CONFERENCE PAPER
International Multidisciplinary Conference on Innovation, Technology and Sustainability

FUTURITY PUBLISHING

Accepted: February 22, 2026 | **Published:** March 7, 2026 | **Language:** English

Section of the conference: *Marketing*
Sekcja konferencji: *Marketing*

Determinants and Barriers of Green Marketing Adoption in Bangladesh's RMG Sector

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the determinants and barriers influencing the adoption of green marketing practices within Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector. As global demand for sustainable fashion intensifies, manufacturers in emerging economies face increasing pressure to integrate environmentally responsible strategies into their operations. The research adopts an industry-level analytical approach, drawing upon recent scholarly literature, secondary industry reports, and sectoral data to evaluate the drivers, structural constraints, and strategic implications of green marketing implementation. The findings indicate that international buyer requirements, growing consumer preference for sustainable products, certification standards, and government incentives are the primary drivers of adoption. However, high production costs, limited access to sustainable raw materials, infrastructural gaps, and insufficient consumer awareness remain significant barriers. The analysis further demonstrates that firms integrating sustainability into their marketing strategy achieve enhanced competitive positioning and long-term reputational benefits. The study contributes to the discourse on sustainable marketing in developing economies by contextualising green marketing adoption within the structural realities of Bangladesh's RMG industry and offering implications for policymakers and industry stakeholders.

KEYWORDS: Green marketing, Sustainability, Ready Made Garment (RMG) industry, Sustainable consumption, Bangladesh, Environmental strategy, Emerging economies.

How to cite: Sarna, F. Z., & Chowdhury, N. H. I. (2026). Determinants and Barriers of Green Marketing Adoption in Bangladesh's RMG Sector. *International Multidisciplinary Conference on Innovation, Technology and Sustainability*. Futurity Research Publishing. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18939605

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Introduction

The global apparel industry is increasingly shaped by sustainability imperatives, as environmental degradation, climate change, and resource scarcity intensify regulatory and market pressures on manufacturers. The fashion sector is responsible for substantial water consumption, chemical discharge, and carbon emissions, making it one of the most environmentally impactful industries worldwide (Niinimäki et al., 2020; UNEP, 2023). In this evolving landscape, green marketing has emerged not merely as a promotional tool but as a strategic orientation integrating environmental responsibility into production, branding, and supply chain communication. Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, as the world's second-largest apparel exporter, occupies a critical position in this transition. While the industry significantly contributes to national GDP and employment, it also faces increasing scrutiny from international buyers demanding compliance with environmental standards and sustainability certifications (Islam et al., 2021; World Bank, 2022). Global retailers are progressively requiring suppliers to adopt certified sustainable materials, reduce carbon intensity, and ensure supply chain transparency. These pressures create both incentives and constraints for firms operating within developing economies.

Prior research suggests that green marketing adoption in emerging markets is driven by stakeholder pressure, competitive differentiation, and regulatory alignment (Testa et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022). At the same time, structural barriers such as high production costs, technological limitations, and limited consumer awareness restrict the pace of sustainable transformation (Khan et al., 2021). Although studies have examined environmental compliance and sustainable production in Bangladesh's RMG industry, limited attention has been given to green marketing as a strategic adoption phenomenon at the industry level.

This gap is significant because marketing orientation plays a decisive role in translating sustainability efforts into competitive advantage. Understanding the determinants and barriers influencing green marketing adoption in Bangladesh's RMG sector is therefore essential for aligning environmental objectives with economic sustainability. This study contributes to the literature by providing an industry-level analytical examination of these drivers and constraints within the structural realities of a developing export-oriented economy.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The primary aim of this study is to analyse the determinants and barriers influencing the adoption of green marketing in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector and to evaluate the strategic implications of such adoption for long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What key internal and external determinants drive green marketing adoption within Bangladesh's RMG sector?

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2. What structural and economic barriers constrain the effective implementation of green marketing strategies?
3. How does green marketing adoption influence competitive positioning and sustainability outcomes in an export-oriented developing economy context?
4. By answering these questions, the study seeks to provide an industry-level analytical understanding of how environmental responsibility intersects with marketing strategy (Sarna et al., 2024) within one of the world's most significant apparel production hubs.

Research Results

The findings indicate that the adoption of green marketing in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector is shaped by a dynamic interplay among external institutional pressures, internal strategic orientation, and structural constraints. Rather than functioning as an isolated marketing initiative, green marketing emerges as a strategic response to evolving global sustainability expectations.

Determinants of Adoption: External drivers play a dominant role in stimulating green marketing practices. International buyer pressure has become a primary catalyst, particularly as global retailers increasingly require compliance with sustainability certifications and traceability standards. Environmental certifications such as GOTS and GRS function as market-entry mechanisms that reinforce responsible production practices. Additionally, rising consumer demand for sustainable apparel—especially in export markets—strengthens the economic rationale for integrating environmental messaging into branding strategies. Government incentives promoting energy efficiency and environmental compliance further reinforce this adoption trend. Internal drivers complement these external pressures. Firms that pursue strategic differentiation increasingly integrate sustainability into their brand positioning objectives. A long-term competitive orientation encourages companies to view green marketing not merely as compliance but as a tool for reputation-building and sustained export competitiveness. The structural relationships among these drivers, barriers, and outcomes are illustrated in Figure 1.

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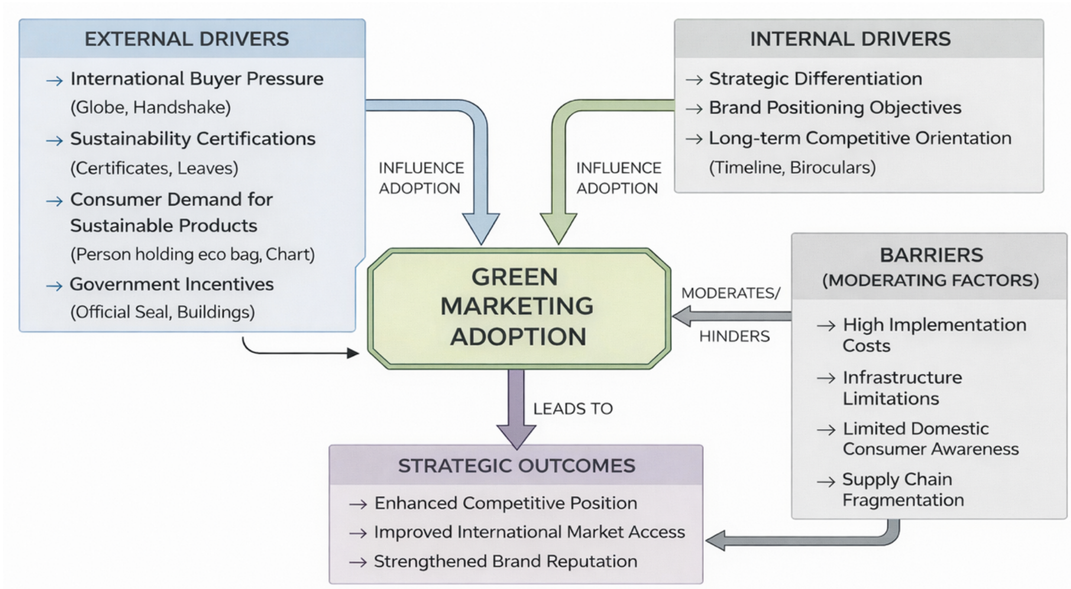
Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Green Marketing Adoption in Bangladesh's RMG Sector



Source: author(s) own development

Structural Barriers: Despite strong adoption drivers, several barriers constrain widespread implementation. High implementation costs remain the most significant limitation, particularly for small and medium-sized firms. Sustainable raw materials, certification processes, and energy-efficient technologies require substantial investment, creating financial pressure within a price-sensitive export industry. Infrastructure limitations further impede adoption. Access to advanced sustainable technologies and integrated supply chain systems remains uneven. In addition, limited domestic consumer awareness reduces incentives for firms targeting local markets. Fragmented supply chains weaken transparency and complicate the communication of credible sustainability claims. The classification of these influencing factors is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Analytical Classification of Green Marketing Adoption Factors

Category	Nature of Influence	Impact on Adoption
External Drivers	Coercive / Market-driven	Accelerates adoption through buyer and regulatory pressure
Internal Drivers	Strategic / Voluntary	Enhances integration of sustainability into competitive positioning
Barriers	Structural / Economic	Moderates or delays effective implementation
Strategic Outcomes	Performance-related	Strengthens market access and reputational capital

Source: author 's own development

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Strategic Implications: The analysis suggests that firms successfully integrating green marketing achieve measurable strategic benefits. These include enhanced competitive positioning, improved access to environmentally sensitive international markets, and strengthened brand reputation. However, the pace and depth of adoption remain uneven due to economic and infrastructural constraints.

Conclusions

This study examined the determinants and barriers influencing green marketing adoption in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector within the broader context of global sustainability transformation. The findings indicate that adoption is primarily driven by external pressures, particularly international buyer requirements, certification standards, and growing consumer demand for sustainable products. At the same time, internal strategic orientation reinforces the integration of sustainability into brand positioning and long-term competitive planning. However, the transition toward green marketing remains uneven across the sector. High implementation costs, infrastructural limitations, fragmented supply chains, and limited domestic consumer awareness moderate the pace and depth of adoption. These structural constraints are particularly pronounced among small and medium-sized firms operating within price-sensitive export markets. As a result, green marketing in the RMG sector functions both as a compliance mechanism and as an emerging strategic differentiation tool. The study contributes to the literature on sustainable marketing in emerging economies by contextualising the adoption of green marketing within an export-driven industrial structure. It highlights the need for coordinated efforts among industry stakeholders, policymakers, and international buyers to reduce structural barriers and promote an inclusive sustainability transition. Future research may incorporate firm-level empirical data to measure performance outcomes associated with green marketing integration and to evaluate longitudinal shifts in adoption patterns. Overall, green marketing adoption in Bangladesh's RMG sector represents a strategic inflexion point—balancing economic competitiveness with environmental responsibility in a rapidly evolving global apparel market.

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