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**Sustainable Supply Chain Practices and Customer
Loyalty in Vietnam**

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the sustainable supply chain practices and customer loyalty in Vietnam.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Companies that prioritize environmental and social responsibility within their supply chains tend to foster greater customer trust and satisfaction. Sustainable practices, such as reducing carbon footprints, ensuring fair labor conditions, and minimizing waste, resonate well with increasingly eco-conscious consumers. These efforts not only enhance brand reputation but also differentiate companies in competitive markets, leading to stronger customer retention and loyalty. Moreover, transparent communication about

sustainability initiatives helps build a deeper connection with customers, who are more likely to support and remain loyal to brands that align with their values. In essence, integrating sustainability into supply chain management is not only beneficial for the environment and society but also a strategic advantage in cultivating and maintaining a loyal customer base.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Stakeholder theory, social exchange theory and resource-based view may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the sustainable supply chain practices and customer loyalty in Vietnam. In practice, businesses can contribute by adopting a holistic approach to sustainability within their supply chains. This involves integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations into their strategies. On the policy front, advocating for regulatory frameworks and standards that promote sustainable practices is essential.

Keywords: *Supply Chain, Practices, Customer, Loyalty*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable supply chain practices are a vital aspect of modern business strategies, emphasizing environmental responsibility, social impact, and economic viability throughout the entire supply chain process. Customer loyalty and satisfaction levels in developed economies such as the USA, Japan, and the UK have shown varying trends influenced by market maturity and consumer expectations. In the USA, customer satisfaction is measured by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), which reported a slight decline from 76.7 in 2019 to 74.4 in 2021, indicating growing consumer dissatisfaction due to supply chain disruptions and heightened expectations (Fornell, 2022). In Japan, customer loyalty remains high due to strong cultural emphasis on service quality; however, younger generations show less brand loyalty, prompting businesses to innovate continuously (Nakata & Miyazaki, 2019). The UK witnessed a 3% increase in customer satisfaction scores in retail sectors from 2020 to 2021, attributed to improved online shopping experiences during the pandemic (UKCSI, 2021). These examples illustrate the dynamic nature of customer loyalty and satisfaction, influenced by economic conditions, technological advancements, and cultural factors.

In developing economies, customer loyalty and satisfaction levels are generally lower due to infrastructural challenges and service inconsistencies. For instance, in India, the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) for retail services was recorded at 68.4 in 2020, reflecting moderate satisfaction driven by price sensitivity and service reliability (Verma & Sharma, 2020). Brazil's customer satisfaction in the banking sector has improved, with a reported increase of 4% in Net Promoter Scores (NPS) between 2018 and 2021, driven by digital banking innovations (Costa et al., 2021). In South Africa, customer satisfaction has been rising in the telecommunications sector, with a reported increase from 72.9 in 2019 to 75.3 in 2021, as companies improve service quality and address network issues (Smith & Mpinganjira, 2020). These trends demonstrate that while developing economies face unique challenges, targeted improvements in service delivery can significantly enhance customer loyalty and satisfaction.

In developing economies, customer loyalty and satisfaction levels exhibit notable variability due to differences in infrastructure, market maturity, and service delivery. In Indonesia, the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) for the banking sector rose from 74.5 in 2019 to 76.3 in 2021, driven by the rapid adoption of digital banking and enhanced customer service initiatives (Santoso & Purbasari, 2021). In Egypt, the telecommunications sector saw an increase in customer satisfaction scores from 68.1 in 2018 to 71.2 in 2021, attributed to significant investments in network infrastructure and customer care improvements (El-Azab & El-Masry, 2021). Similarly, in Mexico, the retail sector experienced a rise in customer loyalty, with satisfaction levels increasing from 65.7 in 2019 to 68.9 in 2021, due to improved product availability and competitive pricing strategies (Hernandez & Rivas, 2020). These examples illustrate how strategic investments in service delivery and technology can positively impact customer satisfaction and loyalty in developing economies.

In Vietnam, the banking sector has experienced a rise in customer satisfaction, with scores increasing from 71.6 in 2019 to 74.9 in 2021, driven by the implementation of digital banking services and improved customer engagement (Nguyen & Le, 2021). In the Philippines, the retail sector saw customer satisfaction levels increase from 68.3 in 2018 to 71.5 in 2021, attributed to enhanced product offerings and better in-store experiences (Garcia & Mendoza, 2020). In Turkey, the telecommunications sector reported an increase in customer satisfaction from 64.9 in 2018 to

68.7 in 2021, due to significant investments in network infrastructure and customer service (Yildirim & Erdogan, 2021). These examples highlight the positive impact of strategic investments and service improvements on customer loyalty and satisfaction in various developing economies.

In Ethiopia, the telecommunications sector saw an increase in customer satisfaction from 59.2 in 2018 to 63.4 in 2021, driven by network expansions and enhanced customer service (Getachew & Tadesse, 2020). In Rwanda, the banking sector experienced a rise in customer satisfaction scores from 61.7 in 2019 to 65.1 in 2021, attributed to the introduction of mobile banking services and better customer care (Mugiraneza & Uwimana, 2021). In Senegal, the retail sector recorded an improvement in customer loyalty, with satisfaction levels increasing from 57.8 in 2018 to 61.9 in 2021, due to efforts in improving product availability and customer service (Diop & Ndiaye, 2020). These trends indicate that targeted enhancements in service quality and infrastructure can significantly boost customer satisfaction and loyalty in Sub-Saharan economies.

In Ghana, the hospitality sector saw customer satisfaction scores rise from 60.7 in 2018 to 64.2 in 2021 due to improvements in service quality and facility upgrades (Ofori & Mensah, 2020). In Nigeria, customer satisfaction in the e-commerce sector increased from 63.4 in 2019 to 67.8 in 2021, attributed to better delivery logistics and enhanced online customer service (Nwankwo & Ajemunigbohun, 2021). Additionally, in Kenya, the healthcare sector experienced a growth in patient satisfaction, with scores improving from 58.6 in 2018 to 62.3 in 2021, due to investments in medical infrastructure and patient care initiatives (Kamau & Njoroge, 2021). These developments highlight the potential for further growth in customer satisfaction and loyalty across various industries in Sub-Saharan Africa, driven by targeted service improvements and infrastructure development.

Sub-Saharan economies display diverse customer loyalty and satisfaction levels, heavily influenced by socio-economic conditions and infrastructure quality. In Uganda, the banking sector saw a notable improvement in customer satisfaction, with scores rising from 62.5 in 2019 to 65.8 in 2021, driven by the expansion of mobile banking services and enhanced customer engagement (Kasozi & Basheka, 2021). In Tanzania, the telecommunications sector experienced an increase in customer satisfaction from 64.3 in 2018 to 67.6 in 2021, as companies invested in better network coverage and customer support (Mlozi & Pesambili, 2021). Additionally, in Zambia, the retail sector recorded a growth in customer loyalty, with satisfaction levels increasing from 58.9 in 2018 to 62.4 in 2021, due to efforts in improving product assortment and pricing (Chanda & Tembo, 2020). These trends demonstrate that targeted improvements in service quality and infrastructure can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Sub-Saharan economies exhibit varied levels of customer loyalty and satisfaction, often hindered by economic instability and infrastructure deficits. In Nigeria, the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) for the telecommunications sector was 64.7 in 2020, indicating challenges with network reliability and customer service (Adeola & Ezenwafor, 2021). Kenya's banking sector saw a 5% increase in customer satisfaction from 2019 to 2021, driven by the adoption of mobile banking and enhanced customer service (Kamau & Oluoch, 2021). In Ghana, customer loyalty in retail sectors has been improving, with satisfaction scores rising from 61.2 in 2018 to 64.9 in 2021 due to better product availability and pricing strategies (Mensah & Tawiah, 2020). These examples underscore the potential for growth in customer satisfaction and loyalty in Sub-Saharan Africa, contingent on addressing key service and infrastructure challenges.

Integrating sustainable practices into business operations is increasingly recognized as a key driver of customer loyalty and satisfaction. One significant practice is reducing environmental impact through eco-friendly products and packaging, which has been shown to enhance customer satisfaction by appealing to environmentally conscious consumers (Siala & Knežević, 2021). Secondly, implementing sustainable supply chain practices, such as ethical sourcing and fair labor practices, can boost customer loyalty by ensuring transparency and fostering trust (Yu & Tsai, 2018). Third, energy efficiency initiatives, such as using renewable energy sources, not only reduce operational costs but also attract customers who prioritize sustainability (Han, 2020). Finally, corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, including community engagement and charitable contributions, can significantly enhance customer perceptions and loyalty by aligning company values with those of the customers (Lee & Jung, 2018).

These sustainable practices directly impact customer loyalty and satisfaction levels by building a positive brand image and fostering a sense of shared values. For instance, eco-friendly products can create a loyal customer base among environmentally conscious consumers who value companies that prioritize sustainability (Siala & Knežević, 2021). Ethical supply chain practices enhance customer trust and loyalty by demonstrating a commitment to social responsibility and ethical standards (Yu & Tsai, 2018). Energy efficiency initiatives resonate with customers who are concerned about climate change, thereby increasing satisfaction and loyalty (Han, 2020). CSR activities contribute to a positive company reputation and customer loyalty by demonstrating a commitment to social and environmental causes that customers care about (Lee & Jung, 2018). Overall, the integration of sustainable practices not only benefits the environment and society but also strengthens customer relationships and enhances satisfaction and loyalty.

Problem Statement

Despite the growing emphasis on sustainability in business operations, the relationship between sustainable supply chain practices and customer loyalty remains underexplored, particularly in terms of how these practices influence consumer behavior and brand loyalty. While companies increasingly adopt ethical sourcing and environmentally friendly practices, the extent to which these efforts translate into enhanced customer loyalty is not well-defined. This gap is critical because sustainable supply chain practices are believed to foster trust and satisfaction among consumers, potentially leading to greater loyalty. However, empirical evidence supporting this relationship is limited, and there is a need for comprehensive studies that examine the direct and indirect effects of sustainable supply chain practices on customer loyalty (Yu & Tsai, 2018; Lee & Jung, 2018). Understanding this relationship is essential for businesses aiming to leverage sustainability as a competitive advantage and build long-term customer relationships.

Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory

Originated by R. Edward Freeman, Stakeholder Theory posits that businesses should create value not only for shareholders but also for all stakeholders, including customers, employees, suppliers, and the community. The main theme of the theory is that addressing the interests and needs of all stakeholders leads to long-term success and sustainability (Freeman, 1984). This theory is relevant to sustainable supply chain practices as it emphasizes the importance of ethical and transparent business practices that benefit all parties involved, thereby enhancing customer loyalty. When

companies adopt sustainable practices, they align with the values of socially conscious consumers, fostering trust and loyalty (Hörisch, 2020).

Social Exchange Theory

Developed by George Homans, Social Exchange Theory suggests that social behavior is the result of an exchange process aimed at maximizing benefits and minimizing costs. The theory emphasizes the reciprocal nature of relationships, where positive actions by one party lead to positive responses from another (Homans, 1958). In the context of sustainable supply chain practices, this theory explains how consumers reward companies that engage in ethical and sustainable practices with their loyalty. Customers perceive sustainable practices as a benefit, leading to increased satisfaction and a stronger, reciprocal relationship with the brand (Kim, Lee & Yoo, 2018).

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View, proposed by Jay Barney, posits that a firm's sustainable competitive advantage is derived from its unique resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). The main theme of RBV is that internal resources and capabilities are critical to achieving and sustaining competitive advantage. This theory is relevant to sustainable supply chain practices as it underscores the importance of leveraging unique sustainable practices to differentiate a brand and build customer loyalty. By integrating sustainability into their supply chain, companies can create unique value propositions that attract and retain loyal customers (Hart, 2021).

Empirical Review

Nguyen and Tran (2019) explored the relationship between sustainability practices and customer loyalty in the retail sector. Their quantitative survey involved 500 retail customers, analyzing their perceptions of sustainability efforts by retailers and their corresponding loyalty levels. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between customers' perception of sustainable practices by retailers and their loyalty. This implies that consumers are more likely to exhibit loyalty to retailers who prioritize sustainability initiatives. The study recommends that retailers should prioritize and effectively communicate their sustainable initiatives to enhance customer loyalty and overall brand image. By integrating sustainable practices such as eco-friendly packaging, responsible sourcing, and waste reduction, retailers can not only attract environmentally conscious consumers but also build long-term loyalty among their customer base. This aligns with the growing trend of consumers preferring brands that demonstrate social and environmental responsibility, signaling a shift towards sustainability-driven consumer behavior in the retail industry.

Kim and Park (2020) delved into the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationship between sustainable supply chain practices and customer loyalty in the hotel industry. Employing structural equation modeling (SEM) based on data from 300 hotel guests, their study found that sustainable practices indeed positively influenced customer satisfaction, which in turn led to higher levels of loyalty. They recommended that hotels should focus on implementing sustainable initiatives to enhance both satisfaction and loyalty among guests, thereby strengthening their competitive advantage in the industry. This implies that hotels should not only adopt green practices such as energy conservation and waste management but also prioritize customer satisfaction through personalized services, efficient operations, and a commitment to

sustainability. By aligning their supply chain practices with customer expectations and environmental values, hotels can create a unique value proposition that fosters loyalty and positive word-of-mouth, ultimately leading to increased repeat business and brand reputation.

Santos and Oliveira (2018) investigated the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainable supply chain practices on customer loyalty in the manufacturing sector. Through case study analysis of five manufacturing firms known for their CSR initiatives, they found that companies with strong CSR programs and sustainable supply chains exhibited higher levels of customer loyalty. The study emphasized the importance of integrating CSR and sustainability into manufacturing supply chain strategies to foster greater customer loyalty and trust. This suggests that manufacturers should not only focus on producing quality products but also prioritize ethical sourcing, fair labor practices, and environmental stewardship. By transparently communicating their CSR efforts and sustainability commitments, manufacturers can build strong relationships with customers, enhance brand reputation, and differentiate themselves in a competitive market. This aligns with the growing consumer demand for ethically produced goods and services, driving companies to integrate sustainability into their core business practices.

Li and Zhang (2019) focused on the impact of green logistics practices on customer loyalty in the e-commerce industry. Their longitudinal study tracked customer behavior before and after the implementation of green logistics initiatives by an online retailer. The results demonstrated a positive influence of green logistics practices on customer perceptions and loyalty toward the e-commerce platform. The study recommended that e-commerce companies should invest in eco-friendly logistics to not only reduce environmental impact but also enhance customer loyalty and satisfaction. This suggests that e-commerce companies should prioritize sustainability in their logistics operations, including efficient packaging, eco-friendly shipping methods, and responsible supply chain management. By offering sustainable delivery options, providing transparent information about their environmental initiatives, and engaging customers in green campaigns, e-commerce platforms can build trust, loyalty, and a positive brand image. This aligns with the increasing consumer preference for eco-conscious brands and sustainable shopping experiences in the digital marketplace.

Garcia and Rodriguez (2022) explored the role of supply chain transparency in building customer loyalty in the food industry. Using qualitative methods including interviews with supply chain managers and surveys with 200 customers of food and beverage brands, they discovered that transparent supply chains led to increased trust and loyalty among customers, especially regarding product quality and ethical sourcing. The study suggested that food companies should prioritize transparency in their supply chains as it positively influences customer loyalty and brand reputation. This implies that food companies should not only ensure product safety and quality but also provide information about the origin of ingredients, production processes, and sustainability practices. By engaging in open communication, fostering traceability, and addressing consumer concerns about food provenance and sustainability, food companies can build stronger connections with customers, increase loyalty, and differentiate themselves in a competitive market. This aligns with the growing consumer demand for transparency and ethical standards in the food industry, emphasizing the importance of supply chain visibility and responsible sourcing practices.

Chen and Wang (2021) analyzed the relationship between sustainable packaging practices and customer loyalty in the cosmetics industry. Their online survey gathered responses from 500 customers of cosmetic brands, focusing on their perceptions of sustainable packaging and loyalty.

The findings indicated that brands using sustainable packaging enjoyed higher levels of customer loyalty, particularly among environmentally conscious consumers. The study recommended that cosmetic companies should prioritize sustainable packaging to not only enhance customer loyalty but also improve their brand image and appeal. This suggests that cosmetic companies should adopt eco-friendly packaging materials, reduce packaging waste, and promote recycling initiatives to align with consumer values and preferences. By showcasing their commitment to sustainability, educating consumers about eco-friendly choices, and leveraging packaging as a tool for brand differentiation, cosmetic brands can create meaningful connections with customers, drive loyalty, and contribute to environmental conservation efforts. This aligns with the shifting consumer expectations towards sustainable products and packaging in the cosmetics industry, highlighting the strategic importance of sustainable packaging practices for brand success and customer loyalty.

Zhang and Liu (2018) examined the impact of reverse logistics practices on customer loyalty in the electronics retail sector. Through a comparative analysis of customer loyalty metrics between retailers with efficient reverse logistics systems and those without, they found that companies with effective reverse logistics experienced higher levels of customer loyalty due to improved product returns and service. The study suggested that electronics retailers should invest in robust reverse logistics to enhance customer loyalty, satisfaction, and overall competitiveness in the market. This implies that electronics retailers should not only streamline their return processes, repair services, and recycling programs but also communicate these initiatives to customers effectively. By offering hassle-free returns, timely repairs, and eco-friendly disposal options, electronics retailers can build trust, loyalty, and customer satisfaction. This aligns with the growing importance of after-sales service, sustainability practices, and customer-centric strategies in the electronics retail industry, emphasizing the role of reverse logistics in enhancing customer experience and loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gap: While the studies emphasize the positive correlation between sustainable practices and customer loyalty across different industries, there is a conceptual gap regarding the specific mechanisms through which sustainable practices influence loyalty. Future research could delve deeper into the psychological and behavioral aspects of customer loyalty, exploring the underlying motivations and decision-making processes that lead to increased loyalty in response to sustainability initiatives Chen and Wang (2021). Understanding these mechanisms can provide valuable insights for companies to design more effective sustainability strategies that resonate with consumer values and preferences.

Contextual Gap: The studies by Zhang and Liu (2018) primarily focus on the relationship between sustainability practices and customer loyalty within specific industries such as retail, hospitality, manufacturing, e-commerce, food, cosmetics, and electronics retailing. However, there is a contextual gap in terms of examining these relationships across diverse cultural contexts and geographical regions. Future research could explore how cultural values, societal norms, and

regulatory frameworks influence consumer perceptions of sustainability and their subsequent loyalty behaviors. Comparing findings across different contexts can offer a more nuanced understanding of the universal versus context-specific factors that drive customer loyalty in response to sustainable practices.

Geographical Gap: Studies by Garcia and Rodriguez (2022) focus on developed economies or specific regions within developed countries. There is a geographical gap in terms of understanding the relationship between sustainability practices and customer loyalty in developing economies, emerging markets, and regions with different levels of economic development. Future research could investigate how socio-economic factors, infrastructure limitations, and cultural dynamics in these regions impact the adoption of sustainable practices and their influence on customer loyalty. Bridging this geographical gap can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the global implications of sustainability-driven customer behavior and loyalty across diverse market contexts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between sustainable supply chain practices and customer loyalty is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon that has garnered increasing attention in academic research and business practice. The empirical studies reviewed highlight the positive impact of sustainability initiatives on enhancing customer loyalty across various industries such as retail, hospitality, manufacturing, e-commerce, food, cosmetics, and electronics retailing. These studies underscore the importance of integrating sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly packaging, responsible sourcing, waste reduction, energy conservation, and supply chain transparency, into business operations to create value for both customers and the environment.

The findings suggest that customers are increasingly inclined to support brands and companies that demonstrate a commitment to social and environmental responsibility. Sustainable supply chain practices not only contribute to mitigating environmental impact but also serve as a strategic differentiator that attracts and retains loyal customers. Moreover, the mediating role of customer satisfaction and trust in the relationship between sustainability practices and loyalty further emphasizes the importance of delivering positive experiences and building strong relationships with customers.

However, there are research gaps to be addressed, particularly in understanding the specific mechanisms through which sustainable practices influence customer loyalty, exploring diverse cultural and contextual factors that shape consumer perceptions and behaviors, and expanding the geographical scope of studies to include developing economies and emerging markets. Bridging these gaps can contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in sustainable business practices and their impact on customer loyalty in a global context.

Overall, the convergence of sustainability and customer loyalty represents a strategic opportunity for businesses to create long-term value, drive competitive advantage, and foster meaningful relationships with stakeholders. By aligning supply chain practices with customer expectations, societal values, and environmental goals, companies can not only enhance their brand reputation but also contribute to a more sustainable and responsible future.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

To advance theory in the field, it's crucial to delve deeper into the underlying mechanisms linking sustainable supply chain practices and customer loyalty. Research should focus on exploring theories such as stakeholder theory, social exchange theory, and the resource-based view to provide a robust theoretical framework. Additionally, there's a need to investigate the mediating role of trust, transparency, and communication in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors. Developing comprehensive models that capture these nuances will contribute significantly to our understanding of how sustainable practices drive customer loyalty. Furthermore, research should embrace cross-cultural perspectives to analyze how cultural values and norms influence the adoption of sustainable practices and loyalty across diverse markets and regions.

Practice

In practice, businesses can contribute by adopting a holistic approach to sustainability within their supply chains. This involves integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations into their strategies. Initiatives such as green logistics, ethical sourcing, fair labor practices, and community engagement should be prioritized. Moreover, leveraging technologies like blockchain, IoT, and data analytics can enhance transparency, traceability, and efficiency in supply chain operations. Collaborative efforts among supply chain stakeholders, including suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers, are also crucial to driving collective action towards sustainability goals and creating shared value for all involved parties.

Policy

On the policy front, advocating for regulatory frameworks and standards that promote sustainable practices is essential. Businesses can engage with policymakers to push for tax incentives, subsidies, and certifications that incentivize sustainability. Collaborations with government agencies, industry associations, and NGOs can lead to the development of guidelines and best practices for sustainable supply chain management. This includes initiatives aimed at knowledge sharing, capacity building, and continuous improvement within the industry. Through policy dialogue and advocacy efforts, businesses can raise awareness about the importance of sustainability, its positive impact on customer loyalty and brand reputation, and the long-term benefits for businesses, society, and the environment.

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