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**THE EFFECT OF MARKETING INNOVATIONS ON
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AT THE FOOD
RETAIL SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES
IN DUBAI AND COST EFFECTIVENESS
AS MODERATOR**



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SHUROUQ ALI AHMED ALHAMMADI

UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

2025



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THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of marketing innovations specifically green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing on cost based competitive advantage in food retail SMEs in Dubai, with cost effectiveness acting as a moderator. The main objective is to examine how these marketing innovations affect competitive advantage, particularly cost advantage, and the role of cost effectiveness in enhancing this effect. A quantitative research design was used, employing non-proportional cluster sampling with 380 managers from food retail SMEs. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed with structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings indicate that green marketing had no significant impact on cost advantage ($\beta = -0.049$, $p > 0.05$), while both digital marketing ($\beta = 0.182$, $p < 0.001$) and educative marketing ($\beta = 0.291$, $p < 0.001$) had significant positive effects on cost advantage. Additionally, cost-effectiveness was found to moderate the relationship between marketing innovations and competitive advantage, strengthening the effect of digital and educative marketing. Food retail SMEs in Dubai should prioritize digital and educative marketing strategies to improve their cost advantage. Cost effective marketing strategies should be a key focus for SMEs in the food retail sector to ensure long term sustainability and competitive success.





KESAN INOVASI PEMASARAN PERUNCITAN MAKANAN TERHADAP KELEBIHAN BERSAING DALAM PERUSAHAAN KECIL DAN SEDERHANA DI DUBAI DAN KOS EFEKTIF SEBAGAI MODERATOR

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyelidik kesan inovasi pemasaran, khususnya pemasaran hijau, pemasaran digital, dan pemasaran edukatif terhadap kelebihan bersaing berasaskan kos dalam kalangan perusahaan kecil dan sederhana (PKS) dalam sektor peruncitan makanan di Dubai, dengan kos efektif sebagai pemboleh ubah pemoderasi. Objektif utama kajian adalah untuk meneroka bagaimana bentuk-bentuk inovasi pemasaran ini mempengaruhi kelebihan bersaing dari sudut kos, serta peranan kos efektif dalam memperkukuh hubungan ini. Reka bentuk penyelidikan kuantitatif digunakan dengan pensampelan kluster tidak seimbang yang melibatkan 380 pengurus daripada PKS dalam sektor peruncitan makanan. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan soal selidik berstruktur dan dianalisis melalui Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur (SEM). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pemasaran hijau tidak memberi kesan signifikan terhadap kelebihan kos ($\beta = -0.049$, $p > 0.05$), manakala pemasaran digital ($\beta = 0.182$, $p < 0.001$) dan pemasaran edukatif ($\beta = 0.291$, $p < 0.001$) memberi kesan positif yang signifikan. Ini menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua strategi ini memainkan peranan penting dalam meningkatkan daya saing kos dalam sektor peruncitan makanan. Selain itu, kos efektif terbukti sebagai pemboleh ubah pemoderasi yang memperkukuh kesan inovasi pemasaran terhadap kelebihan bersaing. Oleh itu, PKS dalam sektor peruncitan makanan di Dubai perlu memberi fokus kepada strategi pemasaran digital dan edukatif yang berkesan dari segi kos untuk memastikan kelestarian dan kelebihan bersaing jangka panjang.





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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAT	Competitive Advantage Theory
CE	Cost Effectiveness
DM	Digital Marketing
DV	Dependent Variable
EM	Educative Marketing
EMT	Entrepreneurial marketing theory
GM	Green Marketing
IV	Independent Variable
PA	Product Advantage
RAT	Resource Advantage theory
RO	Research Objective
RQ	Research Question
SA	Service Advantage
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
UAE	United Arab Emirates





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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



The food retail sector in Dubai, particularly within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), plays a pivotal role in the economic framework of the region. SMEs in this sector are responsible for driving innovation, meeting diverse consumer demands, and contributing significantly to employment and economic growth (Zghoul & Lucas, 2021). However, despite these contributions, SMEs in Dubai's food retail industry face formidable challenges such as intense competition, limited resources, and high failure rates (Alfarji, 2019). In such a dynamic and competitive, gaining and sustaining a competitive has become essential for the long-term survival and growth of these enterprises.





Marketing innovations have emerged as a critical strategic avenue for SMEs to differentiate themselves from larger competitors and achieve market success. In particular, green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing are gaining traction as effective tools for creating a unique market position (Tania, 2018; Jacinta, 2019). These marketing strategies allow SMEs to address evolving consumer preferences and societal trends, while also fostering brand loyalty and enhancing their competitive advantage (Afrina, 2020). However, while the potential of these innovations is widely recognized, empirical research on their impact within the specific context of Dubai's food retail SMEs remains limited.

Among the various challenges faced by SMEs, one of the most pressing is the ability to differentiate their offerings in a highly saturated and competitive market.

Unlike large multinational corporations, which benefit from economies of scale and established brand equity, SMEs must rely on their agility, innovation, and niche positioning to create a distinct market presence (Porter, 1980). Marketing innovations such as green, digital, and educative marketing offer SMEs a strategic toolkit for achieving differentiation, aligning with the growing consumer demand for sustainability, digital engagement, and educational content.

Green marketing, driven by global concerns about environmental sustainability, presents SMEs with an opportunity to align their product offerings with eco-friendly values (Tania, 2018). Consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental effect of their purchasing decisions, and SMEs that integrate sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly packaging, reduced carbon footprints, and organic certifications, can build a loyal customer base that prioritizes sustainability (Zghoul & Lucas, 2021).





Digital marketing also presents vast opportunities for SMEs to enhance their market reach and consumer engagement. In today's digital era, consumers turn to online platforms for product research, price comparison, and purchasing decisions (Afrina, 2020). By leveraging social media, e-commerce platforms, and digital analytics, SMEs can interact directly with their customers, deliver personalized marketing campaigns, and gather valuable consumer feedback to refine their offerings (Jacinta, 2019).

Educative marketing is another powerful tool for SMEs seeking to build trust and credibility with their customers. By educating consumers on product benefits, ethical sourcing, or healthy eating habits, SMEs can differentiate their offerings. This strategy also helps them foster long-term relationships based on transparency and consumer empowerment (Porter, 1980). Through educative marketing, SMEs can position themselves as leaders in their industry, offering not just products but a deeper connection to the values and interests of their target market.

However, while these marketing innovations hold significant promise, their effectiveness in translating into tangible competitive advantages for food retail SMEs remains underexplored. SMEs often face financial constraints that require careful consideration of cost-effectiveness when implementing these innovations. Understanding how cost-effectiveness moderates the relationship between marketing innovations and competitive advantage is crucial. This understanding can guide strategic decision-making and resource allocation within resource-limited environments (Porter, 1980).





Dubai's food retail sector is shaped by a combination of evolving consumer behaviors, regulatory changes, and economic dynamics. One notable change was the introduction of a value-added tax (VAT) in 2018, which led SMEs to reconsider their pricing and operational strategies to adapt to the new tax environment (Aruvian, 2018). In addition, consumer preferences have shifted towards health-conscious, sustainable, and ethically sourced products. This trend has driven SMEs to innovate their product offerings and marketing strategies to meet these new demands (Zghoul & Lucas, 2021). As a result, SMEs are compelled to continuously adapt to external factors to maintain competitiveness in the sector.

For SMEs in Dubai, achieving a competitive advantage requires a delicate balance between cost leadership and product differentiation. Michael Porter's theory of competitive advantage suggests that firms can either reduce their costs below competitors or offer differentiated products that justify a premium price (Porter, 1980). For food retail SMEs in Dubai, this means maintaining operational efficiency while developing unique products that cater to the diverse preferences of consumers. Striking this balance is crucial for SMEs seeking to establish a strong position in a highly competitive market. Successful implementation of both strategies enables SMEs to achieve sustainable growth in the long run.

Although SMEs may lack the resources of larger firms, they can still leverage marketing innovations to create compelling value propositions for consumers. By implementing green, digital, and educative marketing strategies, SMEs can differentiate themselves and thrive amidst competitive pressures (Savir, 2022). These innovations allow SMEs to communicate their unique value to consumers, fostering loyalty and





enhancing brand perception. Using Porter's competitive advantage framework, SMEs can assess how these marketing strategies contribute to their competitiveness. This approach helps SMEs better understand how to utilize limited resources effectively while maintaining a competitive edge.

This study aims to address a gap in the existing literature by examining the relationship between marketing innovations green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing and competitive advantage in food retail SMEs in Dubai. Furthermore, the study seeks to explore how cost-effectiveness moderates this relationship, offering valuable insights for SMEs. By understanding the moderating role of cost-effectiveness, SMEs can make informed decisions on how to allocate resources efficiently. The findings of this research will provide both theoretical and practical guidance for SMEs looking to enhance their competitiveness while managing operational costs effectively (Tania, 2018).

Through this investigation, the study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on marketing innovations, competitive advantage, and SME strategy, particularly within the food retail context in Dubai. By exploring the relationship between marketing innovations and competitive advantage, the study seeks to provide valuable insights for businesses in the region. Furthermore, the findings will offer actionable recommendations for food retail SMEs to refine their marketing strategies. These recommendations will help enhance their market position and ensure sustainable growth. In a rapidly changing market environment, these insights will be crucial for maintaining competitiveness and long-term success (Jacinta, 2019).





1.2 Research Background

Dubai's food retail industry is one of the most dynamic sectors in the UAE's economy, driven by urbanization, a diverse population, and high disposable incomes. The city's strategic position as a global trade and logistics hub has bolstered its role in the food supply chain, making it an attractive market for both local and international food retailers. The rapidly expanding population, combined with evolving consumer preferences, has fuelled the demand for a wider variety of food products. Additionally, Dubai's strong economic fundamentals, including high levels of disposable income, contribute to the growing food retail market (Euromonitor International, 2023). This dynamic environment presents significant opportunities for businesses in the food retail sector to innovate and thrive.



In recent years, the UAE food retail market has witnessed remarkable growth, largely driven by an expanding population and increased consumer spending power. By 2023, the market was valued at approximately AED 20 billion, with an expected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5-7% (Euromonitor International, 2023). This growth has been propelled by shifting consumer preferences, with increasing demand for fresh produce, organic items, and convenience foods. The desire for healthier, sustainable food choices has also contributed to the sector's expansion. As a result, food retailers are adapting their strategies to meet the evolving needs of consumers in this rapidly changing market.

Dubai's position as the retail hub of the UAE makes it a central player in the food retail market. The city boasts a wide variety of food retail outlets, including large





supermarkets, hypermarkets, and smaller specialty stores (Dubai Statistics Center, 2022). These outlets cater to the needs of Dubai's expanding and diverse population, which is characterized by a mix of local and expatriate residents. The growing demand for a broad range of food products, including international and ethnic foods, is driving the growth of food retail businesses. Retailers in Dubai are constantly innovating to meet the unique preferences of this diverse consumer base.

The demographic composition of Dubai's consumer base plays a significant role in shaping the food retail industry. Approximately 90% of Dubai's population consists of expatriates, creating a highly diverse market with varying tastes and food preferences (Dubai Statistics Center, 2022). This unique demographic structure demands a broad selection of food products, including both local and international items. The presence of a large expatriate population influences the types of food offered in retail outlets, driving the need for global food products. As a result, retailers must continuously adjust their offerings to cater to a wide array of cultural preferences and consumer demands.

Consumer preferences in Dubai have increasingly shifted towards health-conscious and premium products. As consumers become more aware of their health, they are opting for organic, gluten-free, plant-based, and low-calorie food options. This trend is especially prominent among affluent consumers, who are also fueling demand for luxury food items and specialty products (Al Mamun et al., 2021). Sustainability concerns have also gained traction, with many consumers seeking food products that are ethically sourced or environmentally friendly. This shift in preferences presents both challenges and opportunities for food retailers to cater to evolving demands.





Another significant trend is the rise of convenience foods, driven by the fast-paced lifestyle of Dubai's residents. Increasingly, consumers are turning to online food delivery services, further boosting demand for ready-to-eat meals, meal kits, and snack foods (Euromonitor International, 2022). This shift reflects the growing desire for convenience, especially among busy professionals and families. As consumers seek time-saving solutions, food retailers must adapt their product offerings to meet these needs. The demand for convenience foods is expected to continue growing as Dubai's population becomes more diverse and busier.

The food retail sector in Dubai is highly competitive, with a broad spectrum of players ranging from large international chains to smaller, specialized outlets. Major international supermarket chains like Carrefour, Lulu Hypermarket, and Spinneys dominate the market, offering a wide variety of products to cater to both local and expatriate consumers. These chains benefit from economies of scale, brand recognition, and established supplier networks (Euromonitor International, 2022). However, they face increasing competition from emerging SMEs that are targeting niche markets and adopting innovative strategies. SMEs are leveraging their agility and specialization to carve out their own market share.

Despite the challenges, SMEs in Dubai's food retail market have several growth opportunities. By targeting niche markets such as organic, halal, vegan, and health-conscious products, SMEs can tap into the growing consumer demand for these items (Euromonitor, 2022). Additionally, embracing digital transformation through e-commerce platforms allows SMEs to reach a broader customer base and engage with consumers in more innovative ways (Bălăceanu et al., 2023). Adopting sustainable





practices also enables SMEs to attract environmentally conscious consumers who prioritize sustainability in their purchasing decisions. These opportunities can help SMEs establish a strong foothold in the competitive market.

The food retail industry in Dubai offers significant opportunities for SMEs, especially those that can leverage marketing innovations like green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing. These strategies allow SMEs to differentiate themselves from competitors and build a loyal customer base. However, SMEs must remain aware of the evolving consumer trends, technological advancements, and operational challenges that shape the industry. By addressing these factors, SMEs can position themselves effectively in the dynamic and competitive food retail market. Staying adaptable and innovative will be key to thriving in this landscape (Alghanmi,



2020; Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hatham, 2023).

Marketing innovation refers to the development of new and creative marketing methods that significantly improve how products and services are marketed, communicated, and delivered to consumers. It involves adopting strategies that leverage new technologies, consumer insights, and trends to meet the changing demands of the market (Aghazadeh, 2015; Alqahtani & Uslay, 2020). In Dubai's food retail sector, marketing innovation plays a crucial role in enabling SMEs to stay competitive. These innovations help food retailers meet the expectations of a diverse consumer base while navigating a rapidly evolving market environment. The adoption of innovative marketing strategies is essential for SMEs aiming to succeed in this competitive landscape (Al-Hadi, Abdel-Rahman, & Hamdan, 2021; Boadu, Xie, Du, & Dwomo-Fokuo, 2022).





Marketing innovation is especially critical for food retail SMEs in Dubai due to the city's competitive market environment and the diverse preferences of its consumers. Technological advancements and changing shopping habits have reshaped the retail sector, making innovation even more important. The main forms of marketing innovations gaining traction in the Dubai food retail sector include green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing. These innovations help SMEs differentiate themselves by appealing to the values and preferences of modern consumers. They also allow SMEs to build brand loyalty and create greater value for their customers (Alghanmi, 2020; Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hathat, 2023).

Green marketing promotes environmentally sustainable practices, including eco-friendly products and responsible production processes. As global awareness of environmental issues increases, especially among younger consumers, food retailers are under pressure to adopt sustainable practices. In Dubai's food retail sector, strategies include reducing plastic waste with biodegradable, recyclable, or reusable packaging. Retailers are also focusing on offering locally sourced, organic, or ethically produced food. Furthermore, efforts to reduce the carbon footprint, such as offering plant-based alternatives, are becoming more common as part of green marketing initiatives (Dangelico, 2017; Bhatia & Jain, 2017).

Digital marketing plays a crucial role in the food retail sector by enabling SMEs to reach larger audiences through various online platforms. In Dubai, where internet penetration is over 99%, leveraging digital marketing strategies has become essential for growth and survival. Social media marketing on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter provides direct access to consumers. These platforms are





particularly valuable for food retailers in Dubai, as they allow them to promote products, engage with customers, and advertise promotions. Additionally, SEO and content marketing have become increasingly popular for driving traffic and improving online visibility (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Aljuma, 2020).

Email marketing and loyalty programs are effective digital marketing strategies that help build long-term customer relationships in Dubai's food retail sector. Personalized email campaigns allow retailers to engage customers with special offers and promotions tailored to individual preferences. Loyalty programs, which reward consumers for repeat purchases, encourage customer retention and increase their lifetime value. These programs foster a sense of connection with the brand, boosting consumer loyalty and encouraging future purchases. Together, email marketing and loyalty programs strengthen consumer trust and help retailers maintain a competitive edge (Aljuma, 2020; Alqahtani & Uslay, 2020).

The growing demand for online food shopping and delivery services has driven SMEs in Dubai to partner with popular food delivery platforms such as Talabat, Zomato, and Uber Eats. These partnerships enable retailers to expand their reach beyond physical stores and offer convenient home delivery services. Many retailers have optimized their operations by introducing online ordering systems, delivery tracking, and contactless payment options. This shift reflects changing consumer expectations, particularly in the wake of the global pandemic. By integrating online sales and delivery platforms, SMEs can remain competitive and meet evolving consumer needs (Ameen, 2018; Almtiri & Miah, 2019).





The food retail industry in Dubai is embracing digital transformation through e-commerce and digital marketing strategies. The city's high internet penetration and tech-savvy population provide a strong foundation for these digital strategies. Food retailers are using social media, SEO, and content marketing to reach customers more effectively and efficiently. These strategies not only promote products but also help build consumer trust and loyalty. As the market evolves, embracing digital marketing and e-commerce is essential for SMEs to thrive in the competitive food retail industry (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Danzen, 2021).

Digital marketing enables SMEs in Dubai to achieve several key objectives. It helps them expand their reach beyond their physical stores and access broader customer segments. Personalized marketing campaigns enable food retailers to target niche markets with tailored messages that resonate with specific consumer needs. Additionally, digital marketing is often more cost-effective than traditional advertising, allowing SMEs to achieve greater impact with fewer resources. By leveraging these strategies, SMEs can effectively compete with larger retailers and strengthen their position in the market (Al-Hadi, Abdel-Rahman, & Hamdan, 2021; Cruz-Ros & Alicia, 2017).

Educative marketing is a valuable strategy for food retailers in Dubai, particularly in building trust with consumers. This approach focuses on providing consumers with valuable information that helps them make informed purchasing decisions. For SMEs offering niche or unfamiliar products, educative marketing can be especially effective in overcoming skepticism. In the food retail sector, this includes educating consumers about the benefits of healthy, organic, and sustainable food





choices, which aligns with the growing health-conscious trend in Dubai. By providing transparency and useful information, SMEs can establish themselves as trusted sources of expertise (Aguirre Plasencia, 2019; Ameen, 2018).

Several key educative marketing strategies can be employed by food retailers in Dubai to enhance consumer engagement. For example, promoting the health benefits of organic and sustainable foods helps to cater to the increasing demand for healthier options in the market. Transparency in sourcing is also critical, as consumers are more likely to trust brands that disclose information about where and how their food products are sourced, especially when it comes to organic or fair-trade items. In a city as diverse as Dubai, food retailers can also target specific cultural and dietary needs, such as promoting halal-certified, vegan, or vegetarian alternatives. These strategies help build brand loyalty and position the retailer as a knowledgeable, ethical brand (Dangelico, 2017; Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hatham, 2023).

The effectiveness of marketing innovations such as green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing can be moderated by several factors that influence their success. One critical factor is the ability of SMEs to implement these strategies without incurring excessive costs. For example, green marketing initiatives may require significant upfront investments in packaging or sourcing organic products. However, the long-term benefits, including brand differentiation and increased customer loyalty, often outweigh the initial costs (Bălăceanu et al., 2023). Understanding how to balance costs and benefits is essential for SMEs to effectively leverage marketing innovations and achieve a competitive advantage.





The effect of marketing innovations on competitive advantage depends heavily on consumer perception of the brand. Effective digital marketing and educative campaigns can enhance a brand's image if executed well, resonating with the target audience. However, it is essential that these strategies align with consumer expectations and preferences to be effective. Without proper execution, even well-intentioned marketing efforts can fail to achieve the desired impact. Therefore, understanding the target audience and how they perceive the brand is crucial for the success of marketing innovations (Aghazadeh, 2015; Aripin, Suganda, & Kusumah, 2022).

SMEs require adequate resources financial, human, and technological to implement and sustain marketing innovations effectively. Firms with limited budgets may struggle to invest in large-scale digital marketing campaigns or sustainability programs, limiting their ability to compete. This can impact the success of marketing strategies, especially in a competitive market like Dubai's food retail sector. However, SMEs can still leverage cost-effective strategies to create impactful marketing initiatives. By prioritizing resource allocation and focusing on key areas, smaller firms can still make meaningful strides in innovation (Alghanmi, 2020; Ameen, 2018).

In Dubai's food retail sector, marketing innovation is essential not just for differentiation, but for maintaining and enhancing competitive advantage. Green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing strategies are critical for SMEs in meeting the demands of evolving consumer preferences. These strategies position SMEs as responsible, customer-focused, and innovative brands in the marketplace. However, the effectiveness of these marketing innovations depends on factors such as resource availability, cost-effectiveness, and consumer perception. Cost-effectiveness,





in particular, serves as a moderating factor, influencing the impact of these innovations on overall competitive advantage (Bălăceanu et al., 2023; Ayoub, 2021).

Understanding the complexities of marketing innovation helps SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector strengthen their market position. By managing the influencing factors that affect marketing innovation, SMEs can improve their competitive edge and ensure long-term success. With a clear understanding of the market dynamics, SMEs can create strategies that resonate with their target audience while staying ahead of competitors. Marketing innovations provide an opportunity for SMEs to position themselves as leaders in the industry. By leveraging these innovations, SMEs can remain adaptable, responsive, and profitable in a rapidly evolving market (Aghazadeh, 2015; Al-Hadi, Abdel-Rahman, & Hamdan, 2021).



Leveraging marketing innovations allows SMEs to meet consumer expectations while building a strong, forward-thinking brand reputation (Al Sayegh, 2018; Aruvian, 2018). These strategies help SMEs not only adapt to shifting market demands but also stay competitive in a crowded food retail landscape. As market dynamics change, SMEs must continue to innovate and implement new strategies to maintain their edge. Doing so will enable SMEs to remain profitable and grow sustainably. By continuously incorporating new innovations, SMEs can build resilience against market challenges and secure long-term success.

The food retail sector in Dubai is a critical contributor to the local economy, with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) playing a key role in providing diverse products and services to a growing population. However, SMEs face numerous





challenges that threaten their competitiveness and long-term sustainability. A major challenge is the intense competition from large multinational retailers such as Carrefour, Lulu, and Spinneys, which dominate the market due to their established brand presence, extensive distribution networks, and financial resources (Al Sayegh, 2018; Aruvian, 2018). This presents a significant barrier for SMEs, which often operate with limited resources and struggle to compete on cost, reach, and market positioning. As a result, SMEs must find innovative ways to differentiate themselves to remain competitive.

Shifting consumer preferences have further intensified the pressure on SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector to innovate. There is an increased demand for sustainable, health-conscious, and technology-driven solutions, which adds to the complexity of competing in the market (Ashmel, 2020; Kotler et al., 2017). However, many SMEs lack the capital required to invest in large-scale marketing campaigns or advanced technological infrastructure. This financial constraint makes it challenging for them to meet evolving consumer demands. As a result, many SMEs continue relying on traditional marketing methods, which are often inadequate for gaining a competitive advantage (Eurobarometer, 2022; Zghoul & Lucas, 2021).

In response to these pressures, marketing innovations such as green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing have emerged as potential strategies to help SMEs differentiate themselves and improve their competitiveness (Bălăceanu et al., 2023; Kotler et al., 2017). Green marketing focuses on promoting environmentally sustainable practices, appealing to Dubai's growing eco-conscious consumer base (Bălăceanu et al., 2023). Digital marketing, which includes tools like social media and





e-commerce, offers a cost-effective means for SMEs to reach a broader audience (Liu et al., 2022). Meanwhile, educative marketing builds trust and loyalty by educating consumers on product benefits and ethical sourcing (Kotler et al., 2017). Together, these innovations provide SMEs with effective ways to engage with modern consumers.

Despite the potential of these innovations, their cost-effectiveness remains a significant challenge for SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector. SMEs, with limited resources, often find it difficult to implement these strategies without incurring significant costs (Noorlailie, 2020; Naradda & Kumara, 2019). The introduction of value-added tax (VAT) in 2018, alongside other economic challenges such as inflation and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, has further exacerbated the financial pressures on SMEs (OECD, 2017; Zghoul & Lucas, 2021). These challenges highlight the need for cost-effective solutions that allow SMEs to implement marketing innovations without compromising their financial stability. There is a clear gap in the existing literature on how SMEs can balance these innovations with their limited resources to gain a competitive advantage, underscoring the need for further research.

This study aims to address this gap by exploring the relationship between green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing in enhancing the competitive advantage of SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector, with a particular focus on the moderating role of cost-effectiveness. The findings of this research will provide important insights into how SMEs can leverage marketing innovations within their financial constraints, offering practical solutions for enhancing their competitiveness and ensuring long-term sustainability (Alghanmi, 2020; Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hathat, 2023). Understanding the impact of cost-effectiveness on marketing strategies





is crucial, as it influences SMEs' ability to innovate without overextending their resources (Bălăceanu et al., 2023; Ayoub, 2021). These insights will guide SMEs in Dubai's competitive food retail market in making informed decisions that balance innovation with cost management, positioning them for sustained growth and success (Aghazadeh, 2015; Al-Hadi, Abdel-Rahman, & Hamdan, 2021).

1.3 Problem Statement

The food retail sector in Dubai is a vital part of the region's economy, with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) playing a crucial role in driving employment, innovation, and growth. However, these SMEs face significant challenges from local industry giants like Carrefour, Lulu, and Spinneys, as well as multinational corporations that dominate the market (Bălăceanu et al., 2023). The increasing competitive pressures make it harder for SMEs to maintain their market share and relevance, highlighting the need for strategies that can help them sustain and enhance their competitive advantage (Ashmel, 2020). As the market evolves, it becomes clear that SMEs must adapt to survive and thrive in a highly competitive environment. Thus, exploring effective strategies is essential for ensuring their continued success.

A competitive advantage, according to Porter (1980), allows a company to outperform its rivals by excelling in areas such as cost, place, and product. In Dubai's food retail sector, SMEs must strike a balance between offering competitive prices (cost advantage), securing strategic locations (place advantage), and differentiating their products (product advantage). However, resource constraints and fierce competition





often hinder SMEs from achieving these advantages using traditional methods. To address these challenges, marketing innovations have emerged as a potential solution for SMEs seeking to gain a sustainable competitive edge. By leveraging innovative marketing strategies, SMEs can carve out a distinct position in the market.

Despite the promise of marketing innovations like green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding their impact on the competitive advantage of food retail SMEs in Dubai. While some studies have explored the role of these strategies in larger organizations (Liu et al., 2022), research on their application in SMEs, especially within the competitive food retail sector of Dubai, remains limited (Ashmel, 2020; Eurobarometer, 2022). This gap is critical, as SMEs in the food retail industry face unique challenges when adopting these strategies, especially when operating with limited resources. Understanding the effectiveness and challenges of these innovations for SMEs is essential for developing strategies tailored to their needs.

This research gap highlights the need for focused exploration in this area. The cost-effectiveness of adopting marketing innovations is a topic that remains largely unexplored in the context of Dubai's food retail SMEs. While digital tools and green strategies hold the potential to enhance competitiveness, their integration requires careful consideration of the financial constraints faced by SMEs (Naradda & Kumara, 2019). Most existing research on marketing innovation primarily focuses on large organizations, which have more financial flexibility to invest in new technologies or sustainable practices (Mohammed, 2019). This leaves SMEs without a clear roadmap for implementing such innovations in a cost-effective manner. To address this, further





research is needed to provide practical solutions for SMEs to innovate within their budgetary limitations, ensuring these strategies remain viable.

Additionally, existing studies often overlook the moderating role of cost-effectiveness in the relationship between marketing innovation and competitive advantage. While green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing have been suggested as strategies for gaining a competitive edge, little is known about how these innovations interact with cost constraints. The literature fails to address how SMEs, with their limited resources, can effectively optimize these marketing innovations to achieve competitive advantages without incurring unsustainable costs (Noorlailie, 2020). This gap in understanding underscores the need for research that focuses on balancing innovation with financial prudence. By exploring this relationship, SMEs can better navigate the challenges of adopting marketing innovations while maintaining cost-effectiveness.

External factors, such as the introduction of value-added tax (VAT) in 2018, economic volatility from the COVID-19 pandemic, and shifting consumer behaviors in Dubai, have added new challenges for SMEs in the food retail sector. These factors further complicate the competitive landscape, making it even more important for SMEs to adopt innovative marketing strategies that are adaptable to the new economic realities (Alghanmi, 2020; Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hatham, 2023).

However, few studies have examined how such external pressures influence the adoption and effectiveness of marketing innovations among SMEs in Dubai. Understanding how external forces shape the success of marketing innovations is





critical for SMEs to remain competitive and responsive in a constantly changing environment (Aghazadeh, 2015; Bălăceanu et al., 2023). By identifying how SMEs can navigate these challenges, businesses can develop strategies that align with evolving market conditions, ensuring they continue to thrive in the face of uncertainty (Ayoub, 2021; Al-Hadi, Abdel-Rahman, & Hamdan, 2021).

This research aims to address these gaps by investigating the impact of marketing innovations specifically green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing on the competitive advantage of SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector. The study will also explore the moderating role of cost-effectiveness in shaping the relationship between these innovations and competitive advantage (Alghanmi, 2020; Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hatham, 2023). By integrating cost-effectiveness as a core component, the research will provide new insights into how SMEs can adopt and benefit from marketing innovations without exceeding their financial capabilities. This approach will offer practical guidance for SMEs in Dubai to innovate while maintaining cost control.

By addressing these gaps, this research will contribute to both academic literature and practical management practices. Academically, it will expand the knowledge base on marketing innovation and competitive advantage in the context of SMEs, specifically within Dubai's food retail sector (Khaled et al., 2019). It will also provide a theoretical framework that incorporates cost-effectiveness as a moderating factor in the relationship between marketing innovation and competitive advantage, an area that remains largely underexplored in current literature. For practitioners, the findings will offer actionable recommendations for SMEs in Dubai to implement





marketing innovations effectively, helping them gain a competitive advantage while managing costs.

Moreover, this research will provide policy recommendations for industry stakeholders and policymakers. These recommendations will emphasize the importance of creating an environment conducive to innovation among SMEs, particularly by supporting cost-effective marketing strategies during times of economic uncertainty (Khaled et al., 2019). Policymakers can play a crucial role in fostering an ecosystem that enables SMEs to thrive despite financial constraints, promoting a more resilient food retail sector in Dubai.

In conclusion, the primary issue lies in the insufficient understanding of how marketing innovations can enhance the competitive advantage of food retail SMEs in Dubai, particularly when balancing the potential benefits of these innovations with the financial constraints faced by these businesses. The existing literature has not adequately addressed the role of cost-effectiveness in this relationship, nor has it explored the impact of external factors reshaping Dubai's business environment (OECD, 2017; Alghanmi, 2020).

This research seeks to fill these gaps by providing empirical evidence on how SMEs can effectively adopt and leverage green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing strategies in a cost-effective manner, thereby creating and sustaining a competitive advantage (Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hatham, 2023; Ayoub, 2021). By understanding the complexities of marketing innovations and their relationship with cost-effectiveness, SMEs can make informed decisions that enhance





their competitiveness and ensure long-term sustainability in a rapidly evolving market (Aghazadeh, 2015; Bălăceanu et al., 2023).

1.4 Objective of the Study

This study aims to examine the impact of marketing innovation dimensions—green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing—on the competitive advantage of food retail SMEs in Dubai. It also seeks to explore how cost-effectiveness moderates the relationship between these marketing innovations and competitive advantage. The research focus on key aspects of competitive advantage, including cost, place, and product differentiation (Alghanmi, 2020; Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hathat, 2023).

The study will provide insights into how SMEs can leverage these marketing strategies to improve their market position while maintaining financial sustainability (Aghazadeh, 2015; Ayoub, 2021). Ultimately, the findings will offer practical recommendations for SMEs in the food retail sector in Dubai to enhance their competitive edge, ensuring they remain adaptable and responsive in a competitive environment (Bălăceanu et al., 2023). The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the effect of marketing innovation dimensions (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) on cost advantage in Dubai food retail SMEs.
2. To examine the effect of marketing innovation dimensions (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) on place advantage in Dubai food retail SMEs.





3. To examine the effect of marketing innovation dimensions (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) on product advantage in Dubai food retail SMEs.
4. To examine the moderating effect of cost effectiveness in the relationship between marketing innovation dimensions (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) and cost advantage among Dubai food retail SMEs.
5. To examine the moderating effect of cost effectiveness in the relationship between marketing innovation dimensions (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) and place advantage among Dubai food retail SMEs.
6. To examine the moderating effect of cost effectiveness in the relationship between marketing innovation dimensions (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) and product advantage among Dubai food retail



1.5 Research Questions

The research questions central to this study aim to explore the effect of marketing innovation dimensions—green marketing and digital marketing—on competitive advantage, specifically in terms of cost, place, and product, within food retail SMEs in Dubai (Alghanmi, 2020; Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hatham, 2023). Additionally, the study seeks to examine how cost-effectiveness moderates the relationship between these marketing innovations and competitive advantage (Aghazadeh, 2015; Ayoub, 2021).





The research assess whether the adoption of green marketing and digital marketing strategies can enhance the competitiveness of SMEs in the food retail sector, focusing on their ability to differentiate on cost, location, and product (Bălăceanu et al., 2023). It also investigates how financial constraints influence the successful implementation of these innovations (OECD, 2017). Ultimately, these questions provide valuable insights into the practical application of marketing innovations for SMEs in Dubai, helping them navigate challenges and enhance their market positioning (Alghanmi, 2020).

1. What effect do marketing innovations (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) have on gaining cost advantage in Dubai food retail SMEs?
2. What effect do marketing innovations (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) have on gaining place advantage in Dubai food retail SMEs?
3. What effect do marketing innovations (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) have on gaining product advantage in Dubai food retail SMEs?
4. Does cost effectiveness moderate the relationship between marketing innovations (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) and cost advantage in Dubai food retail SMEs?
5. Does cost effectiveness moderate the relationship between marketing innovations (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) and place advantage in Dubai food retail SMEs?





6. Does cost effectiveness moderate the relationship between marketing innovations (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) and product advantage in Dubai food retail SMEs?

1.6 Research Hypothesis

To achieve the objectives of the study, the main premise is that marketing innovations significantly affect the competitive advantage of the food retail SMEs in Dubai. To support this, the following hypotheses were also laid out:

RO1 on the effect of Marketing innovation dimensions on cost advantage

- H1:** Green marketing innovation has a significant effect on cost advantage.
- H2:** Digital marketing innovation has a significant effect on cost advantage.
- H3:** Educative marketing innovation has a significant effect on cost advantage.

RO2 on the effect of marketing innovation dimensions on place advantage.

- H4:** Green marketing innovation has a significant effect on place advantage.
- H5:** Digital marketing innovation has a significant effect on place advantage
- H6:** Educative marketing innovation has a significant effect on place advantage.





RO3 on the effect of marketing innovation dimensions on product advantage.

H7: Green marketing innovation has a significant effect on product advantage.

H8: Digital marketing innovation has a significant effect on product advantage.

H9: Educative marketing innovation has a significant effect on product advantage.

RO4 Moderation of cost effectiveness in the effect of marketing innovation on cost advantage.

H10: Cost effectiveness significantly moderates the relationships between Green marketing innovation and cost advantage.

H11: Cost effectiveness significantly moderates the relationships between digital marketing innovation and cost advantage.

H12: Cost effectiveness significantly moderates the relationships between educative marketing innovation and cost advantage.

RO5 Moderation of cost effectiveness in the effect of marketing innovation on place advantage.

H13: Cost effectiveness significantly moderates the relationships between green marketing innovation and place advantage.

H14: Cost effectiveness significantly moderates the relationships between digital marketing innovation and place advantage.





H15: Cost effectiveness significantly moderates the relationships between educative marketing innovation and place advantage.

RO6 Moderation of cost effectiveness in the effect of marketing innovation on product advantage.

H16: Cost effectiveness significantly moderates the relationships between green marketing innovation and product advantage.

H17: Cost effectiveness significantly moderates the relationships among digital marketing innovation and product advantage.

H18: Cost effectiveness significantly moderates the relationships between Educative marketing innovation and product advantage.



1.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study integrates theoretical perspectives and constructs to explore the relationships between marketing innovations, competitive advantage dimensions, and the moderating influence of cost-effectiveness within Dubai's food retail SMEs. The framework draws on key theories, such as Porter's (1980) Competitive Advantage theory, which emphasizes the importance of differentiation and cost leadership, and the resource-based view (Barney, 1991), which highlights the role of resources in achieving competitive advantage. It also incorporates





the theory of innovation adoption, which explores how firms embrace new marketing strategies to gain a competitive edge.

This structured approach will allow for an in-depth understanding of how green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing can impact SMEs in Dubai. By considering the moderating role of cost-effectiveness, the framework aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in leveraging marketing innovations.

The conceptual framework of this study is supported by different theories for namely the Competitive advantage theory, Resource Advantage theory, Entrepreneurial marketing theory (EM) which was born out of the practice of firms operating in conditions of uncertainty, it presents emerging and powerful alternative to cope with the decreasing effectiveness associated with traditional marketing (Whalen 2017). Also the Transient of Competitive Advantage which views the end of competitive advantage being limited to leadership conceptual framework that the objective of any strategy is to maintain the advantage (Jasanta, 2020).

Olsen (2019) concluded that organizations must engage in a process of knowledge development through systemic innovation to sustain their competitive advantage. This aligns with the conceptual framework, which has been adapted from Danzen (2021), who reported a significant effect of marketing innovation on sustainable competitive advantage. The framework integrates key theories, including the Resource Advantage Theory (RAT) and Competitive Advantage Theory (CAT), both of which have been foundational in business-strategic management research.





These theories have been applied by various researchers to study management principles and concepts, providing a strong theoretical basis for this study. By combining RAT and CAT, this framework aims to explore how marketing innovations contribute to competitive advantage in food retail SMEs, particularly in Dubai's dynamic market.

Michael Porter's Competitive Advantage theory serves as a foundational framework to understand how organizations achieve and sustain superior performance in competitive markets. According to Porter, competitive advantage can be achieved through cost leadership, differentiation, and focus strategies. For SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector, competitive advantage is crucial for enhancing profitability and market positioning. Michael Porter first put the theory of competitive advantage forth in 1985 (Mekić & Mekić, 2014). According to the competitive advantage theory, companies and governments should adopt measures that result in the production of high-quality products that can command high prices on the market (Ford, 2020; Mekić & Mekić, 2014). When a company develops or gains an attribute or a set of attributes that enables it to perform better than its rivals, it is said to have a competitive advantage.

These qualities can include having access to inexpensive high quality natural resources as well as human resources that are highly qualified and trained. Information technology and robotics are two examples of new technologies that will either be integrated into the product itself or used to help make it. Due to its increasing prominence in today's corporate environment, information technology can provide a competitive edge by outperforming rivals in terms of online visibility (Ford, 2020).





Michael Porter's Competitive Advantage theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how organizations achieve and sustain superior performance in competitive markets. According to Porter, competitive advantage can be attained through three main strategies: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus (Porter, 1985). These strategies enable firms to position themselves effectively in the market, offering either lower prices, unique products, or specialized services. For SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector, achieving a competitive advantage is essential for improving profitability and enhancing market positioning (Alghanmi, 2020; Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hathat, 2023). Given the intense competition in the market, adopting the right combination of these strategies allows SMEs to differentiate themselves and secure long-term success (Aghazadeh, 2015; Ayoub, 2021).



1. **Cost Advantage:** Involves minimizing costs through operational efficiencies, resource utilization, and economies of scale.

2. **Place Advantage:** Focuses on strategic location, distribution networks, and market accessibility.
3. **Product Advantage:** Centers on product differentiation, quality, innovation, and customer perception.

According to resource-advantage theory, a firm's performance is determined by its comparative advantage in resources, which include both material and immaterial assets. These resources enable companies to create market offerings that are valuable to specific market segments (Patel et al., 2019). Consequently, competition becomes a continuous process where businesses vie for a comparative advantage in resources, leading to superior financial performance and market positions (Patel et al., 2019). In





this context, SMEs must effectively manage and allocate their resources to remain competitive and thrive in the market. The theory emphasizes the significance of resource optimization in gaining an edge over competitors.

Entrepreneurial marketing theory introduces entrepreneurial marketing (EM), a creative, opportunity-seeking strategy employed by many entrepreneurs and SMEs. EM involves risk-taking, external focus, and the generation of creative value, all aimed at achieving higher competitive advantage and improved business performance (Morrish et al., 2020). Key components of EM include customer relationship management, brand awareness tactics, company planning, consumer research, and the creation of compelling promotional messages (Morrish et al., 2020). These elements play a vital role in enabling SMEs to stand out in a competitive market and drive business growth.

By adopting EM practices, SMEs can foster stronger connections with customers and enhance their market positioning.

The discussed theories underpin the conceptual framework by linking competitive advantage, resource advantage, and entrepreneurial marketing. Competitive advantage theory explains how small businesses can leverage resource allocation and efficient utilization to gain a competitive edge in the marketplace (Mekić & Mekić, 2014). This understanding is crucial for SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector, where cost, place, and product advantages are essential for success. The theories highlight the importance of resource management in gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage, particularly within the dynamic and resource-constrained environment of SMEs. By integrating these theories, the framework provides a



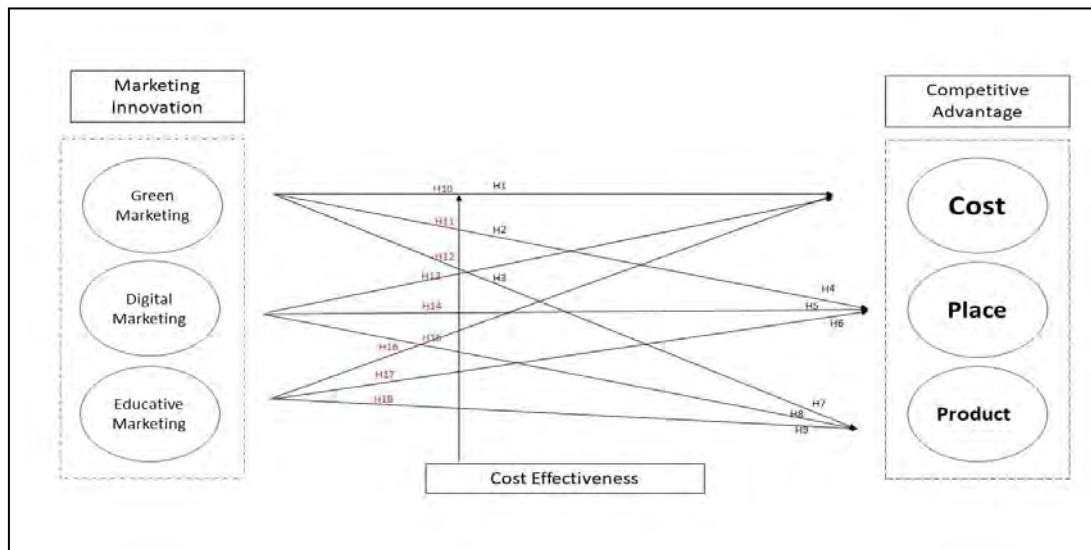


structured approach for analyzing how SMEs can use marketing innovations to improve their competitiveness.

In the context of the UAE food industry, effective resource allocation and utilization are essential for SMEs to achieve a competitive advantage (Alghanmi, 2020). The theories presented also underscore the importance of marketing innovations, such as digital, green, and educative marketing, in helping SMEs stand out in the market (Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hatham, 2023). SMEs in Dubai can benefit from leveraging these strategies to position themselves as cost-effective and innovative businesses that meet consumer expectations (Aghazadeh, 2015). Furthermore, entrepreneurial marketing practices offer valuable insights into how SMEs can be agile, responsive, and creative in their marketing efforts (Ayoub, 2021). Together, these theories form a comprehensive framework to guide SMEs in their pursuit of competitive advantage through marketing innovation (Bălăceanu et al., 2023).

Ultimately, the need for SMEs in the food retail sector to implement entrepreneurial marketing practices is supported by the theoretical framework. These practices help SMEs differentiate themselves from larger competitors by focusing on creativity, customer relationships, and resource optimization (OECD, 2017). By embracing marketing innovations, SMEs can not only achieve a competitive edge but also ensure long-term sustainability and growth (Alghanmi, 2020). The integration of these theoretical perspectives reinforces the importance of strategic marketing decisions for SMEs aiming to thrive in a competitive market (Aghazadeh, 2015). Thus, the consulted theories provide a robust foundation for the study, linking marketing innovation to competitive advantage in Dubai's food retail SMEs (Ayoub, 2021).



Figure 1.1*Conceptual framework*

The conceptual framework of this study is designed to explore the effect of marketing innovation dimensions green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing on competitive advantage, which is measured through cost, place, and product advantages. The framework positions marketing innovations as the independent variables, with competitive advantage as the dependent variable, and highlights the moderating role of cost-effectiveness (Alghanmi, 2020). It examines whether these marketing innovations can positively, negatively, or insignificantly influence competitive advantage for SMEs in the food retail sector in Dubai (Almehairbi, Arunprasad, & El Hathat, 2023). The relationships between these variables are reflected in the hypotheses of the study.

Hypothesis 1 suggests that green marketing innovation significantly affects cost, place, and product advantages (Bălăceanu et al., 2023). Hypothesis 2 explores the effect of digital marketing innovation on these same competitive advantage dimensions (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Hypothesis 3 investigates the effect of educative



marketing innovation on competitive advantage (Aghazadeh, 2015). Additionally, Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 consider the moderating effect of cost-effectiveness on the relationship between each of the three marketing innovation dimensions (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) and the competitive advantage dimensions (cost, place, and product advantage) in the context of Dubai's food retail SMEs (Ayoub, 2021).

1.7.1 Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study is based on several key theories that explore the relationships between marketing innovations and competitive advantage within the context of SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector. These theories provide insights into how marketing innovations, such as green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing, can help SMEs gain a competitive edge.

The Resource Advantage Theory (RAT) emphasizes the importance of resources in creating market offerings that deliver value, while Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory outlines how SMEs can leverage cost, place, and product advantages to outperform competitors. Entrepreneurial Marketing Theory further highlights the role of creativity, risk-taking, and customer relationships in achieving a competitive advantage (Hunt & Morgan, 1995). Additionally, the moderating effect of cost-effectiveness is crucial, as it determines how SMEs can successfully implement these innovations within their financial constraints (Porter, 1985). These theories collectively offer a comprehensive framework to understand how SMEs in Dubai can enhance their



competitiveness through marketing innovations while maintaining cost-effectiveness (Morris et al., 2002).

1.7.1.1 Theories Guiding the Research Framework

- **Resource-Based View (RBV)** The Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that a firm's competitive advantage is derived from its ability to effectively utilize and leverage its resources (Barney, 1991). In the context of this research, marketing innovations such as green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing are considered strategic resources that SMEs can exploit to create a competitive advantage. The RBV theory emphasizes the importance of valuable, rare, and difficult-to-imitate resources (such as unique marketing strategies and capabilities) in achieving superior market performance. By adopting innovative marketing strategies, SMEs in Dubai can improve their resource utilization, reduce costs, expand their market reach, and differentiate their products, thereby gaining a competitive advantage in the highly competitive food retail industry.
- **Competitive Advantage Theory** Porter's Competitive Advantage Theory (1980) is a key theoretical framework that underpins this study. According to Porter, competitive advantage is achieved when a firm outperforms its competitors in key areas such as cost, place, and product. This research applies Porter's theory to explore how marketing innovations can help SMEs achieve these three dimensions of competitive advantage. Green marketing may contribute to cost advantage by reducing production costs, digital marketing may improve place

advantage by expanding market reach, and educative marketing may enhance product advantage by creating product differentiation.

- Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) Theory The Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) Theory emphasizes the use of innovative and proactive marketing strategies by entrepreneurs to create value and competitive advantage (Khalil, 2013). This theory aligns with the focus of the study on how SMEs, as entrepreneurial entities, can leverage marketing innovations to differentiate themselves in the market and improve their competitive position. The theory also emphasizes resource constraints and the importance of cost-effective marketing strategies, which is particularly relevant for SMEs operating in resource-limited environments like Dubai.

1.7.1.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study, as illustrated in Figure 1.1, demonstrates the relationships between the key variables under investigation: marketing innovations (green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing) and dimensions of competitive advantage (cost, place, and product advantages).

This framework integrates the theoretical foundations discussed earlier, including the Resource-Advantage Theory, Competitive Advantage Theory, and Entrepreneurial Marketing Theory, to illustrate how these marketing innovations can contribute to gaining a competitive edge in the food retail sector. The framework also incorporates the moderating effect of cost-effectiveness, emphasizing its role in



determining the success of marketing innovations for SMEs in Dubai. By understanding these relationships, SMEs can effectively position themselves to leverage marketing innovations while managing their resources efficiently. This conceptual framework provides a structured approach to examining how marketing strategies can enhance competitive advantage in the context of Dubai's food retail SMEs (Porter, 1985; Hunt, 1997; Sarasvathy, 2001).

Independent Variables: The three dimensions of marketing innovation green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing are the key independent variables. These innovations are expected to have a significant impact on the competitive advantage of SMEs in the food retail sector (Kotler & Keller, 2016).



promoting sustainable products and reducing waste, which may enhance cost advantage (through resource efficiency), place advantage (by attracting eco-conscious consumers), and product advantage (by differentiating products as environmentally sustainable) (Peattie & Crane, 2005).

- Digital marketing encompasses the use of digital platforms (such as social media, e-commerce, and online advertising) to reach a broader audience, which may lead to place advantage (wider market access), cost advantage (by reducing marketing expenses), and product advantage (by improving customer engagement and satisfaction) (Chaffey, 2015).
- Educative marketing involves educating consumers about the benefits of products, which can build brand loyalty and customer trust. This can directly influence product advantage (by making products more attractive) and cost





advantage (by reducing customer acquisition costs through word-of-mouth and brand reputation).

Dependent Variables: The dependent variables in the framework are the three dimensions of competitive advantage: (Porter, 1985).

- Cost Advantage: The ability of SMEs to offer products at lower costs compared to competitors, which allows them to gain a competitive pricing advantage.
- Place Advantage: The strategic positioning of SMEs in terms of market accessibility, distribution networks, and geographic reach.
- Product Advantage: The differentiation of products based on quality, uniqueness, and innovation to appeal to consumer preferences (Barney, 1991).



The moderating variable, cost-effectiveness, plays a crucial role in the conceptual framework by influencing how marketing innovations, such as green, digital, and educative marketing, contribute to competitive advantage. SMEs with limited resources must balance the costs of implementing these strategies with the potential benefits they can bring in terms of enhanced competitive positioning. The cost-effectiveness of these innovations can determine whether SMEs are able to gain a sustainable competitive edge while managing their financial constraints. This balancing act is essential to ensure that the resources invested in marketing innovations are utilized efficiently. Cost-effectiveness, therefore, becomes a key factor in determining the success of these innovations (Zahra et al., 2000).





The conceptual framework serves as a guide to understanding the relationships between marketing innovations and competitive advantage in Dubai's food retail SMEs. It highlights how green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing can drive cost, place, and product advantages, helping SMEs strengthen their market position. At the same time, it underscores the moderating role of cost-effectiveness in shaping the impact of these marketing innovations. By examining these interactions, the framework provides insights into how SMEs can adopt and integrate marketing innovations to achieve long-term success. This theoretical approach supports the development of sustainable strategies for SMEs looking to thrive in a competitive market environment (Porter, 1985; Hunt, 1997; Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

As outlined in the framework, green marketing focuses on eco-friendly practices, such as offering sustainable products and reducing waste, which can lead to a competitive advantage in terms of cost efficiency and market differentiation. Similarly, digital marketing enables SMEs to expand their reach through online channels, resulting in broader market access and improved customer engagement. Educative marketing builds consumer trust by providing valuable information about products, fostering customer loyalty and reinforcing product advantages. However, the framework also emphasizes that these innovations must be implemented cost-effectively, as SMEs in Dubai are often constrained by limited resources. Cost-effectiveness plays a critical moderating role in determining whether these innovations contribute to sustainable competitive advantages or simply lead to wasted resources (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Ryan, 2016).





This structured approach integrates marketing innovation theories with practical considerations of resource allocation, offering a comprehensive model for SMEs seeking to enhance their market position. Ultimately, it provides actionable insights into how SMEs can remain competitive, differentiate their offerings, and achieve profitability while managing their financial constraints (Peattie & Crane, 2005; Chaffey, 2015).

1.8 Operational Definition

Marketing Innovation (MI) refers to the development and implementation of new marketing strategies, tools, or processes that improve a company's ability to meet customer needs and market demands. MI encompasses three major components including green marketing, digital marketing and educative marketing.

Green Marketing (GM) focuses on promoting products based on their environmental benefits, such as sustainable production methods or reduced carbon footprints. This approach targets environmentally-conscious consumers, emphasizing eco-friendly aspects of products (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Digital Marketing (DM) utilizes digital channels, including social media, SEO, email marketing, and online advertising, to connect with customers and drive sales. It aims to increase brand visibility in the digital space by reaching customers where they spend much of their time (Peattie & Crane, 2005).





Educative Marketing involves providing educational content like tutorials, webinars, or blogs, aimed at helping customers make informed decisions. This strategy seeks to build a long-term relationship with the brand through value-driven interactions. It empowers consumers to understand products better and develop loyalty (Chaffey, 2015).

Competitive Advantage (CA) refers to the unique strengths that enable a company to outperform competitors. It includes factors such as cost leadership, product differentiation, superior customer service, or technological innovation. In this study, three main competitive advantages were considered, i.e., cost advantage, place advantage and product advantage.



Cost Advantage refers to the ability to produce goods or services at lower costs

than competitors, allowing a company to offer competitive prices or higher profit margins. This can be achieved through economies of scale, streamlined operations, or cost-effective sourcing methods.

Place Advantage, on the other hand, is achieved by strategically positioning a company's facilities, operations, and distribution networks to optimize market access and operational efficiency (Ryan, 2016).

Product Advantage This one focuses on offering unique or superior products that stand out in the marketplace. A company might focus on product innovation, design, quality, or customization to differentiate itself from competitors. In the food retail industry, this could mean offering unique, locally-sourced ingredients, organic





options, or specialized products that cater to a particular consumer preference (Ryan, 2016).

Cost Effectiveness is the efficient use of resources to achieve the desired outcomes, ensuring maximum value while minimizing financial expenditures. It is essential for businesses striving for sustainability and profitability. Achieving cost-effectiveness often involves evaluating the return on investment for each resource spent and making adjustments where necessary. This concept plays a crucial role in enhancing the long-term viability of any business. For SMEs, particularly in Dubai's competitive food retail sector, balancing cost-effectiveness with innovation is vital for sustaining competitive advantage (Kotler & Keller, 2016).



the strategic roles that these concepts play in enhancing a company's marketing efforts, competitive positioning, and overall business success. By implementing these strategies, firms can improve their market standing and profitability. The definitions presented here highlight the importance of innovation and cost management as key drivers of business growth. Additionally, they emphasize how companies must align their marketing and operational strategies with their resources and market dynamics. Ultimately, these concepts form the foundation for analyzing how SMEs can thrive in the competitive landscape of Dubai's food retail sector (Porter, 1985).





1.9 Research Significance

This study holds significant implications for both academic knowledge advancement and practical applications within the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Dubai's food retail sector. It explores the impact of marketing innovations specifically green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing on competitive advantage. The research also considers the moderating role of cost effectiveness, shedding light on how SMEs can strategically implement these innovations. By addressing these factors, the study contributes to the broader understanding of strategic management in dynamic markets. Ultimately, it provides valuable insights into how marketing innovations can enhance competitive positioning and profitability in the food retail sector.



Firstly, this research contributes to academic literature by filling important knowledge gaps regarding the effectiveness of marketing innovations in enhancing competitive advantage. While numerous studies have explored competitive advantage in various contexts, there is a distinct lack of comprehensive research specifically focused on SMEs in the food retail sector in Dubai. By applying Michael Porter's framework of competitive advantage cost, place, and product advantages to contemporary marketing practices, the study enriches theoretical frameworks and provides a nuanced understanding of how SMEs can strategically leverage marketing innovations to achieve market differentiation and sustainable growth (Porter, 1985; Kotler & Keller, 2016).





Moreover, the study extends existing theoretical perspectives by examining the moderating role of cost effectiveness. This aspect is vital as it explores how the efficient allocation of resources influences the relationship between marketing innovations and competitive advantage. By incorporating these insights, the research broadens theoretical frameworks and offers a foundation for future studies in strategic management, marketing, and SME research. It provides an opportunity to refine current theories by addressing the complexities of cost-effectiveness in driving marketing innovations. Consequently, this work contributes to the evolving understanding of how cost management plays a crucial role in the success of marketing strategies (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Porter, 1985).

Secondly, the findings of this research have practical implications for SMEs operating in Dubai's competitive food retail market. SMEs often struggle with resource constraints and operational challenges, which limit their ability to adopt and implement innovative marketing strategies. Identifying the marketing innovations such as green marketing, which promotes sustainability, digital marketing that leverages online platforms, and educative marketing that enhances consumer knowledge can help SMEs improve their cost, place, and product advantages. This understanding enables SMEs to make informed decisions about how to allocate resources strategically and improve their market positioning. As a result, SMEs can better navigate the competitive landscape and enhance their long-term success (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Porter, 1985).

Furthermore, the study provides actionable insights for SME managers and entrepreneurs to optimize their marketing strategies, improve customer value propositions, and enhance competitive positioning. This includes understanding





consumer preferences, adapting to technological advancements, and navigating regulatory landscapes effectively. Such insights are invaluable for enhancing business resilience, maximizing profitability, and sustaining growth amidst evolving market dynamics and competitive pressures.

Thirdly, the research findings offer important implications for policymakers and government entities in Dubai. By highlighting the role of supportive policies in facilitating innovation adoption among SMEs, policymakers can promote a conducive business environment that fosters entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic diversification. Policies aimed at reducing barriers to innovation, enhancing access to financing, and supporting skills development can empower SMEs to leverage marketing innovations effectively, thereby contributing to economic resilience and long-term sustainability (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Porter, 1985).

Moreover, understanding the economic effect of marketing innovations on SMEs in the food retail sector can inform policy decisions aimed at promoting sectoral growth, improving market competitiveness, and stimulating consumer demand. This knowledge is crucial for shaping economic policies that foster job creation, enhance productivity, and encourage inclusive economic growth in Dubai's diverse business landscape. By integrating marketing innovations into economic strategies, policymakers can drive sustainable growth in the food retail industry. The insights gained from this research can be used to inform policy frameworks that align with the evolving needs of SMEs. Consequently, this understanding serves as a catalyst for economic development and market vitality in Dubai (OECD, 2021).





The research provides valuable insights for industry professionals, including marketers, business strategists, and consultants working within Dubai's food retail sector. By identifying effective marketing practices that drive competitive advantage, industry stakeholders can refine their strategies, innovate product offerings, and capitalize on emerging market opportunities. Insights into consumer behavior, market trends, and competitive dynamics enable businesses to develop targeted marketing campaigns. This helps optimize resource allocation and strengthens brand equity in a highly competitive marketplace. As a result, businesses can more effectively navigate market challenges and sustain their long-term growth (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Many academic scholars who have examined marketing innovations and competitive advantage in recent years have noted that over 80% of research results from published studies primarily focus on large-scale enterprises (LSEs). This highlights a significant gap in literature specifically concerning food retail SMEs in Dubai, where strategies related to marketing innovation are often underexplored. As identified in the study problem, this gap in literature makes it challenging for SMEs to implement effective marketing strategies. This study helps small-scale food retail businesses in Dubai determine essential marketing activities that are critical for competitive advantage and business survival. By focusing on aspects such as green marketing, this research provides guidance for SME policy implementation in the food retail sector (OECD, 2021; Porter, 1985).

The research explores the relationship between marketing innovation and competitive advantage in SMEs within the UAE's food retail sector, guided by three core theories: Resource Advantage Theory (RAT), Entrepreneurial Marketing Theory





(EMT), and Competitive Advantage Theory (CAT). These theories serve as a framework for testing how marketing innovations can lead to competitive advantage, particularly focusing on how resources are allocated and utilized within SMEs. By applying these theories, the research offers a comprehensive approach to understanding the strategic role of marketing innovations. This examination of resource utilization highlights how SMEs can effectively leverage marketing innovations to gain a competitive edge. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of competitive advantage in the context of SMEs in Dubai's food retail market (Hunt, 2000; Miles & Arnold, 2007; Porter, 1985).

Resource Advantage Theory (RAT) is employed to understand how SMEs can strategically manage and allocate their resources to gain a competitive edge in the market. It emphasizes that efficient resource utilization is key to achieving superior performance. RAT focuses on how firms that efficiently manage their resources can outperform competitors by delivering superior products or services (Hunt, 2000). Entrepreneurial Marketing Theory (EMT) is used to examine how proactive, innovative, and risk-taking marketing strategies can drive marketing innovation.

This approach is particularly relevant for SMEs operating in dynamic and competitive environments, helping them create and sustain competitive advantages through creative and flexible marketing practices (Morris, Schindehutte, & Allen, 2005). Competitive Advantage Theory (CAT) provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how firms can build a sustainable competitive advantage through differentiation, cost leadership, and strategic marketing initiatives (Porter, 1985).





The study also investigates the moderating role of cost-effectiveness, focusing on how resource allocation and utilization shape marketing outcomes. It examines whether cost efficiency influences the relationship between marketing innovation and competitive advantage, emphasizing the importance of managing costs while pursuing innovation and differentiation. By understanding the balance between cost-effectiveness and innovation, SMEs can optimize their resources to maximize the benefits of marketing strategies. The findings highlight how effective resource allocation can contribute to a competitive edge in a resource-constrained environment. Ultimately, this aspect of the research provides valuable insights into the operational efficiency of SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector, where managing cost-effectiveness is crucial for long-term success (Hunt, 2000; Miles & Arnold, 2007).



In terms of practical implications, the research aims to help SMEs in the UAE

food industry improve their performance by enhancing their marketing strategies and achieving cost-efficiency. By leveraging entrepreneurial marketing, SMEs can adopt innovative marketing practices that drive competitive advantage while remaining resource-conscious (Aljuma, 2020).

The study demonstrates how integrating cost-effective marketing strategies can lead to higher profitability and market positioning. Additionally, it provides SMEs with actionable insights into how to utilize marketing innovation to create differentiation and sustain growth (Almehairbi et al., 2023). Overall, the research offers a comprehensive framework to guide SMEs through the complexities of the competitive food retail market in Dubai (Boadu et al., 2022).





Most importantly, the current study has drawn on the Resource Advantage theory (RAT) Entrepreneurial marketing (EMT) and Competitive Advantage theory (CAT) to illustrate how marketing innovation works towards competitive advantage (Alghanmi, 2020). Given the limitation on this type of research in the UAE, the applied theoretical perspectives serve in exploring how effective resource allocation and utilization, entrepreneurial marketing and competitive strategies can apply (Bambang, 2020). Ideally, the theoretical underpinnings present a theoretical road map for leveraging on the relationship between marketing innovation and competitive advantage. It further serves in exploring the moderating effect of cost effectiveness on the relationship by considering the how resource allocation and resource utilization shape the outcomes. The study has also demonstrated that Competitive Advantage theory (CAT) facilitates a broader understanding of the cost, place, and product advantages (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).



In practice, this study will help SMEs in the UAE's food industry achieve greater effectiveness and improved performance. It will provide valuable insights into developing cost-efficiency while operating in a highly competitive business environment (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). By examining the role of entrepreneurial marketing, the study will show how this approach can promote marketing innovation and lead to competitive advantage (Almehairbi et al., 2023). SMEs will gain a better understanding of how to optimize their marketing strategies while maintaining cost-effectiveness. Ultimately, the research will equip SMEs with practical tools to enhance their competitiveness and sustainability in the dynamic UAE food industry (Alghanmi, 2020).





This research explores the experiences and advancements of marketing innovations and competitive advantage specifically at the Food Retail Small and Medium Enterprises in Dubai. Findings were thus target the authorities in understanding the critical challenges faced by SMEs so as to amicably working with pertinent policy makers and implementers to save the situation (Boadu et al., 2022). Moreover, after reviewing the literature, this research clarifies the most dominant and least important factors associated with the Food Retail Small and Medium Enterprises in Dubai. Which further can help the government formulate appropriate strategies to achieve a high level of business performance (Aguirre Plasencia, 2019). The present study were very much significant to all scholars in the field of marketing since it was expand literature as a response to Alghanmi (2020) who claimed there was limited studies on innovations and competitiveness in Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Dubai (Bambang, 2020).



In summary, this research not only advances academic knowledge in strategic management and marketing but also offers practical guidance for SMEs, policymakers, and industry professionals in enhancing competitiveness, fostering innovation, and driving sustainable growth within Dubai's dynamic food retail sector (Dangelico, 2017). By bridging the gap between theory and practice, the study contributes to building a resilient and thriving business ecosystem that supports long-term economic prosperity and innovation-driven entrepreneurship (Bambang, 2020).





1.10 Scope of Study

This research explores the impact of marketing innovations on competitive advantage within small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Dubai's vibrant food retail sector. The study addresses the critical challenges SMEs face, such as high failure rates and the need for effective differentiation in a highly competitive market (Alghanmi, 2020).

By examining the role of marketing innovations, such as green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing, the research aims to uncover strategies that can enhance SMEs' market positioning. The findings will provide insights into how these innovations can contribute to building sustainable competitive advantages. Ultimately, the study seeks to offer practical solutions for SMEs to thrive in an increasingly competitive landscape (Dangelico, 2017).

Geographically this research was carried out in Dubai city, one of the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) most dynamic business environments. A capital of UAE/Emirates a country in the Western Asia, located at the Eastern end of the Arabian Peninsula and shares borders with Oman and Saudi Arabia (Ahmed, 2021). Dubai's food retail sector is renowned for its diversity and rapid growth, characterized by a mix of local, regional, and international players. This focused geographical scope allows for insights tailored to the unique market dynamics, regulatory environment, and consumer behaviors prevalent in Dubai.

The study was basically investigating the three main variables; Marketing Innovation (Green Marketing, Digital Marketing, and Educative Marketing)





(Independent Variable) and the dependent variable, Competitive Advantage (cost, place and product) plus the moderation effect of cost effectiveness on the two variables. Meaning data collection was focus how the factors mentioned affect dealers in Food retail SMEs in Dubai.

This research focuses on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within Dubai's food retail sector, including grocery stores, specialty food shops, restaurants, cafes, and food delivery services. It explores the challenges SMEs face, such as resource constraints, competition, and changing consumer preferences. By concentrating on this sector, the study aims to understand how marketing innovations influence competitive advantage (Alghanmi, 2020). The research is grounded in Michael E. Porter's Competitive Advantage theory, examining green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing as critical factors. These innovations impact competitive advantage through cost, place, and product dimensions, providing valuable insights for SMEs (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

The research is based on three core theories: Competitive Advantage theory, Resource Advantage theory, and Entrepreneurial Marketing theory. These theories help to frame the study's key variables: marketing innovations (independent variable), competitive advantage (dependent variable), and cost-effectiveness (moderating variable) (Hunt & Morgan, 1995). A quantitative approach is employed to gather data through surveys administered to 380 managers and marketing professionals across 56 SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector. The study aims to analyse how marketing innovations affect competitive advantage, with a specific focus on the moderating role





of cost effectiveness. Statistical techniques, such as regression analysis, are used to explore these relationships (Bentler & Chou, 1987).

Acknowledging the limitations of the study, it is recognized that findings may not be universally applicable beyond Dubai's food retail sector. Differences in market conditions, regulations, and consumer behaviours may impact the generalizability of results (Dangelico, 2017). Additionally, self-reported data and potential response biases could affect the accuracy of the findings. Despite these limitations, the research provides insights into how marketing innovations can be strategically implemented to enhance competitive advantage for SMEs. The study also addresses the gap in existing literature regarding food retail SMEs in Dubai, as much of the current research focuses on large-scale enterprises (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).



The study's conceptual framework emphasizes the role of marketing innovations in driving competitive advantage, particularly within the context of SMEs. It explores how green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing can lead to a differentiated competitive advantage in cost, place, and product (Dangelico, 2017; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Through this lens, the research aims to offer practical insights for SMEs seeking to improve their performance in a competitive market (Alghanmi, 2020). The findings are expected to inform marketing strategies that enable SMEs to innovate, reduce costs, and differentiate their offerings. This approach will assist SMEs in effectively navigating challenges within the food retail sector (Karlsson & Tavassoli, 2016).





In terms of practical application, the study offers valuable recommendations for SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector. By examining marketing innovations and their impact on competitive advantage, the research provides SMEs with strategic tools to improve their market positioning (Al-Hadi et al., 2021). It identifies how cost-effectiveness can enhance the outcomes of marketing innovations, particularly for SMEs with limited resources. The study also highlights the role of entrepreneurial marketing in promoting innovation and sustaining competitive advantage. These practical insights can help SMEs optimize their resources and make more informed strategic decisions (Aljuma, 2020).

This research also contributes to the broader academic understanding of marketing innovations and competitive advantage. It extends the current literature by focusing specifically on food retail SMEs in Dubai, a sector often overlooked in previous studies (Alghanmi, 2020; Daniele, 2018).

By integrating concepts from various theoretical frameworks, the study adds depth to the understanding of how SMEs can utilize marketing innovations for long-term success (Porter, 1985; Al-Hadi et al., 2021). The study highlights the importance of adapting strategies to the unique context of Dubai's competitive food retail environment. It also provides a foundation for future research in similar contexts globally (Boadu et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the research aims to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector. By examining the impact of marketing innovations and cost-effectiveness on competitive advantage, it provides





actionable insights for SMEs looking to thrive in a challenging market. The study's theoretical and methodological framework offers valuable contributions to both academic literature and practical marketing strategies (Bambang, 2020). Findings from this research are expected to help SMEs improve their strategic management and resource allocation. Ultimately, this study provides a roadmap for SMEs to navigate the complexities of the food retail sector and build sustainable competitive advantage (Bambang, 2020).

Through this research, the role of marketing innovations in shaping competitive advantage for SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector is clearly established. The study's findings will help inform policy decisions, support industry growth, and enhance SME performance (Morris et al., 2002; Dangelico, 2017). It offers strategies for SMEs to adapt to changing market conditions and innovate in a cost-effective manner. The research also bridges the gap in the literature regarding the impact of marketing innovations in small and medium-sized businesses (Aljuma, 2020). In doing so, it contributes to both the practical and academic fields of marketing and strategic management (Bibi et al., 2022).

1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the research study, which aimed to investigate the impact of marketing innovations on the competitive advantage of SMEs in Dubai's food retail sector (Alfaraj, 2019). The study was driven by the high failure rates and intense competitive pressures experienced by SMEs, emphasizing the





need for innovative marketing strategies to help these businesses gain a sustainable competitive edge (Almehairbi et al., 2023). By examining the effects of green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing, the research sought to understand how these strategies could influence key dimensions of competitive advantage such as cost, place, and product.

The research objectives were clearly defined, focusing on evaluating the role of green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing in shaping cost, place, and product advantages for SMEs (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Additionally, the study examined the moderating role of cost-effectiveness, contributing valuable insights into how SMEs can balance innovation with cost control to secure long-term success in a competitive market. This focus on both innovation and cost-efficiency is crucial for understanding how SMEs can thrive despite limited resources and external challenges (Crosswell, 2018).

Dubai was chosen as the study's geographical focus due to its dynamic business environment and the significant role its food retail sector plays in the broader economy. The specificity of Dubai's market provided rich insights into how SMEs navigate challenges such as evolving consumer preferences, stringent regulatory conditions, and an intensely competitive landscape (Boadu et al., 2022; D'Souza, Taghian, & Lamb, 2006). By concentrating on Dubai, the study was able to provide localized findings that are relevant to businesses in similar high-growth urban environments. The study's outcomes offer valuable lessons for SMEs operating in other markets with similar dynamics.





The research concentrated on SMEs within the food retail sector, including grocery stores, restaurants, cafes, and food delivery services. This sectoral focus allowed the study to delve into the unique challenges faced by food retail businesses, such as resource limitations, fluctuating consumer demands, and the need for differentiation in a crowded market (Al-Hadi et al., 2021). By narrowing the scope to this specific industry, the research was able to produce actionable insights that could directly inform marketing strategies in food retail SMEs. Additionally, the study provided a framework that could be extended to other SMEs in the future (Ameen, 2018).

The conceptual framework for this study was based on three foundational theories Competitive Advantage theory, Resource Advantage theory, and Entrepreneurial Marketing theory (Almehairbi et al., 2023). This tri-theoretical framework provided a holistic approach to understanding the impact of marketing innovations on competitive advantage. It allowed for an in-depth exploration of how green marketing, digital marketing, and educative marketing influence SMEs' competitive positioning, with a particular focus on the dimensions of cost, place, and product advantages. By integrating these theories, the study offered a multifaceted lens through which the role of marketing innovations was analysed.

The research adopted a quantitative approach and used nonproportionate cluster sampling to select a representative sample of 56 SMEs within Dubai's food retail sector (Porter, 1985; Alqahtani & Uslay, 2020). Data was gathered from 380 managers and marketing professionals using structured surveys, ensuring that the sample was diverse and adequately represented the different segments within the sector (Karlsson &





Tavassoli, 2016). This empirical approach allowed for the collection of data that could be statistically analysed to uncover key insights into the relationships between marketing innovations and competitive advantage. The robust sampling strategy provided a strong foundation for drawing valid and reliable conclusions about the research question (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

To analyse the data, various statistical techniques, including regression analysis and moderation analysis, were employed to test the hypotheses and explore the relationships between variables. These techniques helped to quantify the effects of marketing innovations on competitive advantage and understand how different factors interact to shape business success. The ethical considerations of the study were rigorously addressed, ensuring that all participants' confidentiality was maintained, participation was voluntary, and ethical research standards were upheld. This careful attention to ethical issues guaranteed the credibility and integrity of the research process (Crosswell, 2018).

While the study has made significant contributions, it acknowledges several limitations. These include potential biases in self-reported data, the limited geographical and sectoral scope of the study, and the assumption of the reliability and validity of measurement instruments (Boadu et al., 2022; D'Souza, Taghian, & Lamb, 2006). These limitations highlight the need for future studies to address broader geographical contexts and industry-specific dynamics to improve generalizability.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined a structured and detailed framework that sets the foundation for the subsequent analysis of empirical data and interpretation of





findings (Al-Hadi et al., 2021). By addressing the research problem of SME competitiveness in Dubai's food retail sector, this study offers actionable insights into how marketing innovations can help SMEs enhance their competitive positioning. It serves as a guide for practitioners and policymakers seeking strategies to improve SME performance and competitiveness within a highly competitive and rapidly evolving market. The following chapters will build upon this framework, providing a detailed analysis of the research findings and practical recommendations for SMEs seeking to leverage marketing innovation for long-term success (Ameen, 2018).

