

## THE ROLE OF GREEN MARKETING IN CREATING A SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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### ABSTRACT

Due to growing environmental concerns, green marketing has become increasingly important in meeting consumer demand and improving a brand's image and reputation. Green marketing follows the same principles as traditional marketing, but focuses on using eco-friendly materials, production methods, packaging, pricing, distribution channels, and promotion. By incorporating green marketing into a branding strategy, companies can benefit by creating a solid brand image and strengthening their position in a highly competitive market. This paper is based on a review of literature, and aims to summarise and classify extant research on green marketing. The paper reviews green marketing as a new way of creating a sustainable competitive advantage. The literature review establishes the difference between traditional competitive advantage and sustainable competitive advantage. Finally, it introduces a conceptual framework for the development of sustainable competitive advantage, including relationship marketing, green marketing, and the components of traditional competitive advantage.

KEY WORDS: *green marketing, sustainable competitive advantage, relationship marketing.*

JEL CODES: M31, M10.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15181/rfds.v40i2.2533>

### Introduction

Over the past few years, the issue of sustainability has gained considerable attention in the business landscape. As consumers become increasingly conscious of environmental issues and their impact on the planet, companies face mounting pressure to adopt sustainable practices. By promoting products or services based on environmental benefits, companies can gain a competitive edge in the market. The purpose of this paper is to summarise and classify extant research on the role of green marketing in creating a sustainable competitive advantage.

In the pursuit of further clarity in defining the role of green marketing in creating a sustainable competitive advantage, the critical review is based on two themes:

(1) What is green marketing? Green marketing has been widely discussed in literature, with scholars examining various aspects of this marketing approach. So this theme focuses on how green marketing is understood in the articles reviewed. The review also identifies how the occurrence of green marketing as a strategy for business has been measured, and from what perspectives.

(2) How does green marketing help to gain a sustainable competitive advantage in business? Previous studies have found that green marketing is a source of competitive advantage, accepting that the principle increases the value of a company's products, by which it gains a competitive edge, improves its image, reaches new markets,

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and is prepared to cope with the environmental pressures of stakeholders (Moravcikova et al., 2019). According to Arseculeratne and Yazdanifard (2014), a green marketing strategy brings about a qualitative change in the relationship between customers and a business organisation. The proactive approach in green marketing is aimed at gaining a competitive advantage by positioning the products strategically in the minds of customers.

*The role of green marketing* is chosen as the subject of the research. This paper examines the concept of green marketing in the context of sustainable competitive advantage. The article aims to answer the relevant scientific problematic question: How can green marketing create a sustainable competitive advantage in business? Thus, the authors seek:

To study and elaborate on the concept of green marketing in the context of green marketing:

1. To identify a green marketing mix.
2. To explore the differences between competitive advantage versus sustainable advantage.
3. To analyse the role of relationship marketing in building a sustainable competitive advantage; and
4. To provide a conceptual framework of the components of sustainable competitive advantage.

To achieve this aim, the following tasks have been formulated: (1) to study and explain the concept of green marketing in the context of sustainable competitive advantage; (2) to highlight the connection between the complexity of sustainable competitive advantage components, including traditional competitive advantage, relationship marketing, and green marketing.

This paper contributes to marketing literature with a critical review of literature focusing on green marketing, competitive advantage, and the components of sustainable competitive advantage.

Research methods: based on literature analysis.

## 1. The importance of green marketing

Many people nowadays are concerned about the negative impact that human activity has on our planet, and this has led to a growing interest in sustainability. Global environmental issues like pollution and global warming have become worldwide concerns. Both consumers and marketers are becoming increasingly aware of the need to transition to green products and services due to non-biodegradable solid waste and the harmful effects of pollutants (Thoria, 2017). As a result, there has been an increasing interest in environmentally friendly products in recent years, and the availability of such products has also expanded. This trend highlights the significance of green marketing in today's world (Choudhary, Agarwal, 2021).

Green marketing, which is also known as environmental or sustainable marketing, involves promoting and selling products and services that are environmentally friendly or have less impact on the environment and our planet. The growing global awareness of environmental issues has made green marketing a crucial business strategy. Green marketing has emerged as a crucial area of study in marketing research, driven by the growing media coverage and the increased expectations of businesses to demonstrate eco-friendly practices (Choudhary, Agarwal, 2021). According to Hasan and Azman Ali (2014), a green marketing strategy contributes to a firm's profitability and competitive advantage, and encourages a greener pattern of consumption.

In fact, 73% of global consumers state that they would definitely or probably change their consumption behaviour to reduce their environmental impact (Nielsen, 2019). Green marketing allows businesses to attract consumers who are concerned about the environment, and who might be willing to pay more for sustainable products. It has been proven by Bashir, Khwaja, Rashid, Turi and Waheed (2020) that consumers are willing to pay extra for green products/services.

Discussing green marketing and its importance is also essential because of the common unethical practice called greenwashing. Green marketing strives to promote sustainable consumption and change consumer behaviour by presenting eco-friendly options as appealing and widely accepted. In contrast, greenwashing seeks to portray regular business practices as environmentally friendly, even though they may not be. This tactic involves deceiving customers by promoting positive environmental values without genuinely adhering to them, often to conceal a company's negative impact on the environment and society (Choudhary, Agarwal, 2021).

## 2. Green marketing mix and brand image

Green marketing encompasses various activities that involve making changes to products, production processes, packaging and advertising. Such modifications may include altering the product design, adjusting the manufacturing process, changing the packaging materials, and modifying the promotional messages (Choudhary, Agarwal, 2021). Thus, the traditional four Ps (product, price, place and marketing promotion) still apply to green marketing (Thoria, 2017).

According to Gosavi (2013), marketers have frequently used words such as ‘green products’, ‘sustainable’, ‘environmentally friendly’, ‘pro-environmental’, ‘eco-friendly’ and ‘ecological’ in the last decade to persuade and attract consumers as part of their green marketing strategy, often using these terms interchangeably. To be more specific, green products can be characterised by various criteria, including: being derived from natural sources; being recyclable, reusable or biodegradable; containing natural ingredients; featuring recycled materials or non-toxic chemicals; complying with approved chemical standards; having no adverse environmental impact; not being tested on animals; and featuring eco-friendly packaging, such as refillable or reusable containers (Choudhary, Agarwal, 2021).

Fan and Zeng (2011) state that even though the product is the focal point and a crucial element of the overall marketing strategy, it is important to note that a green product is not limited to the end product itself. It encompasses all aspects, including the materials used, the production process, the packaging, and other related elements. Environmentally friendly products balance environmental friendliness with three main aspects: functionality, affordability and convenience. These products are typically durable, can be recycled, are made of non-toxic material, and should be composed of materials that can decompose or be recycled. Furthermore, they should have a low environmental impact through their packaging (Choudhary, Agarwal, 2021).

Hashem and Al-Rifai (2011) define green pricing as a pricing strategy that considers a company’s environmental policies, which regulations or corporate instructions may enforce, and any initiatives undertaken by the company in this area. In other words, the pricing is influenced by the company’s environmental considerations.

According to Shil (2012), the concept of a green place in green marketing involves efficient logistics management to reduce transport emissions and ultimately minimise the carbon footprint. This idea is linked to distribution channels that handle green products, which are convenient for customers to facilitate delivery and ensure environmentally friendly cycling procedures within specified conditions and requirements, as Hashem and Al-Rifai (2011) explain. To sum up, the location where a product is available for purchase is referred to as a place, which may include physical and virtual stores.

Green promotion is designing promotional tools such as advertising, marketing materials, signage, websites, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, on-site promotions, videos and presentations, considering people, the planet and profits. In other words, the promotion tools are configured in an environmentally friendly way that promotes sustainability and profitability, while keeping people’s welfare in mind (Shil, 2012). All in all, Rahbar and Abdul Wahid (2011) state that green advertising aims to persuade consumers to buy environmentally friendly products, and emphasises the positive effects of their purchase behaviour, both for themselves and the environment. The aim is to influence consumers’ buying behaviour, and encourage them to choose environmentally friendly products.

In addition, Ganganaboina and Sana (2017) explain that the utilisation of environmentally friendly products in green marketing results in several benefits for companies, including the opportunity to be innovative (Pujari, Peattie, Wright, 2004), improved reputation (Miles, Covin, 2000), and the enhancement of brand image (Chen, Lai, Wen, 2006). Incorporating green marketing in a company’s branding strategy can be valuable for building a strong brand image. For example, Bashir, Khwaja, Rashid, Turi and Waheed (2020) suggest that a hotel’s perceived green brand image can affect consumers’ expectations regarding environmentally friendly hotels. As a result, a green brand image is a valid reason to visit green hotels that can promote sustainable practices.

### 3. Competitive advantage: traditional versus sustainable competitive advantage

Understanding and uncovering potential sources of competitive advantage have been a central focus for strategy researchers and practitioners for many years. Competitive advantage signifies a company’s unique strengths and capabilities. When viewed through a scientific lens, analysing traditional competitive advantage typically involves conducting empirical research and utilising theoretical frameworks to comprehend the fundamental factors that play a role in a company’s capacity to surpass its competitors in the market. Many researchers have contributed to the literature on competitive advantage. Table 1 presents an overview of these authors, along with their main contributions to traditional and sustainable competitive advantage concepts.

Table 1. An overview of the literature on traditional competitive advantage

Approach	Author	Main contribution
		Contributions of traditional competitive advantage
Strategic positioning view	Ansoff (1965); Porter (1980, 1985)	The scientists use strategic management frameworks, such as the generic strategies of cost leadership, differentiation and focus, to analyse how firms can create and sustain a competitive advantage by positioning themselves effectively in the market
Market-based view	Sigalas, Economou, Georgopoulos (2013)	The market-based view of competitive advantage focuses on understanding how firms create value for customers and gain a competitive edge through customer needs, preferences and relationships
The relational view of strategy	Wang (2014)	Suggest that the link between the individual firm and the network of relationships in which the firm is embedded is important for competitive advantage
The knowledge-based view	Evans (2003); Curado (2006)	Point out that material resources decrease when used in the firm, while knowledge assets increase
	Tiwana (2022)	Argue that technology, capital, market share or product sources are easier to copy by other firms, while knowledge is the only resource that is difficult to imitate
The capability-based view	Haas, Hansen (2005)	The authors support the importance of capabilities. They suggested that a firm can gain a competitive advantage from its ability to apply its capabilities to perform important activities within the firm
	Sirmon et al. (2007)	The authors suggest that capabilities and organisational learning are implicitly and explicitly part of any strategy within a company

Traditional competitive advantage has different approaches, including the strategic positioning view, the market-based view, the relational view of strategy, the knowledge-based view, and the capability-based view. These frameworks are crucial in comprehending how organisations can develop and maintain a competitive edge. The strategic positioning view emphasises the importance of effectively positioning a company in the market using cost leadership, differentiation and focus strategies. By strategically aligning themselves with market demands and customer preferences, companies can gain a competitive advantage and enhance their market position (Ansoff, 1965; Porter 1980; 1985). The market-based view emphasises the value creation process and the importance of understanding customer needs, preferences and relationships. By delivering superior value to customers, firms can distinguish themselves from competitors, and establish a competitive advantage based on customer-centric strategies (Sigalas, Economou, Georgopoulos, 2013). The relational

view of strategy highlights the significance of the network of relationships in which a firm is embedded. By leveraging these relationships and creating mutually beneficial partnerships, companies can access opportunities contributing to their competitive advantage (Wang, 2014). The knowledge-based view emphasises the role of knowledge as a critical resource for gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage. Unlike tangible resources that can easily be imitated, knowledge assets increase in value with use and are difficult to replicate (Evans, 2003; Curado, 2006; Tiwana, 2022). The capability-based view underscores the importance of a company's capabilities in driving competitive advantage. By developing and deploying unique capabilities, companies can perform crucial activities more effectively than their competitors, leading to superior performance and a stronger market position. Organisational learning and the ability to adapt and evolve are key components of this view, as companies must continuously build and enhance their capabilities to stay ahead (Haas, Hansen, 2005; Sirmon et al., 2007)

Table 2. An overview of the literature on sustainable competitive advantage

Contributions of sustainable competitive advantage		
Resource-based view	Peteraf (1993)	Highlights four conditions: resource heterogeneity, resource immobility, ex-ante, and ex-post limits to competition, that are necessary to achieve sustainable competitive advantage
	Grant (1995)	The sustainability of the competitive advantage is along the dimensions of durability, mobility and replicability
Dynamic capability view	Christensen (2000); Foster, Kaplan (2001)	This may include the ability to innovate, learn and reconfigure resources and capabilities to seize new opportunities and stay ahead of competitors
	Levis (2000)	Sustainable competitive advantage occurs through the dynamic interplay between a firm and its external environment
The blue ocean strategy	Kim, Mauborgne (2004); Wang (2014)	The authors write about building brands. It rejects the trade-off between low cost and differentiation, because blue ocean creators attract customers on a large scale and in large volumes; thus, they could generate economies of scale very rapidly, placing the potential imitators and current rivalries at a cost disadvantage
Customer relationship management	Hunt, Morgan (1995)	The building of trust and commitment makes relationship marketing rare and difficult to imitate, thus rendering it a potential source for sustainable competitive advantage
Market orientation view	Hunt, Morgan (1995)	Market orientation is an intangible resource which involves a dual focus on both customers and competitors, and can contribute to sustainable competitive advantage

The second table introduces the contribution of sustainable competitive advantage, including the resource-based view, dynamic capability view, the blue ocean strategy, customer relationship management, and market orientation view. The resource-based view emphasises the importance of four conditions: resource heterogeneity, resource immobility, ex-ante limits to competition, and ex-post limits. These conditions are necessary to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Additionally, the sustainability of competitive advantage is assessed based on durability, mobility and replicability dimensions. Companies can establish a sustainable competitive advantage by possessing unique and valuable resources that are difficult to imitate or replicate (Peteraf, 1993; Grant, 1995). The dynamic capability view highlights the significance of a firm's ability to innovate, learn and reconfigure its resources and capabilities. By adapting to the dynamic external environment, companies can seize new opportunities and stay ahead of their competitors. The interplay between a company and its external environment is crucial in achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Christensen, 2000; Foster, Kaplan, 2001; Levis, 2000). The blue ocean strategy challenges the traditional



trade-off between low cost and differentiation. Companies can generate economies of scale rapidly by creating new markets and attracting customers on a large scale, putting potential imitators and current rivals at a cost disadvantage (Kim, Mauborgne, 2004; Wang, 2014). Customer relationship management emphasises the building of trust and commitment with customers. This relationship-based approach makes relationship marketing rare and difficult to imitate. By fostering strong customer relationships, companies can create a potential source of sustainable competitive advantage (Hunt, Morgan, 1995). The market orientation view focuses on both customers and competitors. Companies can align their strategies with market demands and gain a competitive advantage by having a dual focus. Market orientation is considered an intangible resource that contributes to sustainable competitive advantage (Hunt, Morgan, 1995).

All in all, the analysis of literature on traditional and sustainable competitive advantage has confirmed that building a sustainable competitive advantage requires balancing the implementation of the planned development strategy with the use of new opportunities. The literature on competitive advantage can be divided into two main categories: traditional and sustainable competitive advantage. Traditional competitive advantage focuses on short-term gains through cost leadership, differentiation, and focus strategies. On the other hand, sustainable competitive advantage looks at long-term success by considering factors such as corporate social responsibility, environmental sustainability, and ethical business practices.

According to Hoffman (2000), dyadic relationships within a network context can be seen as a first step towards understanding the contributions that participating in a network system can bring to achieving sustainable competitive advantage. For them, sustainable competitive advantage requires developing the personal and corporate knowledge to drive innovation, improve continuously, and develop competence (Yolles, 2008). Blery and Michalakopoulos (2006) defines relationship marketing as a strategic tool that promises the systematic development of ongoing collaborative business relationships as a critical source of sustainable competitive advantage.

Affran (2019) shows that the six relationship marketing practices (communication, commitment, competence, conflict handling, trust, and bonding) are highly important in explaining sustainable competitive advantage. Communication was found to be the highest contributor to sustainable competitive advantage.

Sahin (2013) stated that companies implementing customer relationship management benefited from providing integrated marketing communication, using communication effectively in marketing, keeping customers long-term, and securing a competitive advantage as well-known brands.

#### 4. Analysing the impact of green marketing on sustainable competitive advantage

Sustainable competitive advantage refers to the unique and durable advantages a company has over its competitors, allowing it to outperform and maintain its market position over the long term. Several vital components can contribute to sustainable competitive advantage. Understanding the components affecting sustainable competitive advantage is crucial for any company. Studies of sustainable competitive advantage focus on essential factors, such as people, resources, strategic capabilities, strategy, culture, technology and innovation, industry outcomes, innovation, and dynamic capabilities (Soloducho-Pelc, Sulich, 2020).

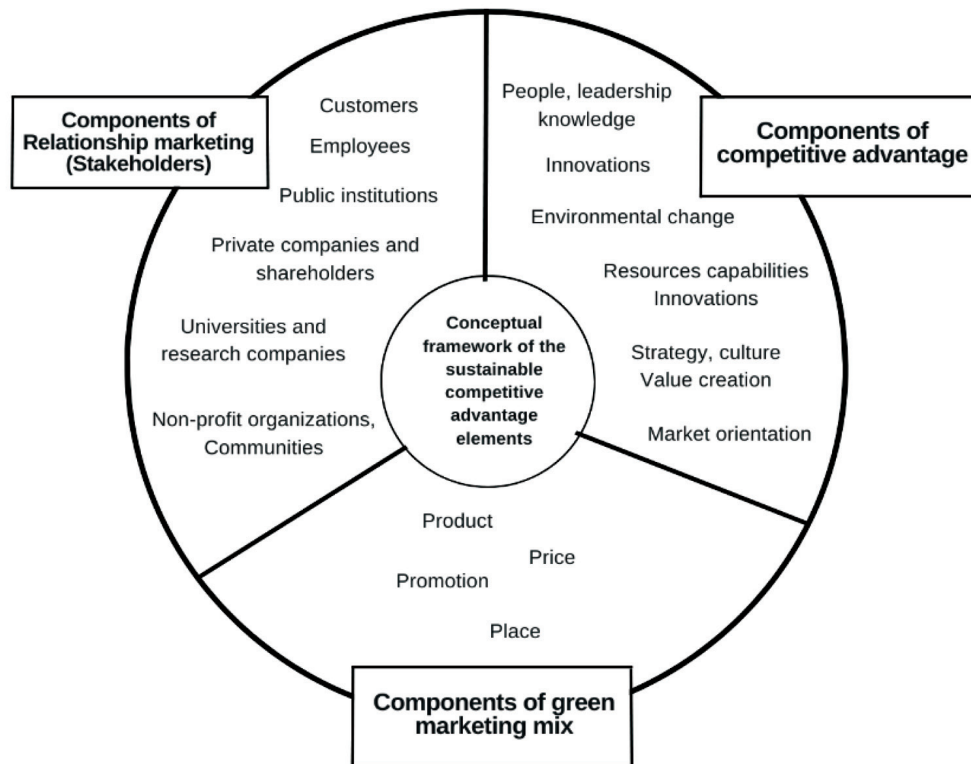


Figure 1. A conceptual framework of the sustainable competitive advantage elements

Source: compiled by the author, based on Hasan and Ali (2014), and Soloduch-Pelc and Sulich (2020).

In order to establish a sustainable competitive advantage, it is essential to identify key components and activities that can distinguish a company from its competitors. It requires defining the fundamental principles of green marketing components, and implementing relationship marketing strategies. Analysing sustainable competitive advantage from various perspectives can give managers a valuable tool for managing their company's long-term success.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper explores the role of green marketing in creating a sustainable competitive advantage. It identifies and discusses various aspects of green marketing and its impact on sustainable competitive advantage. The following four objectives were addressed:

1. The concept of green marketing: the paper examined the understanding of green marketing in the reviewed articles, highlighting its significance in promoting environmentally friendly products and services.
2. The green marketing mix: the traditional marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion) was analysed in green marketing, emphasising the importance of incorporating eco-friendly elements into each component.
3. The difference between competitive advantage and sustainable advantage: a comparison was made between traditional and sustainable competitive advantages, emphasising the long-term benefits and the enduring nature of sustainable competitive advantage.
4. The role of relationship marketing in building sustainable competitive advantage: the study explored the significance of relationship marketing in developing ongoing collaborative business relationships, which can serve as a critical source of sustainable competitive advantage.

The findings of this paper support the notion that green marketing can contribute to creating a sustainable competitive advantage. By adopting environmentally friendly practices and promoting green products, companies can attract environmentally conscious consumers, distinguish themselves from their competitors, enhance their brand image, and gain long-term market advantages. The paper underscores the importance of incorporating green marketing strategies into business operations to achieve environmental sustainability and competitive success. It contributes to the marketing literature by providing a comprehensive review of green marketing, traditional competitive advantage, and the components of sustainable competitive advantage. It also stresses the complexity of sustainable competitive advantage. As the outcome of the literature review, it provides a conceptual framework and dimensions with a solid theoretical background that needs further development. Thus, empirical studies are recommended to test the validity and the usefulness of the conceptual framework. These dimensions can help to generate new insights into the nature of sustainable competitive advantage and how it can be sustained over time. In future research on sustainable competitive advantage, exploring the similarities and differences between relationship and green marketing strategies and how they can be leveraged to achieve sustainable competitive advantage would be worthwhile. Ultimately, sustainable competitive advantage refers to a company's unique and enduring advantages over its competitors, enabling it to maintain a superior market position over an extended period.

To sum up, this paper emphasises the important role of green marketing in creating sustainable consumption and environmental responsibility. The findings indicate that green marketing strategies can benefit the environment and give companies a competitive advantage by attracting environmentally conscious consumers. However, ensuring that these strategies are implemented genuinely and are not used merely for greenwashing purposes is essential. By continuing to investigate and implement green marketing practices, consumers can contribute to building a more sustainable future for both business and the environment.

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## ŽALIOSIOS RINKODAROS VAIDMUO FORMUOJANT TVARŲ KONKURENCINĮ PRANAŠUMĄ

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### Santrauka

Augant sąmoningumui suvokiant tvarumą, žaliosios rinkodaros praktikos tampa vis svarbesnės tenkinant vartotojų poreikius. Per pastaruosius metus tvarumo klausimas sulaukė daug dėmesio ir verslo aplinkoje. Dėl to žalioji rinkodara tampa vis aktualesnė gerinant prekės ženklo reputaciją, įvaizdį, didinant konkurencinį pranašumą. Siekiant išsiaiškinti, koks žaliosios rinkodaros vaidmuo ir tvaraus konkurencinio pranašumo komponentai, straipsnyje iškelti du svarbūs uždaviniai: (1) įvardyti, kas yra žalioji rinkodara? (2) išanalizuoti, kuo skiriasi tradicinis ir tvarus konkurencinis pranašumas. Taigi šiame straipsnyje pateikiama ankstesnių mokslinių tyrimų informacija apie žaliosios rinkodaros vaidmenį, kuriant tvarų konkurencinį pranašumą verslui.

Žalioji rinkodara vadovaujasi tais pačiais principais kaip ir tradicinė, tik akcentuoja naudojimąsi draugiškomis aplinkai medžiagomis, gamybos metodų taikymą, pakuotes, kainodarą, platinimo kanalus ir reklamą. Įmonėms, kurios įtraukia žaliają rinkodarą į savo prekių ženklo strategiją, tai gali būti naudinga, nes taip jos gerina įmonės įvaizdį ir stiprina savo pozicijas konkurencinėje rinkoje. Žalioji rinkodara apima produktų, gamybos procesų, pakuočių ir reklamos elementus. Dėl to tradicinis rinkodaros kompleksas, kurį sudaro produktas, kaina, vieta ir reklamos kanalai, taikomas ir žaliajai rinkodarai (Choudhary, Agarwal, 2021; Thoria, 2017).

Konkurencinio pranašumo mokslinę literatūrą galima skirstyti į dvi pagrindines kategorijas: tradicinis ir tvarus konkurencinis pranašumas. Tradicinis konkurencinis pranašumas susitelkia ties trumpalaikė nauda, pavyzdžiui, kainos lyderyste, tuo tarpu tvarus konkurencinis pranašumas siekia ilgalaikės sėkmės, atsižvelgiant į veiksmus, tokius kaip socialinė atsakomybė, aplinkosauginiai procesai ir etiškos verslo praktikos.

Taigi straipsnyje pristatomas konceptualus tvaraus konkurencinio pranašumo didinimo modelis, įskaitant santykių rinkodaros, žaliosios rinkodaros ir tradicinio konkurencinio pranašumo komponentus.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *žalioji rinkodara, tvarus konkurencinis pranašumas, santykių rinkodara.*

JEL KLASIFIKACIJA: M31, M10.

*Received: 2023-04-03*

*Revised: 2023-05-15*

*Accepted: 2023-05-19*