

# Bridging the Gap in Green Marketing Research: A Global Overview and a Roadmap for Vietnam

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## Abstract:

While green marketing has gained significant global traction over the last twenty years, it has yet to be fully integrated into Vietnam's academic circles or business practices. This gap is primarily attributed to a lack of robust theoretical foundations. By employing a content analysis approach to review existing literature, this study examines 109 papers sourced from the Science Citation Index. The findings highlight how green marketing evolved between 1998 and 2018 in terms of its theoretical underpinnings, methodologies, and expanding scope. Additionally, the paper suggests specific research pathways suited to Vietnam's unique landscape, aiming to align domestic studies with global advancements.

**Keywords:** content analysis, research trends, green marketing, Vietnam context

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, environmental protection has become a central concern for governments and regulatory bodies worldwide. Various environmental policies and regulatory frameworks have been introduced to raise public awareness of ecological changes while simultaneously emphasizing the necessity for businesses to incorporate environmental responsibility into their operational strategies [10]. Regulatory pressure has increasingly required firms to transition from conventional business practices toward environmentally sustainable approaches in areas such as resource procurement, production processes, and marketing activities [17, 39]. In response to these emerging expectations, many organizations across different industries have progressively adopted green marketing as an integral component of their strategic management.

Green marketing is currently considered one of the fastest-growing marketing approaches in the context of sustainable development. Its rapid expansion has been driven not only by the growing commitment of the business sector but also by substantial academic contributions aimed at strengthening its theoretical foundations and practical applications. Since its emergence in the 1970s [36], green marketing has undergone continuous theoretical refinement and practical evolution over nearly five decades. As a result, it has developed into a significant global trend, attracting increasing attention from both researchers and practitioners.

Within the Vietnamese context, however, green marketing remains a relatively emerging

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research area [3]. Although businesses have shown increasing interest in integrating green marketing into their competitive strategies, academic research on this topic has not expanded at a comparable pace to that observed internationally. This gap can be partly attributed to the limited availability of academic resources, insufficient systematic reviews, and the lack of updated theoretical syntheses related to green marketing.

Given this context, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of global research trends in green marketing. Based on this review, the author will propose several potential directions to promote and strengthen green marketing research within Vietnam.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a literature review approach to examine the development of research on green marketing. To systematically synthesize existing academic contributions, content analysis was employed as the principal analytical technique. Content analysis is widely recognized as a rigorous methodological approach in social science research because it enables the structured examination of textual data while maintaining objectivity and transparency in the analytical process [25]. The methodological orientation of this study was informed by the framework proposed by Kumar [26], which has been previously applied to investigate the theoretical development of green marketing research.

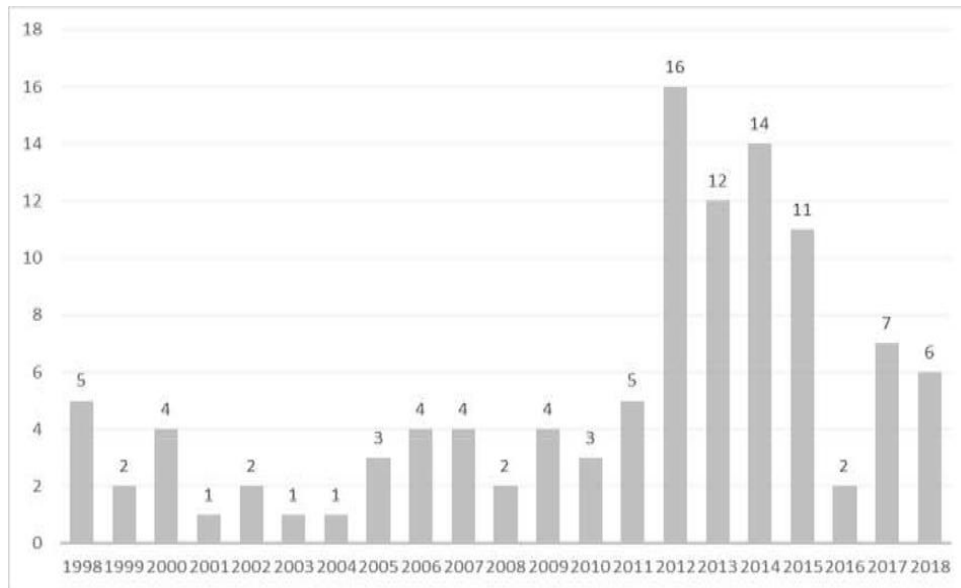
To maintain the academic focus of the review, the study limited the search scope to reputable journals within the fields of Marketing and Business. Following the classification system provided by the SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) database (available at [scimagojr.com](http://scimagojr.com)), three subject areas were selected: Marketing, Strategy and Management, and Business, Management and Accounting (miscellaneous). Peer-reviewed journal articles written in English were selected as the primary source of secondary data for this study. The data collection process was conducted by searching for publications using the keyword “green marketing”. To ensure the relevance of the collected literature, only articles containing this keyword in the title, abstract, or author-defined keywords were included in the search results [4]. In addition, the review considered publications issued between 1998 and 2018 in order to capture the evolution of green marketing research over a twenty-year period. Only articles with accessible full-text versions were retained to ensure that the content could be comprehensively analyzed [10]. A total of 109 articles were identified as relevant and included in the final dataset for analysis.

Content analysis was applied to examine the selected articles in a systematic and structured manner. According to Krippendorff [25], content analysis can be implemented through either qualitative interpretation of textual materials or quantitative examination of textual patterns and frequencies. Both qualitative and quantitative elements of content analysis were employed. Following the procedure suggested by Dangelico and Vocalelli [10], the collected articles were coded and categorized according to their thematic focus and research characteristics. This analytical process allowed the researchers to identify dominant research themes, summarize descriptive trends in the literature, and classify the main research directions within the field of green marketing. Through this systematic categorization, the study provides an overview of the intellectual structure and research development of green marketing.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Characteristics of the research subjects

research on green marketing remained relatively limited prior to 2012. However, a noticeable upward trend can be observed in subsequent years, with the number of publications increasing significantly and reaching a peak of 16 articles in 2012 (see Figure 1). Despite the fact that the concept of green marketing was initially introduced as early as the 1970s [38], the delayed expansion of publications may suggest that the field required a considerable period for theoretical maturation before gaining stronger research momentum.

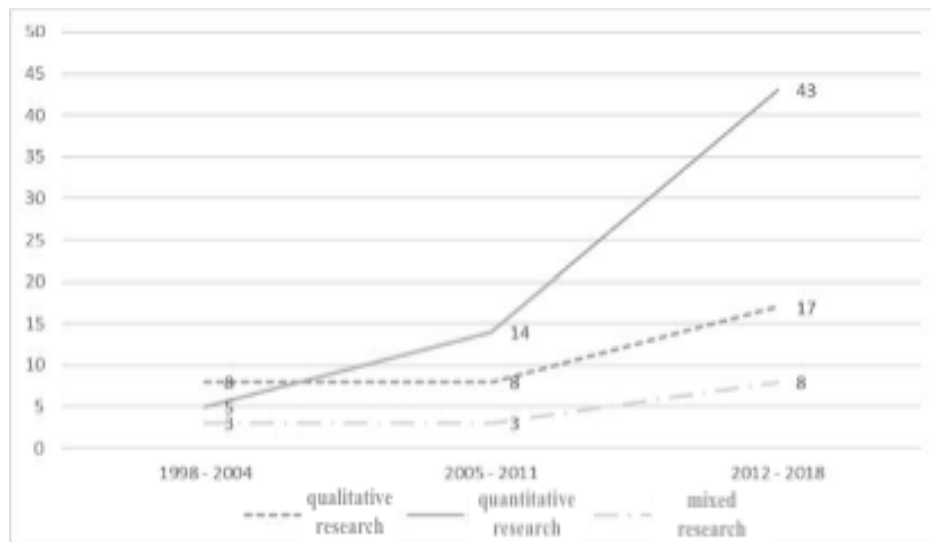


**Figure 1. Statistics of published articles by year**

Statistics regarding the research locations show that green marketing has attracted scholarly attention across diverse regions of the world. Asia emerges as the most frequently examined region, accounting for 30 studies. This concentration may be explained by the increasing severity of environmental challenges faced by many developing Asian economies [17], as well as the growing regulatory pressures promoting environmentally responsible business practices in these countries [29]. Western countries also show substantial research activity, with 20 studies conducted in Europe and 19 in the Americas. Australia and Africa appear less frequently in the dataset, indicating a relatively limited research presence during the reviewed period. Furthermore, several studies adopted multi-country perspectives, reflecting the increasingly globalized nature of green marketing research.

With respect to methodological approaches, quantitative research methods represent the dominant strategy, with 62 studies (56.9%) employing statistical or survey-based techniques. Qualitative approaches were used in 33 studies (30.3%), while a smaller proportion of research (14 studies, or 12.8%) adopted mixed-methods designs. The use of quantitative methods increased substantially, particularly from the 2005 – 2011 period onward, suggesting a growing emphasis on measurement-based investigations in green marketing research (see Figure 2). A more detailed discussion of the specific methodological techniques applied within these

research streams is presented in the following sections.



**Figure 2. Statistics of research methods used by period**

Regarding research orientation, 78 studies (approximately 71.6%) adopted empirical approaches, whereas theoretical contributions accounted for only 28.4% of the sample. This imbalance may be attributed to two main factors. First, the theoretical foundations of green marketing have been progressively established over several decades, reducing the relative emphasis on conceptual development. Second, marketing research is inherently practice-oriented and closely connected to real-world business applications [23]. As a result, researchers tend to prioritize empirical investigations to better capture market behaviors and organizational practices.

### **3.2. The development of green marketing theory**

The concept of green marketing was formally introduced by Hennion and Kinnear (1976, as cited in [10]) following earlier concerns about the environmental consequences of marketing activities. Peattie [37] later described this initial phase as the first evolutionary stage of green marketing, during which scholars primarily focused on defining the concept and establishing its theoretical foundations.

Subsequent studies gradually expanded the conceptual scope of green marketing. Peattie (1995, as cited in [38]) conceptualized green marketing as a comprehensive management process aimed at identifying and satisfying consumer and societal needs in a sustainable manner. This perspective highlights the ethical dimension of marketing activities, positioning environmental responsibility as an integral component of corporate social responsibility [39]. However, as noted by Ottman (1993, as cited in [10]), early interpretations of green marketing remained relatively narrow, as they mainly emphasized the environmental impacts of business activities rather than encouraging substantive behavioral change among firms.

To address these conceptual limitations, later research broadened the definition of green marketing to include efforts to reduce the environmental and social impacts of products and production systems while promoting more sustainable alternatives [37]. This shift marked the

second evolutionary phase of green marketing, characterized by increasing attention to clean technologies, stronger corporate environmental commitments, and rising global awareness of environmental risks. Similarly, Kotler (2011, as cited in [35]) emphasized the operational dimension of green marketing, highlighting practices such as eco-friendly product design, sustainable packaging, pollution prevention, and energy efficiency.

In its most recent stage, green marketing has increasingly been associated with the broader objective of sustainable economic development [37]. Reflecting this shift, Dangelico and Vocalelli [10] proposed the term sustainable green marketing to capture the expanded strategic role of environmental considerations in marketing. Nevertheless, this stage has also revealed significant challenges. Crane [9] pointed out that the overuse and misuse of environmental claims has contributed to declining consumer trust, representing a critical obstacle to the credibility of green marketing practices.

Overall, green marketing should not be viewed as an entirely separate marketing paradigm but rather as an extension of existing marketing philosophies incorporating sustainability principles [12]. Its distinctive value lies in its integration of environmental ethics and long-term societal considerations into business strategy, reflecting a more humanistic orientation in contemporary marketing thought [36].

### **3.3. Green marketing mix strategy**

The increasing urgency of environmental challenges has prompted scholars and practitioners to reconsider the traditional marketing mix (4Ps: Product, Price, Promotion, Place) from a sustainability perspective. Within this context, green marketing requires firms to redesign these strategic tools to align with environmental objectives while maintaining market competitiveness [36].

#### ***Green product strategy***

Green products, often referred to as environmentally friendly or eco-designed products, are generally understood as those developed to minimize environmental impacts across their life cycle [2, 44]. This includes reducing the use of hazardous and non-renewable materials while promoting recyclability, durability, and resource efficiency (Robert, 1995, as cited in [2]). Previous studies also emphasize that green product strategies typically involve recycling initiatives, material reduction, sustainable packaging, and product longevity improvements (Kinoti, 2011, as cited in [11]). The literature indicates growing scholarly interest in green products, particularly in service sectors such as hospitality, food services, and logistics [6, 7, 22, 28]. For instance, research on green hotels reflects increasing consumer demand for environmentally responsible accommodation options (Clausing, 2008, as cited in [32]). At the same time, studies warn that overstating environmental attributes may lead to consumer skepticism or backlash [9]. As a result, recent research highlights the importance of integrating environmental benefits with functional performance and emotional value to enhance product acceptance [12]. Additionally, after-sales services have been identified as an important factor influencing green product evaluation, particularly among environmentally conscious consumers [36].

### ***Green price strategy***

Green pricing refers to pricing policies that reflect the additional costs associated with environmentally responsible production while addressing consumers' willingness to pay for sustainability attributes (Grove et al., 1996, as cited in [10]). Higher prices are often unavoidable due to increased production costs, stricter environmental standards, and regulatory pressures [38]. Recent research suggests that consumers may accept price premiums for green products when environmental benefits are clearly communicated and perceived as meaningful [5, 14]. However, willingness to pay varies depending on product characteristics and perceived value. Existing studies typically classify consumer responses into two groups: those willing to accept price premiums and those who remain highly price-sensitive (Kapelianis & Strachan, 1996, as cited in [10]). Notably, most willingness-to-pay research has been conducted in European markets, indicating potential research opportunities in developing countries such as Vietnam [10]. Methodologically, research in this area is predominantly quantitative, with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) frequently used to examine relationships between consumer perceptions, attitudes, and pricing decisions [19].

### ***Green promotion strategy***

Promotion is often regarded as a critical instrument within the green marketing mix because of its role in shaping environmental awareness and influencing consumer behavior [11]. Green promotion activities typically aim to communicate environmental benefits, promote sustainable lifestyles, or strengthen a firm's environmentally responsible image (Banerjee et al., 1995, as cited in [11]). Among promotional tools, green advertising has attracted particular attention due to its role in enhancing environmental awareness and stimulating demand for eco-friendly products [31]. Research suggests that environmentally framed advertising may influence consumer behavior when it appeals to both ethical motivations and personal benefits [16]. Moreover, green advertising contributes to corporate image building by reinforcing associations with environmental responsibility. Methodologically, studies on green promotion employ diverse approaches, including surveys, experiments, and mixed methods. Experimental designs are particularly valuable because they allow researchers to observe how consumers form perceptions of environmental claims before making evaluations. This approach remains underutilized in Vietnam and represents a promising methodological direction for future research.

### ***Green distribution strategy***

Green distribution refers to managerial practices aimed at minimizing environmental impacts throughout the product distribution process, from production and delivery to consumption and reverse logistics systems [11]. Given that most consumers do not actively search for products solely because of their environmental attributes [18], the availability, accessibility, and visibility of green products become critical determinants of market success. Ensuring consistent exposure of green products across distribution channels is therefore essential for firms pursuing green marketing strategies. Recent studies emphasize the role of digital platforms, integrated transportation systems, and packaging reduction in improving the environmental performance of distribution systems [10]. Among these developments, reverse

logistics has emerged as a particularly significant innovation, enabling firms to recover value through recycling, reuse, and waste reduction [39]. Beyond environmental benefits, reverse logistics has also been shown to improve operational efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance customer service performance [28]. Furthermore, unlike conventional products, green products often require closer coordination across the entire supply chain. As a result, green marketers tend to adopt a lifecycle-oriented distribution approach, managing products from production to final consumption in order to maximize both environmental and operational efficiency [43].

### ***Green consumer behavior***

Green consumers are generally defined as individuals who avoid products perceived as harmful to health or the environment and who prefer environmentally responsible alternatives (Strong, 1996, as cited in [29]). As in traditional marketing research, understanding consumer behavior remains central to green marketing strategy development [23]. The literature shows increasing attention to this topic, with a substantial proportion of studies focusing on green purchase intentions, trust, and decision-making processes. Research consistently demonstrates that green consumers are more complex and heterogeneous than conventional consumer segments, as their decisions often involve ethical considerations and long-term sustainability concerns [1, 18]. Consequently, identifying the motivations underlying green consumption has become essential for effective strategy development [15]. Both theoretical and empirical studies contribute to this research stream. Conceptual work has expanded traditional consumer behavior models by incorporating social influences and environmental values [20], while empirical research has focused on identifying determinants of green purchasing behavior. Methodologically, studies rely heavily on quantitative techniques such as SEM and regression analysis, while qualitative research frequently employs interviews and focus groups to explore consumer motivations. Applications of green consumer behavior research span diverse sectors, from everyday consumer goods to tourism services [8, 16]. Notably, younger consumers and students have received particular attention due to their potential influence on future green markets [29, 30].

## **4. DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM**

Based on the systematic review of 109 peer-reviewed studies on green marketing, several research directions can be identified to guide future scholarly work in the Vietnamese context.

First, greater attention should be given to research on green consumers and green consumption behavior, as this remains a relatively underdeveloped area in Vietnam. Existing evidence suggests that environmental awareness among Vietnamese consumers is still limited, resulting in relatively low demand for environmentally friendly products (PetroTimes, 2013, as cited in [34]). Future research could therefore focus on younger consumer segments, particularly pupils and university students, to better understand their environmental attitudes, behavioral intentions, and the factors shaping green consumption patterns. Methodologically, this research stream would benefit from quantitative approaches, especially causal modeling techniques, complemented by qualitative interviews to provide deeper behavioral insights.

Second, further empirical research on green marketing mix strategies is needed to support the

development of green markets in Vietnam. Despite global growth in environmentally oriented products and services, green offerings in Vietnam remain limited in both supply and consumer recognition, resulting in relatively modest research attention [21]. However, given global sustainability trends, the expansion of research on green products and services appears inevitable. For example, studies examining consumer demand for green hospitality services, such as green hotels, could provide practical implications for both researchers and practitioners. In addition, research on green pricing and distribution strategies is particularly important, as Vietnamese consumers remain highly price-sensitive and cost considerations continue to play a decisive role in purchasing decisions [24]. In this regard, research on reverse logistics may offer valuable insights into cost optimization and competitive advantage for businesses operating in emerging green markets.

Finally, more research is needed on the effectiveness of green promotion strategies, particularly the influence of green advertising on consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior. Future studies should examine how environmentally oriented advertising messages shape consumer trust and product evaluations within the Vietnamese market. Quasi-experimental designs, combined with interview methods, could provide valuable evidence on the causal effects of green promotional activities. As these approaches remain relatively underutilized in Vietnam, their broader adoption would contribute to methodological diversification and strengthen the empirical foundation of green marketing research.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study provides a structured overview of the development of green marketing research through a systematic analysis of 109 peer-reviewed publications. The findings reveal a clear upward trend in green marketing research over the past decade, reflecting the growing academic and practical relevance of sustainability-oriented marketing in response to global environmental challenges. Given the increasing importance of sustainable business practices, this research area is expected to continue expanding in both theoretical and empirical directions.

Despite achieving its primary objective of mapping key research trends and identifying major thematic areas, this study is not without limitations. Due to the scope of the review, several potentially valuable research directions could not be examined in depth. Future research should therefore extend the current analysis by exploring additional dimensions of green marketing and by providing more context-specific evidence, particularly in emerging markets.

Overall, further empirical and theoretical investigations are necessary to strengthen the practical and academic foundations of green marketing, thereby supporting its broader application in both research and business practice.

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