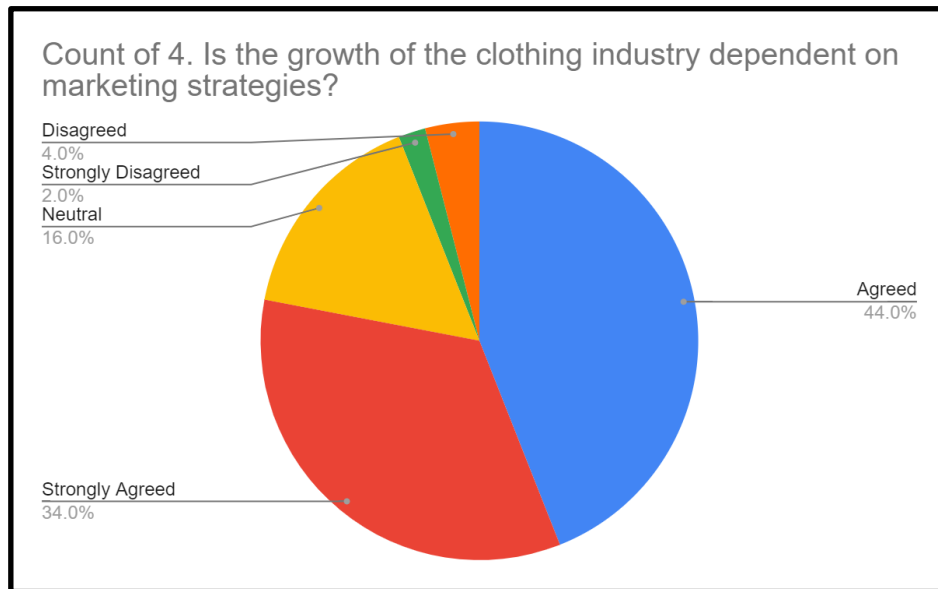


Figure 4.2.4: Dependency of clothing industry on marketing strategies

(Source: MS Excel)

The growth of the clothing industry is dependent on multiple factors and the marketing strategies could be one of those. A question about the dependency of the clothing industry on marketing strategies was added to the survey questionnaire to identify participants' responses. According to the above figure, 34% and 44% of participants strongly agreed and agreed respectively with this question. The percentage of disagreed and strongly disagreed participants is negligible. The statistics imply that marketing strategies are responsible for manipulating the growth of the clothing industry.

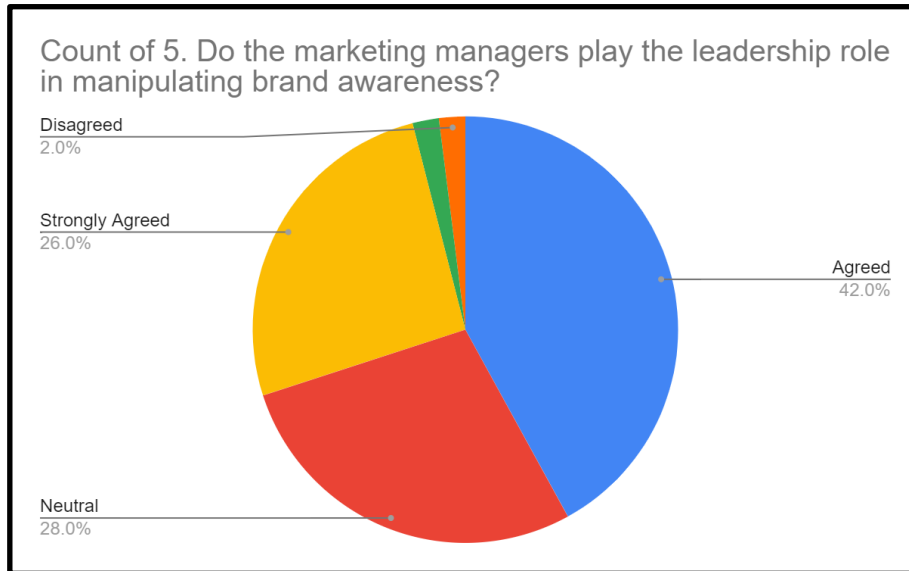


Figure 4.2.5: Marketing managers in manipulating brand awareness

(Source: MS Excel)

A survey question regarding the role of marketing managers in manipulating brand awareness has been asked of the participants. According to the above figure, 42% of respondents agreed with the role-play of leadership by marketing managers. The number of neutral customers against this question is 28%. 26% responded strongly with the role of marketing managers to manipulate brand awareness. Marketing managers are responsible for guiding the employees to enhance brand recognition in a competitive market (Iyer *et al.* 2021).

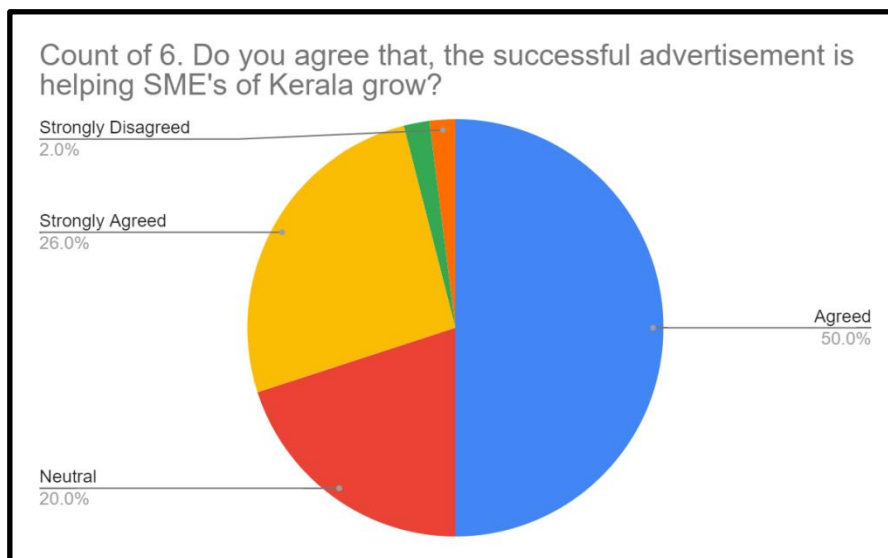


Figure 4.2.6: Brand advertisement in the growth of Kerala SMEs

(Source: MS Excel)

A survey question about the influence of successful advertisement in the growth of SMEs in Kerala was added to the questionnaire to identify participants' responses. According to the above figure, half of the research participants agreed with the influence of successful advertisement in improving the growth of SMEs in Kerala. The number of respondents, 26%, strongly agree with the correlation of advertisement with the SMEs of in Kerala growth. These statistics summaries that brand advertisements are directly correlated with the growth of SMEs in Kerala.

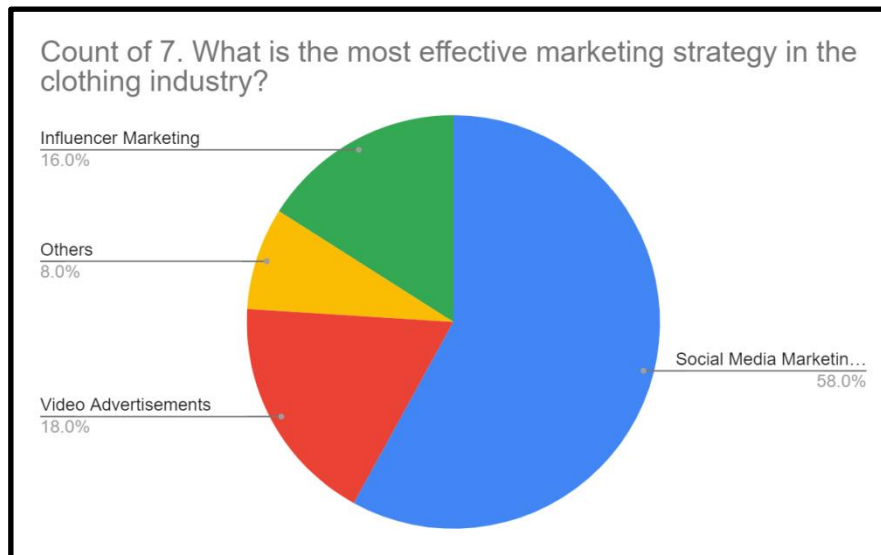


Figure 4.2.7: Marketing strategies of the clothing industry

(Source: MS Excel)

Marketing strategies play an important role in the success of an organization in a competitive landscape (Sudirjo, 2023). A question has been added to the questionnaire to identify the effective marketing strategies in the clothing industry and the view of respondents on that. As per the above figure, respondents signified multiple marketing strategies in the growth of clothing industry. 58% responded stated that, "Social Media Marketing" (SMM) is the most effective marketing strategy. Influencer marketing and video advertisements got the vote of 16% and 18% of the respondents in the effectiveness in terms of marketing strategy in the clothing industry.

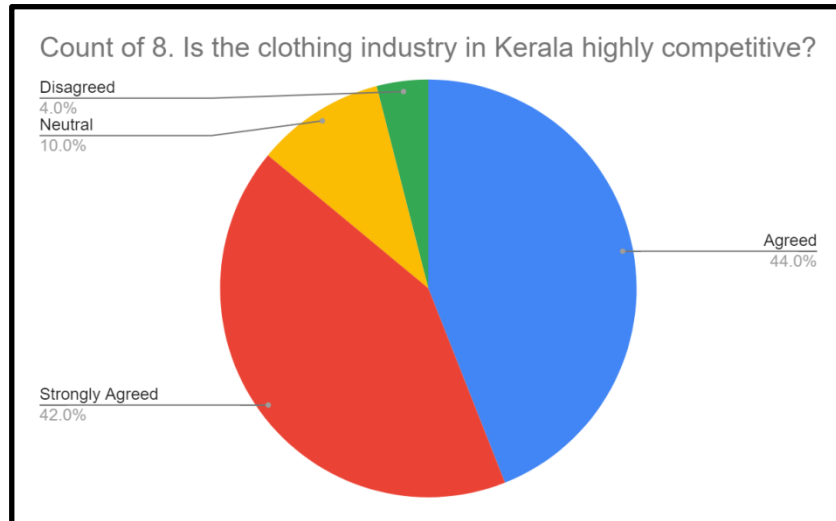


Figure 4.2.8: Competition of Kerala clothing industry

(Source: MS Excel)

The survey question regarding the competitiveness of the clothing industry in Kerala is to identify participants' responses towards this factor. Figure 4.2.8 states that 44% and 42% of participants agreed and strongly agreed with the high competitiveness of the Kerala clothing industry. None strongly disagreed with this factor whereas, 10% and 4% of participants were neutral and disagreed with the high competitiveness of the Kerala clothing industry.

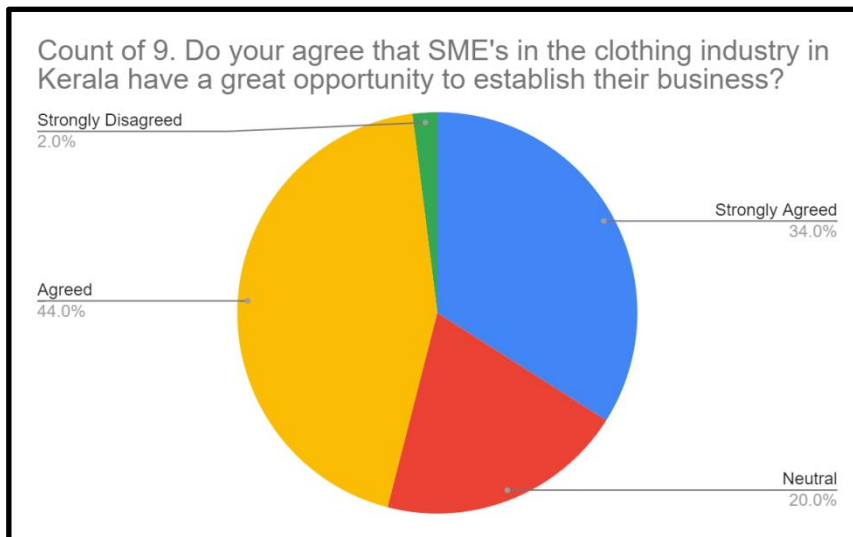


Figure 4.2.9: Opportunity for SMEs in the clothing industry of Kerala

(Source: MS Excel)

A question regarding the opportunity of establishment of the business by the clothing industry of SMEs in Kerala has been added to the survey questionnaire to determine the research questions. According to the above figure, 34% of participants strongly agreed with the high

opportunity for Kerala SMEs to establish their businesses. Positive marketing strategies promote the establishment of a business under favorable circumstances (Yasa *et al.* 2020). 44% of participants agreed that the SMEs of Kerala in the clothing industry could be able to establish their business in the future.

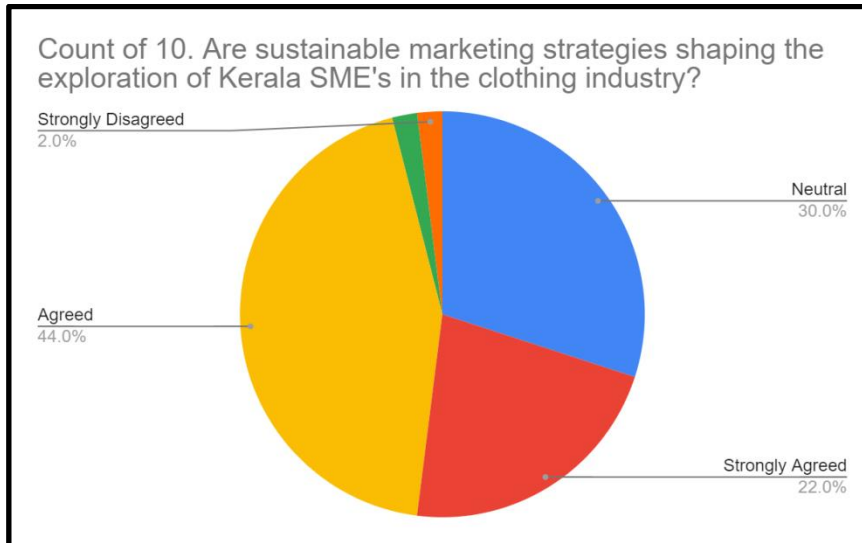


Figure 4.2.10: Marketing strategies in Kerala SMEs in the clothing industry

(Source: MS Excel)

According to the above figure, 44% of respondents agreed that sustainable marketing strategies are shaving the exploration of SMEs in the clothing industry in Kerala. Adding this survey question to the questionnaire is to identify participants' responses regarding influential factors behind the marketing strategies. 22% of participants strongly agreed with the influence of marketing strategies in the exploration of SMEs in the clothing industry of Kerala.

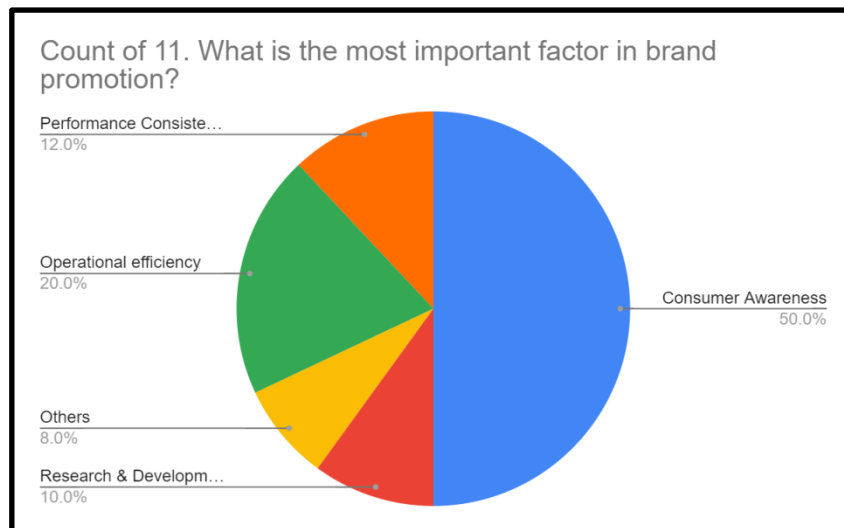


Figure 4.2.11: Important factors in brand promotion

(Source: MS Excel)

The success of a business organization is majorly reliant on brand promotion in a competitive market. Brand promotion of an organization is dependent on a lot of factors and consumer awareness is one of those (Zhao *et al.* 2022). According to Figure 4.2.11, 50% and 20% of respondents stated that consumer awareness and operational efficiency are the primary factors in brand promotion respectively. 12% of participants stated that performance consistency manipulates brand promotion whereas 10% of respondents stated that brand awareness is dependent on research and development.

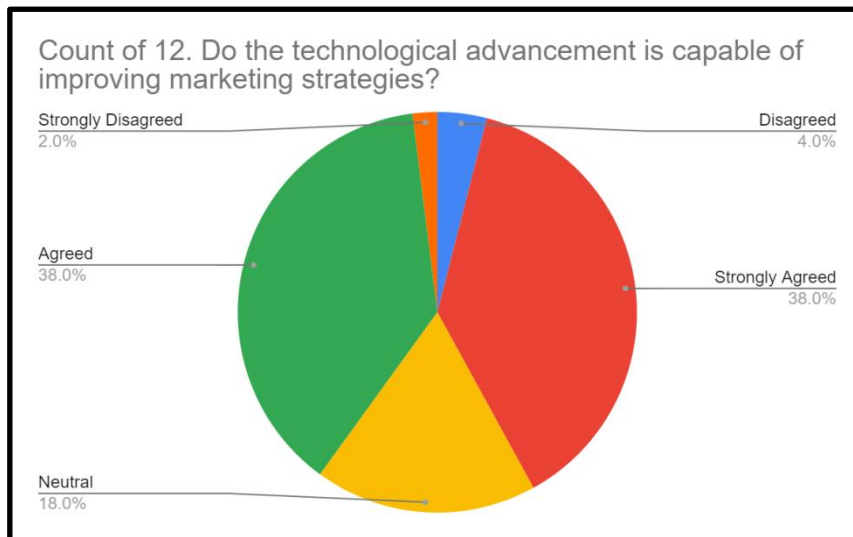


Figure 4.2.12: Marketing strategies in technological advancements

(Source: MS Excel)

Technology is shaping the marketing strategies of business organizations in the current world of digitization. A question regarding the capabilities of Technological advancement in improving marketing strategies has been added to the survey questionnaire. According to the above figure, 38% of participants strongly agreed and agreed with this question. The number of respondents who disagreed is too negligible, implying that Technological advancement can improve marketing strategies.

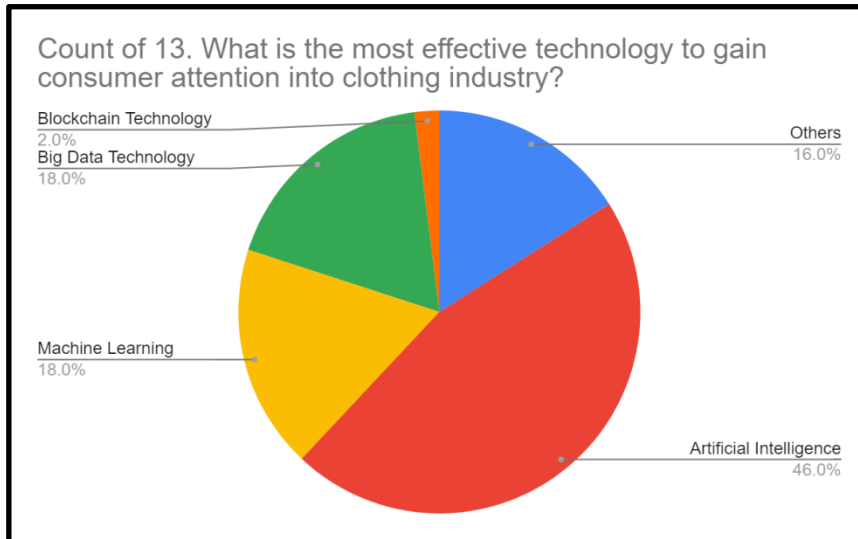


Figure 4.2.13: Effective technology in gaining consumer attention

(Source: MS Excel)

Technological acquisition can gain consumer attention in a business organization including the clothing industry (Ahmad et al. 2020). According to Figure 4.2.13, 46% of participants stated that AI is shaping consumer attention in the clothing industry. 18% of participants that, machine learning and big data Technologies are effective in gaining consumer attention in the clothing industry as well.

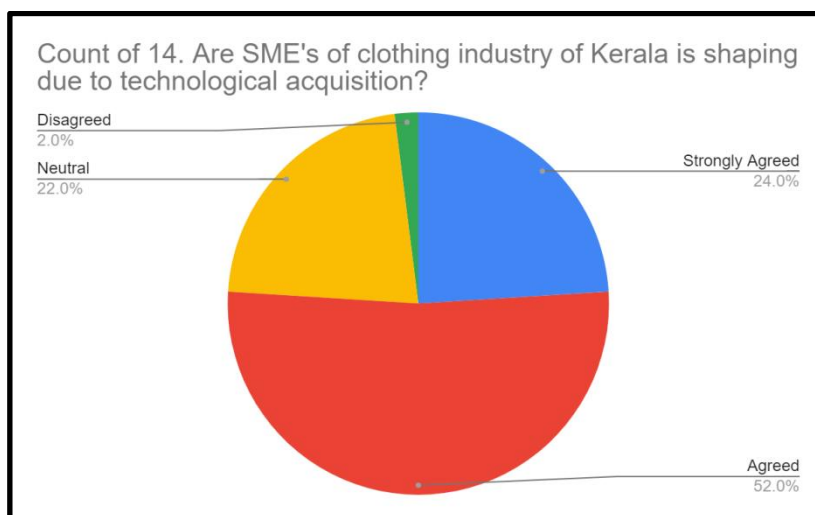


Figure 4.2.14: Kerala SMEs of clothing industry in technological acquisition

(Source: MS Excel)

A question regarding the technological acquisition in shaping the SMEs of the clothing industry in Kerala has been added to the survey questionnaire. 52% and 24% of participants agree and strongly agree with this question. The number of disagreed respondents is negligible which

concludes that the SMEs of the clothing industry in Kerala are majorly dependent on technological acquisition.

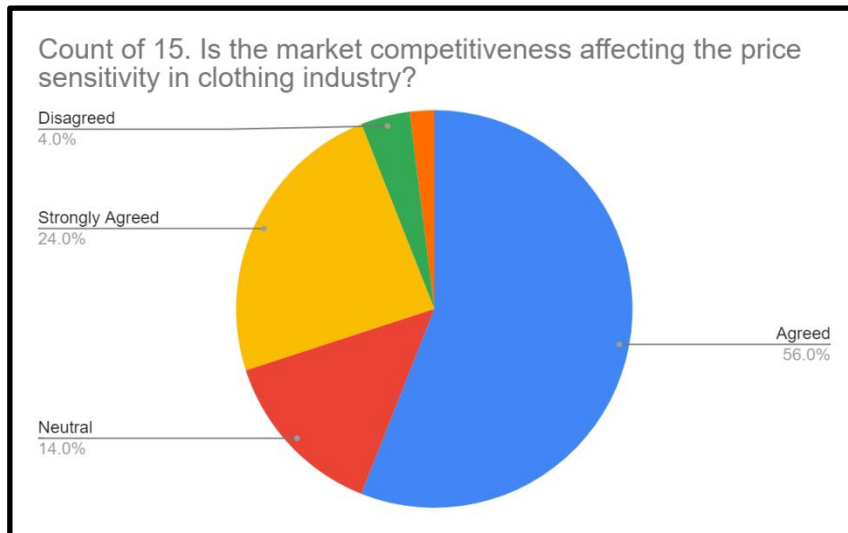


Figure 4.2.15: Impact of market competitiveness on price sensitivity

(Source: MS Excel)

Adding this question is to identify participants' responses regarding the correlation between price sensitivity and market competitiveness in the clothing industry. According to Figure 4.2.15, 56% of participants agreed that market competitiveness is affecting the price sensitivity in the clothing industry. Market competitiveness increases the demand for products and product pricing also increases (Mayer *et al.* 2021). 24% of participants strongly agreed with this factor as well.

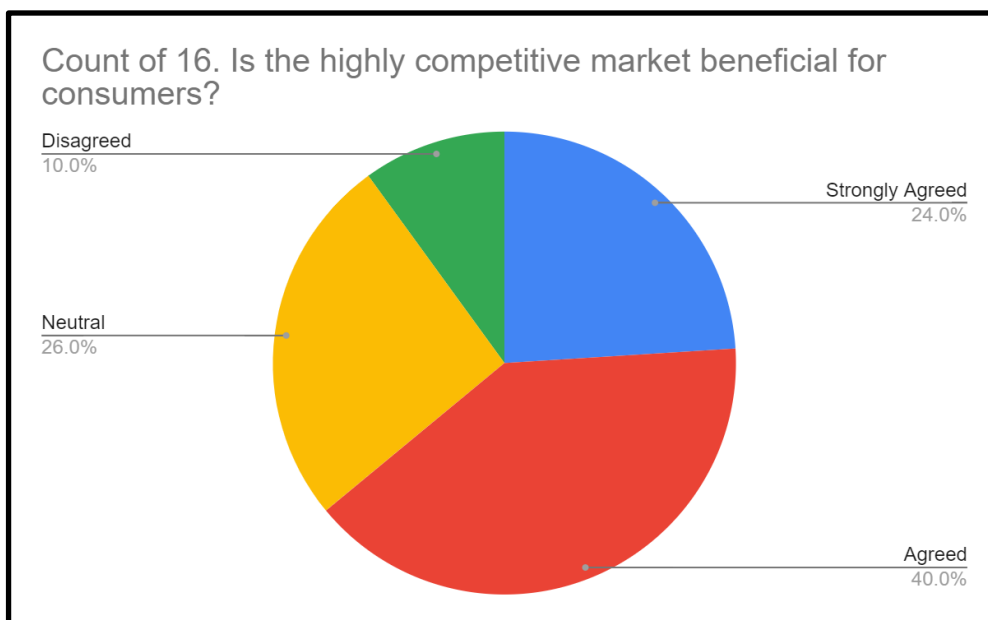


Figure 4.2.16: Advantages of highly competitive market for customers

(Source: Created by the author)

According to the above image, almost 40% of respondents agreed that market competitiveness could be highly beneficial for consumers, as it can easily reduce the price of the products. In addition, customers can buy high-quality products at low prices. During the survey, it was also observed that almost 24% of respondents strongly agreed that the highly competitive scenario of the market could provide different kinds of benefits to consumers at the time of accessing quality products and services. On the other hand, 26% of respondents remained neutral, which explains whether market competitiveness may be beneficial for the customers or not, and 10% of respondents completely disagreed with this fact.

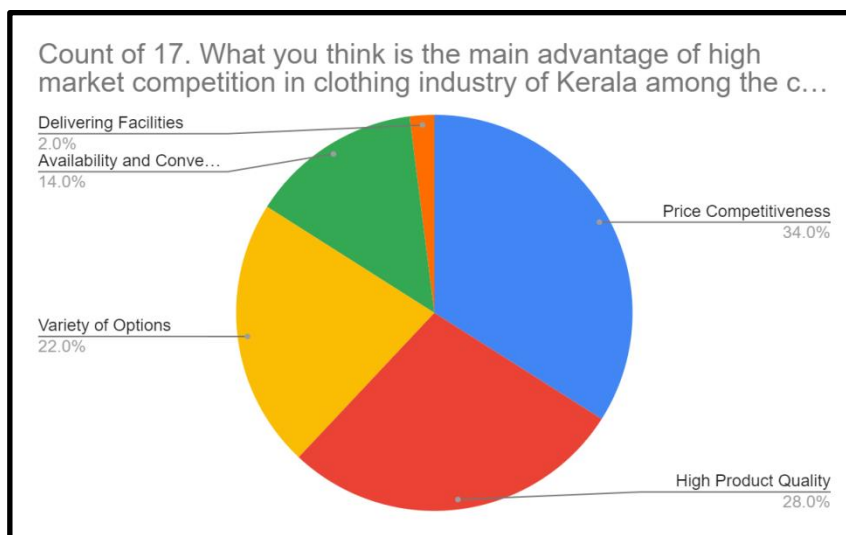


Figure 4.2.17: Price Competitiveness creates high market competition in clothing industry of Kerala

(Source: Created by the author)

As per the above image, it is important to explain that price competitiveness is the main advantage of high market competition in the clothing industry of Kerala among the consumers. 34% of respondents supported those prices became competitive when the clothing market of Kerala became highly competitive. On the other hand, 28% of respondents agreed that high product quality is the main advantage of high market competition. Whereas 22% of respondents agreed that a variety of options is the main advantage. While 14% of respondents supported that availability and convenience are the main advantages and finally 2% of respondents supported that delivery facilities are the main advantage of high market competition including the industry of Kerala.

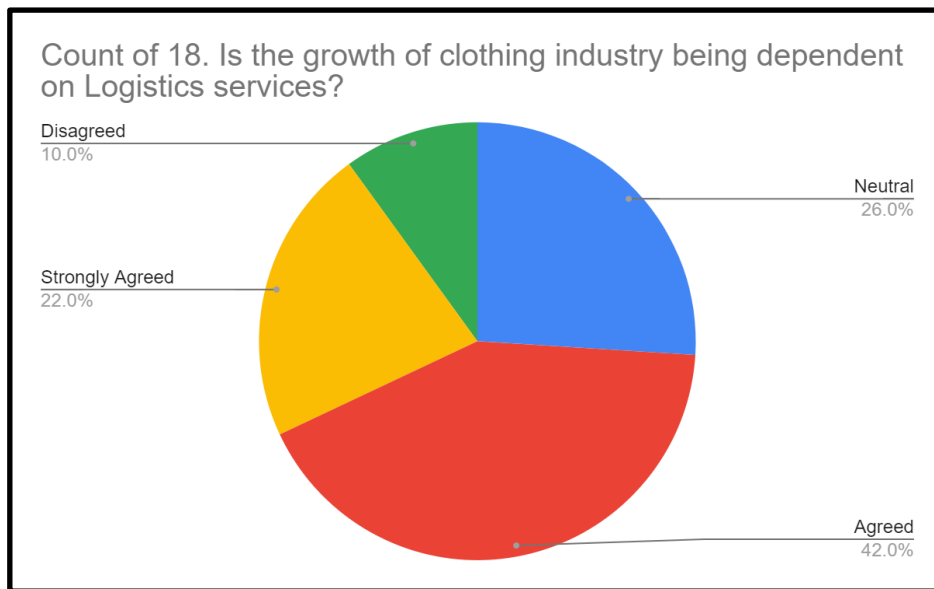


Figure 4.2.18: Logistic service is the main reason for growth for clothing industry of Kerala

(Source: Created by the author)

The above image states that the logistics service is the most important factor that decides the growth of the clothing industry. Almost 42% of respondents agreed that logistics services could develop the clothing industry; as logistic services can reduce stock-outs and business organizations meet delivery deadlines. This way the business organization can maintain its positive image in front of its clients and customers, which they must develop positive brand recognition. Whereas 22% of respondents strongly agreed on the importance of logistic services in the development of the clothing industry. On the other hand, 26% of respondents remain neutral. As per their concern, the logistics service may improve the clothing industry or not. However, 10% of respondents completely disagreed with this fact.

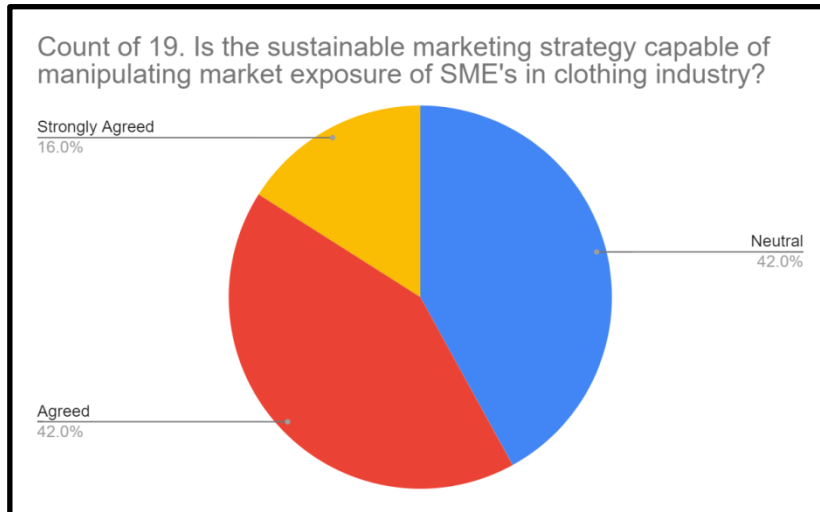


Figure 4.2.19: Sustainable marketing strategy can manipulate the market exposure

(Source: Created by the author)

According to the above graph, it is important to state that a sustainable marketing strategy can manipulate the market exposure of SME clothing organizations in Kerala. During the survey, 42% of respondents agreed with this fact, the sustainable marketing process not only provides all the requirements of the present generation but also provides the ability of the business organization to fulfill the requirements of future generations without harming nature. In addition, this process also makes the business organization socially responsible. Hence, 16% of respondents support the fact and 42% of respondents remain neutral.

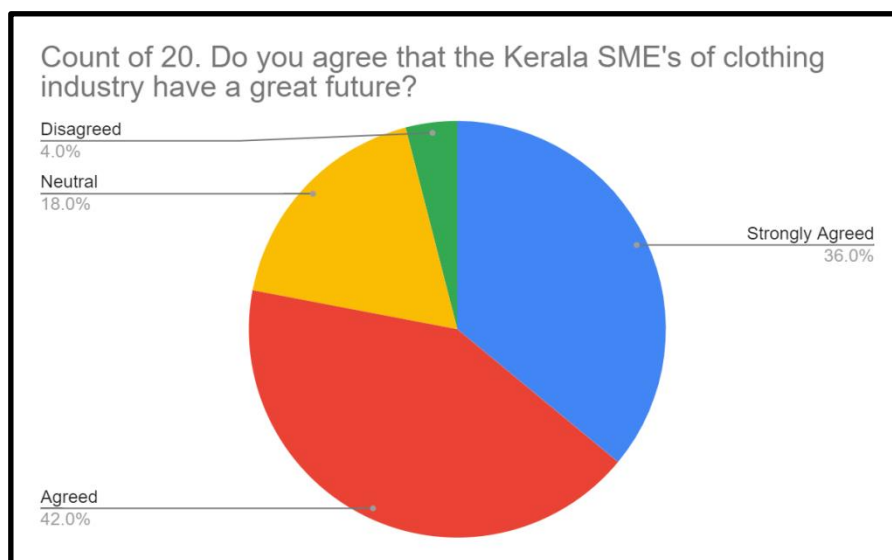


Figure 4.2.20: Kerala SMEs of clothing industry have a great future

(Source: Created by the author)

According to the above graph, it can be stated that the clothing SME industry of Kerala has a great future. Almost 42% of respondents agreed with this fact and 36% of respondents strongly agreed with this fact. However, only 18% of respondents remain neutral in explaining whether the clothing SME industry of Kerala has a great future or not. Finally, only 4% of respondents disagreed with this fact.

4.2.2 SPSS Analysis

This Statistical Analysis was done using IBM SPSS software. With the help of this software the researcher done the Descriptive and Correlation Analysis.

Descriptive

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| | N Statistic | Minimum Statistic | Maximum Statistic | Mean Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Deviation Statistic |
| 1. What is yours age? | 50 | 1 | 4 | 1.36 | .127 | .898 |
| 2. What is your Gender? | 50 | 1 | 3 | 1.44 | .076 | .541 |
| 3. What is your marketing designation in clothing industry? | 50 | 1 | 5 | 3.40 | .219 | 1.552 |
| 4. Is the growth of the clothing industry dependent on marketing strategies? | 50 | 1 | 5 | 2.46 | .198 | 1.403 |
| 5. Do the marketing managers play the leadership role in manipulating brand awareness? | 50 | 1 | 5 | 2.44 | .188 | 1.327 |
| 6. Do you agree that, the successful advertisement is helping SME's of Kerala grow? | 50 | 1 | 5 | 2.28 | .194 | 1.371 |
| 7. What is the most effective marketing strategy in the clothing industry? | 50 | 1 | 4 | 2.78 | .132 | .932 |
| 8. Is the clothing industry in Kerala highly competitive? | 50 | 1 | 4 | 2.50 | .201 | 1.418 |
| 9. Do your agree that SME's in the clothing industry in Kerala have a great opportunity to establish their business? | 50 | 1 | 4 | 1.94 | .132 | .935 |
| 10. Are sustainable marketing strategies shaping the exploration of Kerala SME's in the clothing industry? | 50 | 1 | 5 | 2.36 | .185 | 1.306 |
| 11. What is the most important factor in brand promotion? | 50 | 1 | 5 | 2.12 | .199 | 1.409 |
| 12. Do the technological advancement is capable of improving marketing strategies? | 50 | 1 | 5 | 2.62 | .196 | 1.383 |
| 13. What is the most effective technology to gain consumer attention into clothing industry? | 50 | 1 | 5 | 2.40 | .225 | 1.591 |
| 14. Are SME's of clothing industry of Kerala is shaping due to technological acquisition? | 50 | 1 | 4 | 2.18 | .184 | 1.304 |
| 15. Is the market competitiveness affecting the price sensitivity in clothing industry? | 50 | 1 | 5 | 2.12 | .193 | 1.365 |
| 16. Is the highly competitive market beneficial for consumers? | 50 | 1 | 4 | 2.34 | .175 | 1.239 |
| 17. What you think is the main advantage of high market competition in clothing industry of Kerala among the consumers? | 50 | 1 | 5 | 3.48 | .179 | 1.266 |
| 18. Is the growth of clothing industry being dependent on Logistics services? | 50 | 1 | 4 | 2.28 | .174 | 1.230 |
| 19. Is the sustainable marketing strategy capable of manipulating market exposure of SME's in clothing industry? | 50 | 1 | 3 | 1.74 | .102 | .723 |
| 20. Do you agree that the Kerala SME's of clothing industry have a great future? | 50 | 1 | 4 | 2.48 | .192 | 1.359 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 50 | | | | | |

Figure 4.2.21 Descriptive statistics

The findings of the descriptive analysis offer an understanding of the views and attitudes of the respondents on different aspects that can influence the clothing industry in the context of Kerala concerning marketing and technology. The target population was 70 respondents, and the variables included age, gender, marketing designation, and perceived growth and level of competitiveness of the clothing industry. The mean values of most questions range from 1 to 3, which suggests the respondents are neutral to moderately positive in their attitude towards the questions posed. The mean concerning the impact of the effectiveness of marketing strategies and the role of technological advancement on marketing strategies with 2.46 and 2.62

respectively. It indicates that, according to the respondents, these factors are of moderate importance. The high values of the standard deviation like 1.552 for the marketing designation also demonstrate that there is a variation in the outcome that can be because of the respondent profile and their job responsibility within the clothing industry.

It is possible to identify aspects within which respondents can perceive considerable opportunities or find various challenges. The mean score was rated 1 for the question of opportunity that the clothing industry has for SMEs in Kerala. It shows that respondents are not optimistic about the future of the industry for SMEs. The response to the extent to which sustainable marketing strategies are influencing the exploration of SMEs which was a mean of 2.36 suggests that the participants have a moderate level of belief that sustainability is an influencing factor in the market. But as the standard deviations are constantly above 1, these data prove that in the industrial context, opinion is divided. It is necessary to launch more specific initiatives related to risks and possibilities.

| | | Correlations | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | 1. What is your age? | 2. What is your gender? | 3. What is your marketing designation in clothing industry? | 4. Is the growth of the clothing industry dependent on marketing strategies? | 5. Do the marketing managers play the leadership role in manipulating brand awareness? | 6. Do you agree that the successful development of SMEs in Kerala has a great opportunity to establish their business? | 7. What is the most effective marketing strategy in the clothing industry? | 8. Do you agree that SMEs in the clothing industry in Kerala have a great opportunity to establish their business? | 9. Do you agree that the successful development of SMEs in Kerala has a great opportunity to establish their business? | 10. Are sustainable marketing strategies influencing the exploration of SMEs in the clothing industry? | 11. What is the most important factor in brand promotion? | 12. Do the technological advancement is capable of improving marketing strategies? | 13. What is the most effective technology to gain consumer attention in the clothing industry? | 14. Are SMEs of clothing industry in Kerala is exploring digital marketing strategies? | 15. Is the market competitiveness affecting the price sensitivity in clothing industry? | 16. Is the highly competitive market beneficial for consumers? | 17. What you think is the main advantage of high market competition in clothing industry? | 18. Is the growth of clothing industry being dependent on Logistics services? | 19. Is the sustainable marketing strategies capable of manipulating market exposure of SMEs in clothing industry? | 20. Do you agree that the Kerala SMEs of clothing industry have a great future? | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. What is your age? | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .314 | .092 | .287 | .001 | .262 | -.025 | -.240 | .099 | -.043 | .083 | -.331* | .097 | .074 | -.119 | -.112 | -.065 | -.093 | .116 | .173 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .138 | .871 | .049 | .993 | .570 | .881 | .093 | .493 | .766 | .566 | .019 | .002 | .810 | .410 | .438 | .652 | .520 | .424 | .228 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. What is your gender? | Pearson Correlation | | 1 | .378 | .076 | .208 | .001 | -.168 | 1.130 | 1.134 | 1.116 | -.124 | .084 | .290* | .036 | -.128 | .229 | -.017 | 1.148 | .036 | .048 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | .136 | .591 | .593 | .147 | .727 | .242 | .357 | .353 | .222 | .360 | .657 | .041 | .836 | .374 | .109 | .808 | .303 | .796 | .783 | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. What is your marketing designation in clothing industry? | Pearson Correlation | | | 1 | -.095 | .012 | -.168 | -.208 | 1.140 | .045 | -.002 | -.013 | .291* | .174 | .216 | .121 | .076 | .056 | .216 | -.089 | -.039 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | .671 | .931 | .059 | .036 | .241 | .151 | .354 | .756 | .988 | .828 | .640 | .226 | .132 | .401 | .668 | .609 | .126 | .833 | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Is the growth of the clothing industry dependent on marketing strategies? | Pearson Correlation | | | | 1 | .306* | .059 | -.188 | .262 | .021 | -.049 | .023 | .355* | -.139 | -.269 | .194 | .002 | -.081 | .279 | .080 | .203 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | .048 | .593 | .059 | .031 | .884 | .195 | .066 | .002 | .742 | .873 | .011 | .336 | .059 | .176 | .988 | .576 | .050 | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Do the marketing managers play the leadership role in manipulating brand awareness? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | 1 | .189 | -.300* | .401** | 1.120 | .213 | .026 | .148 | .118 | .248 | .094 | .414** | -.282 | .346* | .334 | .277 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | .092 | .147 | .035 | .031 | .189 | .035 | .004 | .405 | .136 | .859 | .303 | .415 | .002 | .515 | .003 | .066 | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Do you agree that the successful development of SMEs in Kerala has a great opportunity to establish their business? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | 1 | .049 | .179 | .348* | 1.114 | .109 | .025 | .079 | .188 | .200 | .087 | .121 | .086 | .240 | .124 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | .570 | .727 | .241 | .084 | .189 | | .734 | .215 | .013 | .432 | .451 | .863 | .087 | .191 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. What is the most effective marketing strategy in the clothing industry? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | 1 | -.039 | .355 | -.021 | .005 | -.193 | -.091 | .094 | -.171 | -.199 | .161 | .237 | -.087 | .069 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | .881 | .242 | .151 | .195 | .035 | .734 | .790 | .705 | .866 | .873 | .180 | .530 | .564 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. Is the clothing industry in Kerala highly competitive? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | 1 | .285 | .243 | -.123 | .380* | .127 | .116 | .211 | .315 | -.193 | .293 | .169 | .169 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | .003 | .013 | .002 | .007 | .281 | .423 | .149 | .024 | .178 | .239 | .243 | .238 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9. Do you agree that SMEs in the clothing industry in Kerala have a great opportunity to establish their business? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | 1 | .436** | .052 | .366 | .071 | .277 | .454** | .071 | .008 | .210 | .218 | .537** | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | .002 | .720 | .002 | .022 | .002 | .002 | .001 | .825 | .908 | .143 | .128 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10. Are sustainable marketing strategies influencing the exploration of SMEs in the clothing industry? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | 1 | .076 | .360* | .047 | .524* | .319* | .364* | .029 | .203 | .188 | .234 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | .400 | .010 | .745 | <.001 | .024 | .059 | .841 | .158 | .182 | .102 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11. What is the most important factor in brand promotion? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | .039 | .337 | .211* | .375* | .005 | .544* | .083 | .179 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | | .019 | .016 | .018 | .001 | .001 | .013 | <.001 | .057 | .224 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12. Do the technological advancement is capable of improving marketing strategies? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | .039 | .337 | .211* | .375* | .005 | .544* | .083 | .179 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | .019 | .016 | .018 | .001 | .001 | .013 | <.001 | .057 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13. What is the most effective technology to gain consumer attention in the clothing industry? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | .250 | -.080 | .188 | -.330* | .275 | .163 | .043 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | .008 | .078 | .190 | .019 | .053 | .257 | .785 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 14. Are SMEs of clothing industry in Kerala is exploring digital marketing strategies? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | .396** | .004** | -.029 | .369** | .332 | .214 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | .009 | <.001 | .843 | .005 | .019 | .134 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15. Is the market competitiveness affecting the price sensitivity in clothing industry? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | .193 | .086 | .430* | .363* | .552** | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | .180 | .507 | .002 | .010 | <.001 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16. Is the highly competitive market beneficial for consumers? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | .024 | .059 | .050 | .000 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | .813 | .621 | .524 | .319* | | | | | | | | | | |
| 17. What you think is the main advantage of high market competition in clothing industry? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | .069 | -.240 | -.042 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | .007 | .893 | .001 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18. Is the growth of clothing industry being dependent on Logistics services? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | .260 | .238 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | .007 | .027 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19. Is the sustainable marketing strategies capable of manipulating market exposure of SMEs in clothing industry? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | .441** | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | .001 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 20. Do you agree that the Kerala SMEs of clothing industry have a great future? | Pearson Correlation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | .001 | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 4.2.22: Correlation statistics

Some of the relevant findings of the correlation analysis of various factors that influence the clothing industry in Kerala for the above indicators are very essential. There is also a moderate positive relationship between age, marketing strategy, and brand promotion with higher scores on perceived dependence received from older respondents. It implies that they perceive a positive relationship between marketing and industry growth. Gender has an insignificant connection with most variables, and gender differences do not play a significant role in perceiving industry factors. Marketing designations are mildly related to the perception of competitiveness in the industry and technology aspect but not very strongly. Immediate past research has shown that the clothing industries' dependence on marketing strategies for growth is an inverse relation, and the perception of marketing managers' leadership role is in direct association with other factors such as technological developments and market forces. Sustainable marketing strategies and technology are significant determiners of brand awareness and SME success thus auspicious in determining the destiny of the industry. The study also provides evidence that market forces to enhance price sensitivity and consumer benefits and logistics services are essential to the industry's progress. The findings generalize the idea that age and gender are accessible to a certain extent, but the marketing strategies, technologies, and competitiveness play a key role in the changing scenario of the Kerala clothing industry.

4.3 Discussion

The critical discussion allows the reader to delve deeply into the implications of the research findings. This section helps to interpret the results within the wide study field. The findings of the literature review and primary quantitative have been critically discussed to answer each research objective. Primary quantitative research involves gathering the original data directly through surveys. It ensures that data is specific to the research questions.

4.3.1. Significance of sustainable marketing strategies in Kerala-based Clothing SMEs

SMEs improve their environmental and social impact and strengthen their financial standing through embracing sustainability. The literature review states that the clothing and textile industry plays a vital role in the economy, as this industry generates significant revenue through global trade, and becomes a source of employment (Vilakazi *et al.*, 2020). SMEs grab attention from economic experts, policymakers, and academics. Natural dyes and natural dyeing

methods have been a focus for the scientific community because these methods offer many advantages. Natural dyes are sustainable, safer than synthetic dyes, and eco-friendly which make them a popular choice for health-conscious customers (Benli *et al.*, 2024). On a similar note, the primary quantitative result asserts that most of the customers believe that price competitiveness is the main advantage of high market competition in the clothing industry of Kerala. The increased competition among clothing brands drives prices down. In the intensely competitive market, businesses need to offer attractive prices to grab the attention of the customers which benefits the customers to access the clothing products to more affordable options.

The study report addressed that Sulochana Cotton Spinning Mills in Chitambalam, which is a clothing factory in Tirupur, started to use recycled polyethylene terephthalate bottles in garments and fabric (Preetha, 2023). Tirupur is in Tamil Nadu which is the neighboring state of Kerala and is known as a significant garment manufacturing hub. This clothing factory is aligned with SDGs including responsible production and consumption that attract support from the effective stakeholders and lead to global sustainable efforts. Similarly, the primary quantitative result states consumer awareness is the most important factor in brand promotion. On this note, the published article, states that consumerism is rooted in our daily lives from shopping activities at the end of the year to the convenience of online purchases. The monetarily driven lifestyle strains finances and harms the environment. Due to this affordable and sustainable clothing demand, Malai, a vegan alternative leather brand, in Kerala was introduced (Arora, 2021). This sustainable marketing approach is helpful for Kerala to address the environmental impact of the fashion industry. Therefore, it can be inferred that RO1, the idea of sustainable marketing strategies, has been met and states that the promote local materials, use of green packaging, and implementation of recycling programs in Kerala clothing companies address the environmental concerns.

4.3.2 The process to develop the effectiveness of Kerala-based clothing SMEs

Brand identity is essential for clothing organizations. Marketing strategy is the most effective way to manifest the brand identity of a clothing organization. According to Alzoubi *et al.* (2022), market segmentation is the way to establish effective marketing strategies. In addition, business organizations need to focus on the online marketing process to make people aware of the product and service. Social media platforms always assist business organizations, especially clothing organizations, to make their products popular for a wide range of target markets. In the view of Khodabandeh, and Lindh (2021), in the contemporary digital age, it

becomes essential for any clothing organization to make a sustainable position in the market. Online marketing always helps small clothing organizations to access the worldwide market by following a very easy process. You do not need to concentrate on any kind of geographical boundaries or limitations. This is the most important and cost-effective way to promote the products. In the traditional marketing process business organizations need to depend on billboards, TV advertisements, newspaper advertisements, and magazine advertisements which always require a huge amount of funds, whereas social media marketing or online marketing is considered the most pocket-friendly and is reachable for a wide range of customers as well as offer a good return on investment. Ihzaturrahma and Kusumawati (2021), always suggest that data-driven decisions always can properly predict the market situation. Online marketing assists the business organization in analyzing the market-centric data and helps to develop strategies that can appeal effectively to the target customers. According to a survey of January 2023, it has been observed that Facebook is the most common social media platform for global marketers than any kind of traditional marketing process. 89% of marketers prefer Facebook and 80% of marketers prefer Instagram to promote clothing products (Dencheva, 2024). As per the survey of 2023, digital marketing has offered almost 366.1 billion US dollars as revenue to global business organizations (Digitalvidya, 2024). With the help of online marketing business organizations also can improve, their conversion rate by offering personalized products also it allows the business organization to establish direct communications with the customers to promote the clothing products. The dynamic process of online marketing always offers real-time optimization to the clothing organization to earn the biggest advantage for the business. To improve the marketing strategy of the clothing brands of Kerala to focus on the online marketing process by building their websites (Webdesigncochin, 2024). As well as they also need to understand the facilities of the social media platforms and influence marketing processes to promote the products and develop brand awareness. Clothing SME organizations of Kerala also can improve their marketing strategies by focusing on SEO content as well as by maturing email marketing strategies. SEO content always helps business organizations to enhance their position among customers and it easily can improve the local ranking of the organization. However, by following the online marketing process the clothing SMEs of Kerala can offer more personalized products as well as discounts to establish successful interaction with the consumers. These kinds of personal relations always help that organization to enhance customer loyalty and brand recognition.

4.3.3. Barriers often faced by Kerala-based clothing SMEs while integrating sustainable marketing

Kerala-based clothing SMEs often face issues in integrating sustainable marketing due to financial limitations, market competition, technological limitations, and maintaining regulatory compliance. The literature review found that manufacturing businesses face sustainability issues because their suppliers fail to meet sustainability criteria (Govindan and Jha, 2024). During the sustainable manufacturing supply chain implementation, companies face a variety of barriers that require a comprehensive decision-making approach to find an effective solution. On a similar note, the primary quantitative data analysis found that most of the Kerala textile customers agreed that the growth of the clothing industry is dependent on logistics services. Logistics services play a vital role in the supply chain, meaning the flow of raw material. However, any disruption in logistics including transportation delays, geopolitical issues, or natural disasters directly impacts the timely delivery of raw materials.

The literature review found that textile and apparel firms face issues due to shortened delivery times, lower costs, and difficulties in managing geographic complexity (Warasthe, Brandenburg, and Seuring, 2022). Synchronizing the quick deliveries involves managing the multiple suppliers and production stages that challenge the streamlined process. Besides that, next-generation textiles (NGTs) are the paradigm shift in the textile industry and incorporate the most recent advances in technologies, features, and materials (Hossain *et al.*, 2024). NGTs are more advanced and provide new functionalities compared to traditional fabrics. The advanced textiles are designed to be sustainable and eco-friendly, however, some of the methods used to manufacture them still cause pollution. Nature can be harmed by the microscopic material, waste, and fabric chemicals used in textile manufacturing. Besides that, NGTs may pose risks associated with chemical exposure, heat issues, and electrical hazards.

In recent days, advanced textiles have increasingly used nanotechnology that helps to create garments and fabrics with UV-resistant, optical, electrically conductive, flame-retardant properties. These nanoparticles can be ingested or inhaled through the skin that have an adverse impact on human health (Hossain *et al.*, 2024). The published report states that Kerala mills faced issues in a global economic downturn, rising materials, high power charges, and rising material costs that led to several job losses (News Bureau, 2023). The Kerala mills including Kottayam Textiles in Kottayam, Thrissur Cooperative Spinning Mill, Sitaram Textiles in Thrissur, and Prabhuram Mills faced uncertain issues like the global economic downturn. Therefore, RO3, the challenge faced by textile companies, has been met and states that the

textile SMEs in Kerala often face issues in supply chain disruption, global economic downturn, and technological limitations.

4.3.4. Strategies to Overcome the Challenges while Integrating Sustainable Marketing in Kerala-based Clothing SMEs

Kerala-based clothing SMEs need to focus on leveraging local resources, improve supply chain transparency, and adopt advanced technology to mitigate the issues. The literature review found that the textile items need to be long-lasting to support sustainability (Plakantonaki *et al.*, 2024). The three key design aspects include a design for disassembly, a design for durability, and a design for a long-lasting style. The Kerala-based clothing SMEs need to choose high-quality and strong materials to prevent tearing out. Another idea considers the customers' fashion sensibility by selecting the classic color that stays in style longer. On a similar note, the quantitative data analysis found that most of Kerala Textile consumers believe that social media marketing is the most effective marketing strategy in the clothing industry.

The literature review found that social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube have massive users that allow fashion brands to reach a diverse customer base (Kochhar, 2020). Fashion brands across various segments including fast-fashion retailers (H&M, Zara), online retailers (Boohoo, ASOS), and sports fashion brands (Nike) are increasingly using social media in their marketing activities. In this regard, Kerala small and medium companies can use the benefits of social media to spread the sustainable practices that the companies undertake.

Besides that, through conducting the survey, it was found that most of the Kerala Textile customers believe that artificial intelligence is the most effective technology to gain consumer attention in the clothing industry. This raw data collected from the participants indicates that customers value the potential of AI to improve their shopping experiences. The literature review found that artificial intelligence is the idea of simulating the learning, perception, decision-making, and reasoning of human brain capacity. The AI algorithms can be used in the Kerala sustainable textile SMEs to analyze customer data and preferences to recommend products or services that improve the shopping experience (Bravo and Iturralde, 2024). Therefore, RO2, a recognized strategy for Kerala-based clothing SMEs, has been met and states that these SMEs need to improve their supply chain, adopt AI, and integrate social media platforms to meet their desired goals in the evolving market.

4.4 Summary

The data analysis helps to reveal the patterns and trends in large data sets that help to understand the forecast future outcomes. This study has conducted the primary quantitative research method that helped to gather the raw data directly from the participants and help to answer the specific research questions. The study critically discussed the primary quantitative results with the literature review findings to meet each research objective. This research paper found that promoting local materials, the use of green packaging, and the implementation of recycling programs in Kerala clothing companies address environmental concerns. However, the textile SMEs in Kerala often face issues with supply chain disruption, global economic downturn, and technological limitations. Furthermore, these SMEs need to improve their supply chain, adopt AI, and integrate social media platforms to meet their desired goals in the evolving market.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Through the whole study, it is concluded that a sustainable marketing strategy highlights environmental, economic, and social positive effects. This marketing strategy facilitates the production of products that have a low harmful impact on the environment and society. Clothing SMEs of Kerala adopt this sustainable marketing strategy to value the environment and community. This study finds that a sustainable marketing strategy helps Kerala SMEs strengthen brand recognition and ensure a positive impact on the community. Moreover, this study finds that nowadays people are more aware of environmental impact and select companies that incorporate sustainable practices in their products. In this context, to maintain sustainable practices clothing SMEs in Kerala source local raw products to strengthen the local economy and minimize costs and carbon particles produced from transport systems. In addition, SMEs prioritize using bamboo, eco-friendly fabrics, and organic cotton as raw materials for clothing products. Clothing SMEs in Kerala concentrate on biodegradable packaging methods as a substitute for plastic packaging. Additionally, clothing SMEs prioritize recyclable and reusable materials such as recycled paper and cloth bag materials for packaging. Sustainable marketing strategies encourage SMEs to minimize plastic usage and promote sustainability.

This study explores the benefits of implementing sustainable marketing strategies in Kerala's clothing SMEs. In this context, adherence to sustainable marketing strategies helps SMEs boost

brand reputation and recognition. This optimistic reputation can improve new customer acquisition and increase customer retention rates, significantly boosting business growth. Most customers are eco-aware and select brands that offer sustainable products. Thus, sustainable marketing incorporation attracts environment-conscious customers and creates reliability that builds strong connections with customers. Sustainable practices are a cost-saving approach and can increase the effectiveness of business operations. Moreover, SMEs employ renewable energy systems to stimulate energy efficiency.

However, this study finds some challenges for Kerala's clothing SMEs in implementing sustainable marketing strategies such as inadequate investment, supply chain disorders, technological issues, and market pressure. However, SMEs implement strong methods to minimize these challenges such as collaboration with suppliers, high financial investment, R&D initiatives, and adopt advanced technologies. Clothing SMEs prioritize staying updated about ethical practices, and sustainable rules to avoid legal liabilities. Additionally, Kerala's clothing SMEs collaborate with investors, tech companies, and potential suppliers to ensure the smooth implementation of sustainable practices.

5.2 Linking with Objectives

Theme 1 is linked with objective 1 outlines the understanding of sustainable practices, their roles, and ways of enhancing their effectiveness that create a favorable impact on the environment. Sustainable marketing always highlights products that value the environment and customers' well-being and meet market needs. It fosters long-lasting value for both stakeholders and businesses. This marketing strategy promotes cost-efficiency, lowers disposals, reduces harmful impacts on the environment, and maximizes social well-being. Sustainable marketing strategies promote products that produce zero carbon footprint and are eco-friendly (Anita *et al.*, 2024) Kerala's SMEs implement sustainable practices and emphasize using sustainable materials like organic cotton, and bamboo, minimizing waste, and promoting energy efficiency. In this context, the sustainable marketing method promotes the use of reusable and biodegradable materials replacing plastic materials for packaging.

SMEs must adopt cutting-edge technologies that rigorously monitor sustainability in business operations and educate customers regarding the importance of sustainable practices.

Additionally, clothing SMEs in Kerala proactively engage communities in their sustainability endeavors and collaborate with government organizations, and NGOs to strengthen sustainable initiatives.

Themes 2 and 4 are linked with objective 2 which illustrates the advantages of sustainable marketing strategies. Sustainable marketing can strengthen the brand image of Kerala-based clothing SMEs. Kerala's clothing SMEs can differentiate their products and dominate the clothing market by using environmentally friendly products and gaining customer trust (Ijomah *et al.*, 2024). This practice promotes efficient usage of resources that helps SMEs to save business costs. Besides, SMEs in Kerala can gain government subsidies and incentives to stimulate sustainable marketing. This marketing helps SMEs to stay competitive in this competitive market, thus clothing SMEs adopt sustainability to dominate the clothing market. Sustainable marketing is a unique selling recommendation that acquires loyal consumers. Sustainable marketing allows SMEs to improve brand reputation and trustworthiness and foster an ethical culture. This marketing strategy helps SMEs to promote innovation, Distinguish their clothing products and prioritize social and environmental well-being. Thus, sustainable marketing stimulates business improvement and facilitates sustainability. SMEs implement some strategies that help them to minimize issues in incorporating sustainable practices. They source materials that are locally produced, minimize transportation costs and boost the local economy. Kerala's clothing SMEs collaborate with government entities, suppliers, tech associations, and investors to ensure the smooth incorporation of sustainable marketing practices (Atique, 2024). SMEs accentuate developing an inventive culture and finance in R&D endeavors to explore inventive sustainable methods.

Theme 4 is linked with objective 3 which defines the challenges encountered by Kerala's clothing SMEs while incorporating sustainable marketing. SMEs face financial burdens or restrictions in executing sustainable marketing. Moreover, sustainable marketing implementation requires high capital which creates obstacles for SMEs (Alam, Ahmad, and Abunar, 2024). In addition, sustainable initiatives need high expenditures that create financial hindrances for Kerala's clothing SMEs. Sometimes, the allocation of sufficient funds for sustainable actions is challenging for SMEs. Sometimes SMEs face ethical issues and parallel maintaining fairness in their supply chains. In this context, it is challenging to originate ethical resources that have environmentally friendly usefulness and standard sustainable quality. Sometimes, sourcing sustainable materials is difficult as they are not locally available and require higher costs. Sustainable marketing methods must obey global and national regulations. In this context, certifications are highly crucial to foster authenticity and reliability. However, SMEs face problems in achieving certifications and observing the regulations because of higher expenditure. Sustainable marketing methods require technological innovation to mitigate waste

issues and promote energy efficiency. Sometimes, embracing these cutting-edge technologies can be hard for Kerala's SMEs as it demands high expenses.

5.3 Recommendations

To improve the sustainable marketing strategy, the Kerala clothing SME industry not only concentrates on the sustainable manufacturing process but also promotes more ethical business practices, so their marketing strategies attract a wider customer group. As the present generation has become environmentally conscious as well as socially responsible, it is, the responsibility of the clothing SME industries of Kerala to promote the most ethical business practices through their marketing process that can ensure positive brand recognition for the concerned industry.

- **Eco-friendly material source**

SMEs need to originate biodegradable materials like bamboo, organic cotton, and decomposable fabrics. These biodegradable products have a minimal environmental effect rather than synthetic products (Usman *et al.*, 2023). Further, SMEs need to execute energy-efficient methods, water recycling, and minimizing waste production that improves sustainability. Sustainable practices help SMEs attract eco-aware consumers by emphasizing sustainable practices in business operations.

- **Fair communication**

Fairness and open communication are pivotal to constructing trust with customers. Clothing SMEs of Kerala need to foster fair and precise interaction about their sustainable initiatives through social media, websites, and traditional media like TV, and radio. In this context, SMEs should deliver elaborate details regarding materials sourcing, ethical operations of supply chains, clothing manufacturing methods, and devotion to valuing environmental and social wellness (Keramitsoglou, Litseselidis, and Kardimaki, 2023). This fair communication helps SMEs to develop reliable customers. Clearness and genuineness in the marketing approach smoother the implementation process of sustainable practices and improve credibility.

- **Promote fair trade**

Kerala's clothing SMEs must prioritize originating products locally that support regional crafters and boost the economy. Additionally, local sourcing can minimize transportation costs and minimize carbon emission production from transportation. This fair-trade approach can effectively minimize carbon footprints from the environment and promote healthy circumstances. They should conduct marketing campaigns to highlight the usage of ethically

sourced local materials. Additionally, this local source can preserve Kerala's ancestry. The fair-trade approach attracts regional and foreign customers who are conscious of authenticity, sustainability, and ethical approaches.

- **Sustainable packaging systems**

SMEs need to incorporate sustainable packaging systems as a major initiative to promote sustainable marketing. In this context, Kerala's clothing SMEs need to use eco-friendly, reusable, recyclable, and compostable packaging products. Moreover, eco-friendly materials usage can effectively reduce waste products and lower environmental footprint attracting customers who are highly aware of plastic products. In addition, clothing SMEs should inspire customers to take part in sustainability initiatives and offer attractive discounts and incentives for using recycled bags.

- **Enlighten customers about sustainable awareness**

Kerala's clothing SMEs must educate people regarding the significance of sustainable practices, engage individuals in sustainable campaigns, and create an engaged, trustworthy, and dedicated customer (Khan *et al.*, 2024). Clothing SMEs in Kerala should maintain an active presence on social media, and develop engaging content, blogs, and videos to increase awareness of sustainability in the fashion sector. They must share the advantages of eco-friendly and sustainable materials and their importance in fast fashion among the community. However, SMEs need to develop a community of eco-aware customers who support clothing SMEs and their sustainable initiatives to strengthen brand presence.

- **Circular economy incorporation**

SMEs need to incorporate a circular economy approach in their business operation including recycling and reusing clothes which can strengthen the brand's presence and dedication to sustainability. In this context, Kerala SMEs should motivate consumers to return and replace old apparel for reusing and recycling purposes (Tuboalabo *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, SMEs need to offer repair services to their consumers to expand cloths lifespan. In this way, this circular marketing endeavor distinguishes Kerala SMEs from their competitor and allows them to dominate in the clothing market.

5.4 Research Gap

The study identifies several research gaps in the exploration of sustainable marketing strategies for Kerala's clothing SMEs. Although the research investigates the role of sustainability in marketing, it lacks in-depth qualitative data, particularly insights from industry managers, that

could further clarify how these strategies are applied in practice . The study primarily relies on quantitative data collected through surveys, which limits its ability to fully explore the complex dynamics of sustainable marketing and its impact on SME performance.

Moreover, the research does not address how these strategies are being adapted to different sectors within the clothing industry, leaving a gap in understanding the broader application of sustainable marketing across diverse market contexts . Another notable gap is the absence of secondary qualitative data, such as case studies or interviews, that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing sustainable practices . Additionally, the study does not examine the potential influence of technological advancements, such as AI, in enhancing the effectiveness of these strategies. Addressing these gaps in future research could provide a more holistic view of sustainable marketing's role in shaping the competitive landscape of Kerala's clothing industry.

5.5 Future Scope

In the future, this research process can guide future researchers to conduct research to adopt more sustainable marketing strategies for clothing brands to protect the environment. As well as sustainable marketing strategies, not only full feeling the contemporary customer's requirements but also meet the requirements of future generations by protecting the environment. The future researcher can explain how clothing brands of Kerala can adopt a more ethical approach at the time of manufacturing fashionable clothes. In this way, clothing organizations have become more socially responsible and utilize more eco-friendly materials, as well as focus on recycling in the manufacturing process. As well as that they can concentrate more on using renewable energy in manufacturing, most importantly will concentrate on reducing water wastage. The clothing industry business organizations are unable to follow the proper ethical manufacturing process, especially to provide fair wages to the laborers. Through this research process, the future researcher can explain the importance of providing fair wages to the workers and ensuring safe working conditions, designed to ensure they are safe and secure. In this way, fashion organizations can also promote longevity and versatility in the overall manufacturing process. Finally, the future researcher can explain how the clothing organizations of Kerala can minimize the carbon footprint of concerned industries to mitigate the impact on the planet and its inhabitants.

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APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire :

1. What is your age?
 - a. 21-35 years
 - b. 35-45 years
 - c. 45-55 years
 - d. Above 55 years

2. What is your Gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Others

3. What is your marketing designation in clothing industry?
 - a. Manager
 - b. Designer
 - c. Coordinator
 - d. Assistant
 - e. Others

4. Is the growth of the clothing industry dependent on marketing strategies?
 - a. Strongly agreed
 - b. Agreed
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagreed
 - e. Strongly disagreed

5. Do the marketing managers play the leadership role in manipulating brand awareness?
 - a. Strongly agreed
 - b. Agreed
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagreed
 - e. Strongly disagreed

6. Do you agree that, the successful advertisement is helping SMEs of Kerala grow?

- a. Strongly agreed
 - b. Agreed
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagreed
 - e. Strongly disagreed
7. What is the most effective marketing strategy in the clothing industry?
- a. Influencer Marketing
 - b. Social Media Marketing (SMM)
 - c. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
 - d. Video advertisements
 - e. Others
8. Is the clothing industry in Kerala highly competitive?
- a. Strongly agreed
 - b. Agreed
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagreed
 - e. Strongly disagreed
9. Do you agree that SMEs in the clothing industry in Kerala have a great opportunity to establish their business?
- a. Strongly agreed
 - b. Agreed
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagreed
 - e. Strongly disagreed
10. Are sustainable marketing strategies shaping the exploration of Kerala SMEs in the clothing industry?
- a. Strongly agreed
 - b. Agreed
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagreed
 - e. Strongly disagreed
11. What is the most important factor in brand promotion?
- a. Consumer awareness
 - b. Operational efficiency
 - c. Research & Development
 - d. Performance consistency
 - e. Others
12. Do the technological advancement is capable of improving marketing strategies?
- a. Strongly agreed
 - b. Agreed
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagreed
 - e. Strongly disagreed

13. What is most effective technology to gain consumer attention into clothing industry?
- Artificial Intelligence
 - Machine Learning
 - Big Data Technology
 - Block chain Technology
 - Others
14. Are SMEs of clothing industry of Kerala is shaping due to technological acquisition?
- Strongly agreed
 - Agreed
 - Neutral
 - Disagreed
 - Strongly disagreed
15. Is the market competitiveness affecting the price sensitivity in clothing industry?
- Strongly agreed
 - Agreed
 - Neutral
 - Disagreed
 - Strongly disagreed
16. Is the highly competitive market beneficial for consumers?
- Strongly agreed
 - Agreed
 - Neutral
 - Disagreed
 - Strongly disagreed
17. What is main advantage of high market competition in clothing industry of Kerala among the consumers?
- Variety of options
 - Price competitiveness
 - High Product quality
 - Availability and convenience
 - Others
18. Is the growth of clothing industry being dependent on logistics services?
- Strongly agreed
 - Agreed
 - Neutral
 - Disagreed
 - Strongly disagreed
19. Is the sustainable marketing strategy capable of manipulating market exposure of SMEs in clothing industry?
- Strongly agreed
 - Agreed
 - Neutral
 - Disagreed

e. Strongly disagreed

20. Do you agree that the Kerala SMEs of clothing industry have a great future?

a. Strongly agreed

b. Agreed

c. Neutral

d. Disagreed

e. Strongly disagreed