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Impact of sustainable development goal orientation on supply chain collaboration and sustained competitive advantage: Evidence from the tea and coffee industry

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ABSTRACT

According to the Resource Based View (RBV) theory and the sustainable development goals (SDG) framework, this study investigates the structural relationships between sustainable development goals, supply chain collaboration, and sustained competitive advantage. Data were collected from a survey of 359 firms in Thailand's coffee and tea supply chains and analyzed using structural equation modeling. The findings show that partnership is the most influential aspect of the SDG, whereas resource sharing is the most influential aspect of supply chain collaboration. Findings also show that supply chain collaboration has more influence than capability to enhance sustained competitive advantage. This research sheds light on the linkage between sustainable development goals and supply chain collaboration and capability, which affects the firm's sustained competitive advantage.

Introduction

Sustainability has been recently one of the critical business issues that accelerate business transformation (UN, 2023). Key challenges such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015) are examples of current business practices. Even though the success of sustainability is well established, some companies still need help finding it difficult to embrace the concept of sustainable supply chain management to compete with other supply chains (Christopher, 2005). As a result, this article investigates existing methods and problems in sustainable supply chain management. The cases of Thailand's tea and coffee supply chains were chosen based on their importance in local economic and social development in the countryside upstream of the supply chain, through processing, and at the point-of-sale downstream of the supply chain. According to the findings of this article, supply chain members value sustainable supply networks.

Implementing the concept of sustainability in the supply chain is one of the current key objectives of a supply chain manager (Nimsai et al., 2020; Gartner, 2022). Sustainability is viewed as the key to attaining supply chain resilience and economic growth, with all partners acting in order to achieve sustainable supply chains (Jiang et al., 2021; Accenture, 2023). Whereas many organizations have been successful in

implementing collaborative activities and improving their performance, others have struggled or failed to do so. Academics and practitioners have been confused as to why some firms were successful while others were not. To comprehend this issue, it is necessary to comprehend the mechanism by which sustainability can contribute to a long-term competitive advantage for the organization in terms of environmental, social, and economic factors (SAP, 2022). As a result, our research seeks to comprehend the causal relationship between business orientation towards sustainable development goals and persistent competitive advantage, as well as the important mechanisms that mediate such benefits.

This paper examined the coffee and tea supply chain management in Thailand in relation to SDG, sustainable supply chain, and sustained competitive advantage, as these sectors have been one of the most agricultural values in Thailand's northern region throughout the entire supply chain. Sustainability has been a critical issue in tea and coffee supply chain management. Even though there has been some research on the tea and coffee supply chain, there is a limited understanding of the essential elements driving sustainable tea and coffee supply chain management.

Although tea production is confined to a tiny area of Thailand's northern province, it routinely produces high-quality oolong, green, and

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black teas—1.7% of global tea production. Oolong tea (green and black) is the most common. Thai tea is well-known for its aromatic Oologs, developed in collaboration with Taiwan. Thai tea is harvested from March to October yearly, and the elevation should be average.

The main processes of the coffee supply chain are as follows (Contreras-Medina et al., 2020), Roasting, Packaging, Shipping, Grinding, Brewing, and Consuming. These processes are primarily involved with sustainable supply chain management due to the quality and nature of its supply chain. It involves various stakeholders that need to balance economic, social, and environmental aspects.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Sustainable development goals (SDG)

“The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all developed and developing countries in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.”, according to UN (2022).

Since the paper focuses on the implementation of sustainable supply chain management. Supply chain is employed as the unit of analysis in this paper (Barratt, 2004). Sustainable Supply Chain Management has been studied and characterized in several ways. In this paper, sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) refers to the management of materials, information, as well as capital flow, and also collaboration among supply chain (SC) partners deriving from stakeholders and customers while implementing all triple bottom line (TBL) economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Seuring and Muller, 2003).

Supply chain collaboration (SCC)

According to Mentzer et al. (2001), Simatupang and Sridharan (2002) and Min et al. (2005) define supply chain collaboration as at least two enterprises in the same supply chain working together to achieve their mutual goals. As an enabler of a seamless supply chain, supply chain collaboration is thought to have significant benefits (Henrich

et al., 2022). The seamless supply chain is a theoretical aim in which enterprises have no boundaries and act as one (Towill, 1997; Childerhouse et al., 2004). Several collaborative approaches, such as information sharing, incentive alignment, and decision synchronization, could be used in supply chains (Spekman et al., 1998; Akintoye et al., 2000; Holweg & Pil, 2008). As a result, supply chain collaboration is one of the leading supply chain strategies that the company should examine and apply (Holweg et al., 2005).

Supply chain capability (CAP)

A resource offering concrete actions and useful resources to assist firms in achieving corporate sustainability (SAP, 2022). Managing environmental, social, and economic impacts is referred to as SSC. SCM promotes excellent governance practices throughout the life cycles of commodities and services. SAP (2022) provides three sustainable supply chain components: green, circular, and transparent. In this study, we employed the VRIO attribute according to the Resource Based View (RBV) theory proposed by Barney (1991) to measure the supply chain capability that could lead to a better supply chain relationship between alliances (Monczka et al., 1998).

Sustained competitive advantage (SCA)

According to Resource Based View (RBV) theories, firms can strengthen their sustainable competitive advantage by developing their capacities through the selection and possession of important resources (Nyaga et al., 2009). In this study, we propose that such crucial resources come from the firm’s SDG orientation in supply chain management. So that the company may manage its supply chain responsibly in order to meet economic, social, and environmental goals in a balanced manner. The Resource Based View (RBV) hypothesis has been widely used in management studies. RBV is commonly used to discuss the elements influencing a firm’s resource utilization to improve its competitive advantage and performance (Barney, 2001). RBV is also a widely used theory in SCM research (Cao & Zhang, 2011).

The key concepts of the theory of Resource Based View refer that the firms’ resources, capabilities, and strategic as-sets (Barney, 1991). The foundation of RBV also proposed that a firm’s performance may be derived from its strategic resources. These essential assets cover the basic skills of the firm (Javidan, 1998; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990), the firm’s dynamic capabilities in many aspects (Teece et al., 1997), and the

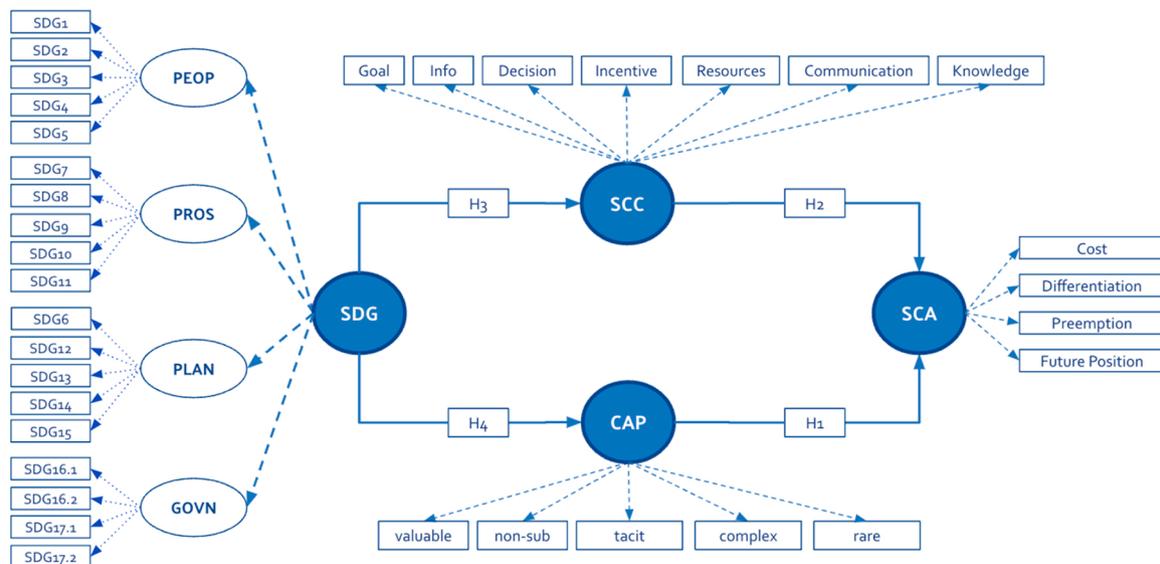


Fig. 1. : Proposed Research Model. Source: Authors.

Table 1
Key studies on sustainable development goals and sustainable supply chain.

Author (s)	Key Factors / Constructs
United Nation (2015; 2023)	Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)
Barney (1991)	Supply Chain Capability
Simatupang and Sridhan (2002)	Supply Chain Collaboration
Cao and Zhang (2011)	Sustained Competitive Advantage

Source: Compiled by the authors

firm’s absorptive capacity to learn and adapt (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Also, the firm’s core competences are important components of the firm’s core or principal products (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990). Core competencies can be considered as collective learning inside an organization (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990). The core capabilities of the firm are the important determinant of competitive advantage in the RBV framework (Kroes & Ghosh, 2010).

RBV has arguably received a lot of attention as a foundation for understanding how supply chain collaboration can improve firm performance through capability development (Kotzab et al., 2003) and competitive advantage of the firm (Cao & Zhang, 2011; Collis & Montgomery, 1995). RBV states that collaboration among supply chain

partners will increase their competitive advantage regarding supply chain speed, convenience, and reliability (Walker et al., 2000).

Conceptual framework and hypothesis development

In this study, we develop a conceptual framework from the literature review in the previous section and the empirical fieldwork in which we interviewed supply chain players in the tea and coffee industry due to their importance in economic aspects and sustainability concerns in the market. We also conduct an exploratory case study to explore the potential relationship between the constructs (Voss et al., 2002; Yin, 2003). Currently, sustainable practices, including sustainable sourcing, is one of the trends in the tea and coffee industry (Finlay, 2021) and brewing (Bilfield, 2022). The geographical area in Thailand, especially the northern region where coffee and tea are farmed and processed, includes Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai.

The RBV theory proposes that collaboration in the supply chain enhances the competitive advantage of the collaborating firms. There are two main aspects of this argument (Barney, 2012). First, resource sharing between supply chain partners can enhance utilisation of the resources and reduce risk in their business environment, which can increase sustained competitive advantage of the firms (Sriram et al.,

Table 2
Measurement Scale.

Construct	Measurement Items	Source
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)	United Nation (2015)
PROS	Prosperity aspect of sustainable development goals SDG7: Affordable and clean energy SDG8: Decent work and economic growth SDG9: Industry Innovation and Infrastructure SDG10: Reduced Inequalities SDG11: Sustainable cities and communities	United Nation (2015)
PEOP	People aspect of sustainable development goals SDG1: No poverty SDG2: Zero hunger SDG3: Good health and Well-being SDG4: Quality Education SDG5: Gender Equality	United Nation (2015)
PLAN	Planet aspect of sustainable development goals SDG6: Clean water and sanitation SDG12: Responsible Consumption SDG13: Climate Actions SDG14: Life below water SDG15: Life on land	United Nation (2015)
PART	Partnerships aspect of sustainable development goals SDG16_1: Peace SDG16_2: Justice SDG16_3: Strong Institution SDG17_1: Partnership for the goals, associations SDG17_2: Partnership for the goals, international	United Nation (2015)
SCC	Supply Chain Collaboration SCC1: Information sharing SCC2: Goal congruence SCC3: Joint decision SCC4: Incentive alignment SCC5: Resource sharing SCC6: Knowledge management	Simatupang and Sridharan (2002), Cao, Q. Zhang (2011)
CAP	Capability Cap1: Valuable Cap2: Imperfectly imitate Cap3: Complex Cap4: Rare	Barney (1991)
SCA	Sustained Competitive Advantage SCA1: Cost leadership SCA2: Product differentiation SCA3: Quality SCA4: Preemption SCA5: Service delivery SCA6: Brand SCA7: Customer responsiveness SCA8: Reputation SCA9: Perception	Cao, Q. Zhang (2011)

Table 3
Profile of survey respondents.

Characteristics	Observations	Frequency (n = 359)	Percentage (%)
Location	Chiang Mai	310	86.35
	Chiang Rai	14	3.90
	Others	35	9.75
Firm type	Single owner	202	56.27
	Company limited	104	28.97
	Cooperative	53	14.76
Number of Staffs	1 – 5 people	188	52.37
	More than 5 people	129	35.93
Years in Business	1 – 3 years	179	49.86
	4-5 years	100	27.86
	More than 5 years	80	22.29

Source: Survey

Table 4
Confirmatory factor analysis results.

Construct	Measurement Items	λ	AVE	CR
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)			
PROS	Prosperity	1.002	0.960	0.988
	SDG7: Affordable and clean energy	0.986		
	SDG8: Decent work and economic growth	0.976		
	SDG9: Industry Innovation and Infrastructure	0.983		
	SDG10: Reduced Inequalities	0.976		
	SDG11: Sustainable cities and communities	0.978		
	PEOP	People		
SDG1: No poverty	0.979			
SDG2: Zero hunger	0.976			
SDG3: Good health and Well-being	0.986			
SDG4: Quality Education	0.968			
PLAN	Planet	0.998	0.950	0.987
	SDG5: Gender Equality	0.983		
	SDG6: Clean water and sanitation	0.985		
	SDG12: Responsible Consumption	0.965		
	SDG13: Climate Actions	0.971		
	SDG14: Life below water	0.977		
PART	Partnerships	0.998	0.959	0.992
	SDG16_1: Peace	0.979		
	SDG16_2: Justice	0.979		
	SDG16_3: Strong Institution	0.987		
	SDG17_1: Partnership for the goals, associations	0.980		
	SDG17_2: Partnership for the goals, international	0.968		
SCC	Supply Chain Collaboration		0.944	0.986
	SCC1: Information sharing	0.979		
	SCC2: Goal congruence	0.966		
	SCC3: Joint decision	0.965		
	SCC4: Incentive alignment	0.974		
	SCC5: Resource sharing	0.980		
	SCC6: Knowledge management	0.966		
CAP	Capability		0.962	0.991
	CAP1: Valuable	0.972		
	CAP2: Imperfectly imitate	0.982		
	CAP3: Complex	0.982		
	CAP4: Rare	0.987		
SCA	Sustained Competitive Advantage		0.949	0.994
	SCA1: Cost leadership	0.960		
	SCA2: Product differentiation	0.974		
	SCA3: Quality	0.983		
	SCA4: Preemption	0.966		
	SCA5: Service delivery	0.977		
	SCA6: Brand	0.976		
	SCA7: Customer responsiveness	0.977		
	SCA8: Reputation	0.972		
SCA9: Perception	0.981			

Note: Model fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 2.230$, CFI = 0.982; TLI = 0.979; RMSEA = 0.059; SRMR = 0.005.

Table 5
Construct correlation and square root of AVE.

	PROS	PEOP	PLAN	PART	SCC	CAP	SCA
PROS	0.960^a						
PEOP	0.251	0.958					
PLAN	-0.334	0.629	0.950				
PART	-0.243	0.301	0.130	0.959			
SCC	0.347	-1.027	-0.412	0.105	0.944		
CAP	0.155	-1.071	-0.145	-0.028	0.515	0.962	
SCA	0.792	-0.569	-0.943	0.512	0.959	0.966	0.949

^aSquare roots of AVE values are along the main diagonal.

^bCorrelations of constructs are below the main diagonal.

1992). Second, better communication between firms was found to increase the responsiveness of the supply chain. Both these aspects increase competitive advantage of the firms (Chen et al., 2004). Verdecho et al. (2012) argue that establishing common goals and performance measurement systems enhances competitiveness. Hence the following hypothesis is proposed. According to the case studies and discussion above, the following hypotheses are proposed. The research model is illustrated with the four hypotheses in a structural model in Fig. 1 below. Tables 1–6.

H1. Supply chain capability has a positive impact on sustained competitive advantage.

H2. Supply chain collaboration has a positive impact on sustained competitive advantage.

H3. Sustainable development goal orientation has a positive impact on supply chain capability.

H4. Sustainable development goal orientation has a positive impact on supply chain collaboration.

Methodology

Survey design and measurement items

This study employed the empirical research method to contributing to build the theory that explain the casual relationship between SDG and supply chain collaboration (Meredith, 1998). The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using Hair (2010)’s recommended approach and criteria was applied to examine the structural relationship between key construct including orientation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Supply chain collaboration (SCC), supply chain capability (CAP) and sustained competitive advantage (SCA). The SDG construct was developed from the concept of the United Nation and verified through the Churchill (1979)’s suggested procedure. Jöreskog (1969)’s classical approach of maximum likelihood was also used to fit the data with the proposed model.

Data collection

We conduct onsite questionnaire survey of coffee and tea firms in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Supply chain members we collect including farmers, collector, roaster, distributors, café .

Results and discussion

Demographic profile

Most of the respondents are based in Chiang Mai (86.35%) as Chiang Mai is the second largest city in Thailand where coffee and tea supply chain are based. It was found that most of the business are solely owned by one person (56.27%), reflecting the small scale of business as well as the number of staff mostly between 1–5 persons (52.37%). Most of the respondents relatively has little business history 1–3 years (49.86%).

Table 6
Measurement model fit indices.

CMIN	df	CMIN/DF	NFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	GFI	RMSEA	SRMR
1428.355	639	2.235	0.967	0.982	0.979	0.982	0.823	0.059	0.005

Table 7
Results of hypotheses testing.

Hypotheses		Path		Estimate	S.E.	p-value	Supported?
H1	SCA	<—	CAP	0.223	0.130	0.087	Yes
H2	SCA	<—	SCC	0.727	0.127	> 0.001	Yes
H3	SCC	<—	SDG	0.978	0.014	> 0.001	Yes
H4	CAP	<—	SDG	0.946	0.015	> 0.001	Yes

Measurement model assessment

Validity and reliability of the research model are assessed with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the results are presented. Factors loadings, average variance explained (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) are presented in Table 4. Model fitness indices are exceeding the cut-off value, Model fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 2.230$, CFI = 0.982; TLI = 0.979; RMSEA = 0.059; SRMR = 0.005. The validity of the model is satisfied as the AVE values are mostly greater than the correlation between other factors.

Structural model assessment

The causal relationships and the measurement model are assessing simultaneously in the structural model, results show that all the goodness of fit indices exceeding the cut-off value. $\chi^2/df = 2.235$, CFI = 0.982; TLI = 0.979; RMSEA = 0.059; SRMR = 0.005. The summary of the hypothesis testing is presented in Table 7. All hypotheses are supported by the data at $p < 0.001$ except the hypothesis 1, supply chain capability positively affect sustained competitive advantage at $p < 0.10$.

Conclusion

This research advances the literature on sustainable supply chain management by proposing and empirically testing the impacts of the sustainable development goals (SDG) orientation on the sustained competitive advantage of the firms in the supply chain which mediated by supply chain collaboration and strategic resources and capabilities. This study also highlights the importance of personal trust and commitment (Kwon & Suh, 2004) in sustainability on competitive advantages (Doney & Cannon, 1997). Previous studies also consider multi theoretical approach to examine the role of trust in the supply chain relationship (Robson et al., 2008), which could be adapted in the future research in relations to the concept of SDG and supply chain collaboration (Ireland & Webb, 2007).

This study also offers an insight for supply chain managers on how they can effectively implement sustainable supply chain strategy to enhance competitive advantage in the long term. We suggest that supply chain collaborations shall be critical strategy to mediate the sustainability initiative together with key resources that are rare and difficult to imitate to effectively promote sustained competitive advantage with sustainability orientation of the supply chain.

Although many previous studies have found significant importance of sustainability in supply chain management, professionals still need to work on deploying sustainability to supply chain management in practice. Employing a multiple case study approach, we found the issue of sustainability via SDGs and sustainable supply chain management to understand how supply chains effectively reach sustainability and competitive advantages. We found that firms can enhance the impacts of sustainability orientation via collaboration in the supply chain and

investment in strategic resources (Jap & Ganesan, 2000).

Using Structural Equation Model, our data from the survey of coffee and tea supply chain members also confirmed these findings. The study also suggests that sustainability orientation also sustained competitive advantage, especially regarding relationships. Considering the limitations, we focused on the tea and coffee supply chain; the empirical results may be different in other sectors. Therefore, more empirical testing of our research model in an indifferent setting could confirm the model's generalization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of Competing Interest

On behalf of all authors, all authors disclosed no relevant relationships.

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