



SUSTAINABILITY PERFORMANCE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
DOI: 10.52932/jfmr.v4i3en.1192 <i>Received:</i> December 22, 2025 <i>Accepted:</i> March 21, 2026 <i>Published:</i> July 25, 2026 Keywords: Developing countries, Sustainability performance, Systematic literature review Article classification: Literature review JEL codes: Q01, O10, O30	Research purpose – This study analyses the development of sustainability performance research in developing countries with the objective to trace dominating thematic areas, research patterns, and key opportunities for future research in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Research motivation – Developing countries face increasing pressures from rapid urbanization, resource constraints, and climate vulnerability, making it essential to critically assess sustainability performance to better understand progress and inform effective strategies. Research design/ approach/ method – A systematic literature review under the PRISMA guidelines was performed to integrate appropriate studies between 2000 and 2025. The articles were examined to disclose trends in research derived thematic categories. Main findings – The results show an increasing number of publications and, a significant focus on Asian countries. Five major thematic clusters are identified: measurement, organizational capabilities, sustainable business processes and practices, sustainable products and services and contribution on business performance. Practical/ managerial implications – This study provides insights for policymakers, organizations, and researchers in developing economies. It aids in benchmarking sustainability efforts, identifying critical areas for intervention, and guiding more effective sustainable development strategies. For scholars, it holds promise for future research, fostering impactful discourse on sustainability performance in these contexts.

1. Introduction

The role of sustainability has dramatically shifted over the past few decades. Once a primary theoretical concept, it is now a central component of how organizations are managed. The modern business world is uncertain, and this evolution is a response to it. Rapid technological advancements, economic upheaval, and societal change create a turbulent environment. Additionally, increasingly stringent environmental and social regulations are driving the adoption of sustainable practices. Organizations are facing growing pressure to act responsibly. This pressure is exerted by various stakeholders such as customers, investors, governments, and local communities. They expect more than just profit. Social and environmental impacts are key concerns (Doh & Quigley, 2014; Waddock et al., 2002). As a result, organizations are changing. They have integrated sustainability principles into their core strategies and daily operations. Sustainability has become essential for modern management.

Sustainable development is conceptualized as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” by the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987). This definition has become the basis for guidance in many global policies, strategies, and academic researches. In this context, sustainability performance (SUSP) is becoming equally important as a means of implementation with which companies can measure the degree to what extent they meet their sustainable development commitments (Labuschagne et al., 2005; Saulick et al., 2023).

The growing interest in sustainability performance in the research field is reflected in the growing number of publications (Goyal et al. (2013). Today, businesses are under increasing pressure from internal and external sources, including investors, policymakers, customers, and civil society, to integrate sustainability

goals into their strategies and operations (Hahn et al., 2015; Shaik et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2010). Simultaneously, an increasing number of businesses are recognizing that adopting a sustainability strategy is not only a moral obligation, but also a strategic opportunity to create long-term value, innovate business models, and enhance competitiveness (Baumgartner & Rauter, 2017; Chabowski et al., 2011; Moore & Manring, 2009).

SUSP includes the economic, social, and environmental dimensions commonly referred to as the triple bottom line (Elkington, 2006). While this perspective is relatively mature in developed economies, research in developing-country contexts remains less systematic. Sustainability initiatives in these settings are often constrained by institutional weaknesses, limited financial resources, and infrastructural gaps (Cuervo-Cazurra & Genc, 2008; Dobers & Halme, 2009; Gupta et al., 2019; Jahanger et al., 2022). In environments marked by political uncertainty and persistent social challenges, improving SUSP becomes both a strategic concern for firms and a broader societal necessity (Cobbinah et al., 2015; Khavul & Bruton, 2013). These conditions also create tensions, such as those between rapid economic growth and environmental protection, or between corporate interests and community expectations (Leal Filho et al., 2019; Volkery et al., 2006). Specifically, this study aims to provide a comprehensive view of the research streams related to SUSP by addressing questions:

RQ1: In what direction is the current state of SUSP in developing countries?

RQ2: What specific topics are explored in relation to SUSP in developing countries?

2. Methodology

The systematic literature review (SLR) process was conducted under the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines and adhered to the methodology outlined by da Cunha Bezerra et al. (2020), Tranfield et al.

(2003), and Wicher et al. (2019). This approach has also been applied to serve a transparent and reproducible review synthesis of the studies that focus on the corporate-level SUSP in developing countries (Saulick et al., 2023). So in Appendix 1 (*see Appendix 1 online*), you can see the review was structured into three phases: planning, conducting, and reporting.

The initial phase was to plan and search for studies through Scopus. By now, the search was deliberately exploratory. The purpose was to refine the research question and identify key concepts, themes, and language related to SUSP. This included discussions with corporate sustainability specialists and numerous trials of different keyword combinations. Specifically, we searched articles containing keywords related to SUSP in developing economies, using the keywords “sustainable performance” OR “sustainability performance” AND “emerging economies” OR “emerging market countries” OR “developing countries”. The use of an array of keywords helped to capture the different definitions of SUSP and contributed to the comprehensiveness and balance of the review.

Two selection criteria were applied to ensure the quality and consistency of the data. To ensure completeness of the literature related to the topic, we reviewed and downloaded all articles that included at least one of the above-mentioned keywords in the title, abstract, or keywords. Phase one consisted of 437 articles. The result of first phase was the collection of a total of 437 research articles. These data were updated to May 31, 2025, ensuring topicality and reflecting the latest research on SUSP. This synthesis stage formed the solid basis for the ensuing analysis.

In phase 2, we screened the 437 articles identified in Phase 1 to assess their pertinence to SUSP. Studies were disqualified if they were duplicates, non-English, dated for more than 25 years, or were conference paper, book chapters, patent, or citation. Academic standard was taken into account too. Only articles from Scopus-indexed journals with SCImago Journal

Rank (SJR) indicator listings were included, to guarantee a comparable level of scientific rigor and peer reviewing. After this preliminary filter, the rest of articles were evaluated manually by abstract reading. Publications not directly related to SUSP, or that mentioned SUSP only tangentially, were excluded. This content-based screening resulted in 168 potentially relevant studies. Next, a full-text review was performed particularly to identify whether SUSP was studied in a developing-country setting. This genera step reduced the sample to 129 articles that were considered relevant to the research (Tranfield et al., 2003). The analysis and synthesis of findings from these 129 studies is presented in phase 3. The relevant data, including publishing information, citation patterns, and sustainability dimension of each article, was systematically documented in Excel spreadsheets. From each section, a selection of articles was read in full, and the findings were integrated (using tables and figures) to answer the research questions. This stage also identifies gaps in the prevailing literature and suggests avenues for further research in SUSP.

3. Results

We applied VOSviewer to map the knowledge structure of SUSP research based on 129 articles (*see Appendix 2 online*). The visualization displays a keyword co-occurrence map, where the size of the node represents the frequency, the link strength represents the co-occurrence strength, and the color of the node represents the thematic clusters, which enhances the readability of the otherwise tightly packed map. The network revolves around two main hubs, which are highly connected nodes: “sustainable development” and “sustainable performance,” that anchor the wider research field. Highly similar concepts such as “corporate social responsibility,” “supply chain management,” “manufacturing,” and “circular economy” demonstrates that the implementation of sustainability especially within the key industrial sectors in the developing world is a major concern.

The proximity between “supply chain management,” “industry 4.0,” and “integration” highlights the growing role of digital technologies in enabling value-chain coordination. Similarly, the association of “corporate governance,” “digital transformation,” and “leadership” reveals that governance mechanisms are more and more converging with digital capabilities to influence sustainability effects. Another cluster which includes “environmental performance,” “decision making,” “sustainability assessment,” or “fuzzy logic” depicts the quantitative and environmental assessment direction of nowadays especially in China, India and Malaysia. This cluster indicates a methodological leaning towards quantitative measures and decision support tools, which are prevalent in Asian studies.

In sum, the network can be seen as a web of themes addressing integration and competitiveness (whereby core concepts link strategic, technological and operational levels of analysis to demonstrate how diverse streams of research collectively shape the SUSP field).

3.1. General overview: research growth and publication trends

Publications over time

The growth in SUSP research over time is illustrated in Appendix 3 (*see Appendix 3 online*). The studies span from 2005-2025, with a total of 129 studies. In the first period (2000-2010), the number of studies was very limited, with only two published works, reflecting the low level of interest. However, from 2011-2015, the number of studies increased slightly before exploding significantly during the next two periods. In particular, the 2016-2020 period recorded 31 studies, and this number nearly tripled in the 2021-2025 period with 94 studies, accounting for more than 72% of the total number of publications. This trend shows that SUSP is increasingly becoming a central concern in research. This surge also reflects growing awareness among academia, governments, managers, and public regarding

the essential role of sustainability in long-term development.

Publications by journal

Research on SUSP in developing countries has been widely published in reputable journals (*see Appendix 4 online*). Following the recommendation of Sandgren et al. (2023), we selected reputable journals listed in widely accepted databases, such as Scopus. The most prominent are Sustainability and Journal of Cleaner Production with 16.28% and 6.2%, respectively. The following journals are also relevant in these articles, including Business Strategy and the Environment, Frontiers in Psychology, and the International Journal of Lean Six Sigma, each with three articles, or 2.3%.

Publications by country

Appendix 5 (*see Appendix 5 online*) reveals that SUSP has been investigated in a diverse array of developing countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Malaysia, Ghana, India, and Vietnam. It bodes well with increasing attention being focused on not only enhancing economic efficiency but also maintaining equivalence among economic growth, environmental protection, resource utilization and social development. Pakistan for 13 studies, accounting for 10.08 percent. China was second with 11 studies (8.53%), followed by India with 10 studies (7.75%). Seven studies were from Vietnam (5.43%) and eight studies (6.2%) from both Bangladesh and Ghana. Possibly, this is indicative of the increasing emphasis on sustainability and rapidly growing economic development accompanied by environmental issues within these countries.

A few studies have also performed cross-country analyses (Hemmati et al., 2024; Laskar, 2018; Sarwar et al., 2024), illustrating a variety of approaches and instruments of sustainable development policies and strategies and thus offering insights for countries under way in the transformation of their growth models.

3.2. Research methods

From 2000 to 2025, research on SUSP has developed diverse approaches that reflect the development and maturity of the field. Results from 129 reviewed literature reveal a strong preponderance of quantitative methodologies (see *Appendix 6 online*), with 97 articles that are based primarily on this research design. Of these, 71 researches were carried out by means of surveys and or interviews by application of structured questionnaires based on well-know theoretical scales. Others were based on secondary data including annual reports, sustainability reports and standardized databases (e.g., ESG, GRI). These studies mostly used sophisticated statistical methods – CB-SEM, PLS-SEM, linear and multiple regression, and GMM – to address multifaceted constructs concerning organizational capability, corporate governance, strategic orientation, sustainable innovation, and stakeholders' influence.

Qualitative and mixed-method studies on the other hand are not many. Three studies followed qualitative methodologies (Jraisat et al., 2023; Morais & Silvestre, 2018; Othman et al., 2022) and five studies used mixed methods (Ashraf et al., 2019; Kumar & Anbanandam, 2019; Mousa & Othman, 2020; Mutale et al., 2019; Orr & Jadhav, 2018). Despite their quantity is few, these studies are seminal. Qualitative methods such as interviews, participant observation, and case studies enable researchers to analyze decision making processes, organizational behavior, and contextual constraints that shape sustainability strategies on the stakeholder level, providing a stakeholder perspective. Meanwhile, mixed methods increase the robustness of research conclusions (triangulation) and allow for modeling the underlying mechanisms and verifying their generalization in different contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The use of these methods not only increases the explanatory power and practical value of SUSP research but also lays the foundation for developing theories that better reflect the diversity of business practices in the sustainability transition era.

3.3. Basic theory

Research on SUSP employs diverse theory to describe firms' enduring performance (see *Appendix 7 online*). The Resource-Based View is the dominant theory among these, which is present in 48 papers, revealing a strong emphasis on the internal resources and capabilities as the source of SUSP. The others include Stakeholder Theory (24 studies), Institutional Theory (15 studies/articles), Dynamic Capability Theory (13 articles), and Agency Theory (11 articles) – combined, they portray firms evolving in response to, and perhaps innovation amid, uncertainty.

Further studies are also conduct on the basis of Natural-Resource-Based View (9 articles) and Legitimacy Theory (7 articles), which direct the discussion toward environmental strategies, governance arrangements and social pressures. Additionally, 33 articles do not explicitly adopt any theoretical, thus a large part of the literature appears to be more descriptive than explanatory.

3.4. Sustainability performance topics

The articles can be categorised into five topics which are similar to the analytical framework of sustainable business factors by Morioka & de Carvalho (2016). Based on *Appendix 8 (see Appendix 8 online)*, the most interesting theme is capabilities – emphasizing the importance of internal resources such as management, leadership capacity, and the ability to develop sustainable technologies and innovations as core premises for SUSP. Another 21 articles make up the second cluster of contributions, which evaluates sustainable operations and its positive impact on financial well-being and growth both in the short and long term and the competitive advantage of enterprises. Subsequently, the theme processes and practices consisting of 19 pieces of works explores detailed operational activities (e.g., sustainable supply chain management, lean manufacturing, and green supply chain). products/services (offerings) even though only six studies indicate a critical guideline for enhancing green products to

mitigate the environmental load. In addition to research on the staple ingredients of sustainable business, yet another research stream addresses measures - namely, the design of systems and tools to evaluate SUSP (16 studies). These articles primarily concentrate on frameworks of indexes, policies, and directives to recognize, quantify, and monitor the fulfillment of sustainability objectives.

Topic 1: Sustainable development capabilities

Enterprises should have a good base for the internal resources of a unit to make sustainable development. Thus, in recent years, enterprises' internal capabilities to embed sustainability principles in their business strategies and operations have been investigated in depth. Effective corporate governance is an essential institutional mechanism to improve a SUSP by sustainable strategies and its control mechanisms. Kwarteng et al. (2023) document that SUSP is directly positively affected by corporate governance, particularly when aligned with sustainability-focused strategies. Further they find that green human resource management plays a large part in enhancing SUSP through organisation ability on recruiting and training, green performance management or the advancement of dynamic sustainability capabilities (Khaskhely et al., 2022; Mousa & Othman, 2020; Rahaman et al., 2024). In addition, management practices, such as the management of technology and total quality management (Tasleem et al., 2019; Yousef et al., 2024) together with formal strategic planning and business innovation (Dwikat et al., 2022), have been found to have a significant positive influence on firm performance, in particular SUSP in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Sustainable leadership is regarded as a key leverage to enable the transformation of an organization's culture and its integration of sustainability in the whole system of its operations (Al Mamun et al., 2018; Zaid et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2022).

Technology is also a key enabler for application of sustainable practices in business operations.

The importance of technology and innovation in the context of digital transformation and Industry 4.0 for SUSP in all aspects: economic, social and environmental has been stressed in several studies (Karmaker et al., 2023; Saha et al., 2022; Umar et al., 2022; Tasleem et al., 2019). Scholars have examined the influence of each dimension of organizational sustainability performance. For instance, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology in human resource management, which is AI-driven, will have a positive impact on SUSP through an improvement in innovation capabilities and in the decision-making process (Mollah et al., 2024). In addition, the use of blockchain technology in supply chain (Jraisat et al., 2023) and management accounting systems (Nguyen et al., 2023) will positively contribute to SUSP to a great extent, in which the management accounting system acts as a mediator and the digital transformation as a moderator for this relationship. Also, the adoption of digital technologies such as IoT, big data analytics, and cloud computing will improve economic, social and environmental aspects of SUSP, with lean manufacturing being a key mediating variable (Aziz et al., 2024; Buhaya & Metwally, 2024; Rashid et al., 2025). These results confirm the perspective that digital technologies, appropriately aligned, might emerge as risk management and strategic instruments for holistic sustainable development.

Topic 2: Business processes and practices for sustainability performance

Studies on sustainable manufacturing and supply chain management tend to converge towards the importance of processes and practices to reinforce SUSP. When environmental, economic and social issues are incorporated into the way a business operates, organizations tend to obtain more enduring and longer-terms results. Throughout the literature, SSCM via focal firm internal coordination, stakeholder collaboration and green technologies is found to positively support three-dimensional performance. It is also

demonstrated that stakeholder pressure and internal SSCM practices positively enhance the firm performance (Aboelmaged, 2012; Wang & Dai, 2018), while research from Ghana and Vietnam proves that environmentally friendly design, production, and sourcing can increase firm performance not only in the environmental and social, but also in the financial (Iddrisu, 2023; Kusi-Sarpong et al., 2016; Le, 2020). Other research highlights SC collaboration and the role of internal social politics, implying that engaging with stakeholders creates social and economic value (Morais & Silvestre, 2018; Pakdeechoho & Sukhotu, 2018; Sudusinghe & Seuring, 2020).

Consistent with the above, it has been found that integrated green supply chain management practices have a more significant positive effect on performance such as profit (Qu et al., 2020; Sarwar et al., 2021; Antwi et al., 2022), especially for the worst polluters. At the same time, the external environment, hardware capabilities, partner network, and institutional setting influence the degree to which SSCM procedures result in success (Orr & Jadhav, 2018; Ashraf et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Espindola et al., 2022). The findings are consistent with related studies focusing on circular economy models and sustainable procurement, where positive impact is reported in environmental, social, and financial perspectives (Agyapong et al., 2024; Amin et al., 2024; Li et al., 2022; Islam et al., 2024).

In general, the literature converges around a common finding: green/sustainable supply chain processes and practices are a primary means for firms to achieve superior SUSP in all three dimensions when such potential is realized and when a sufficient level of organizational commitment to such practices is supported by appropriate levels of external policy and market pressure.

Topic 3: Sustainable offerings: products and services

Integrating sustainability in business processes is seen more and more as a driver of innovation rather than a mere legislation-

driven burden. Firms that implement lean manufacturing, internal green activities and green product innovation have a competitive advantage in meeting environmental challenges and are able to improve firm performance (Afum et al., 2021). These activities create economic value and contribute to diminish the environmental pressure.

There is prior consistent effect across context. Green marketing practices improve environmental performance in the food industry (Braik et al., 2024), green investment and financing promote corporate social responsibility and SUSP in high-emission industries such as chemicals (Ye & Dela, 2023). Regulatory compliance and green practices also reinforce pollution control and the efficient use of resources in developing countries (Opoku, 2025). Instead of incremental changes, firms are now more often pursuing their green manufacturing, lean and supply chain management strategies within a framework of achieving long-term sustainability objectives to enhance overall performance (Opoku et al., 2023; Gama & Bonamigo, 2025). In sum, the integration of sustainability practices stands as a pivotal means of product innovation and responsible business growth in the long term.

Topic 4: Contribution of sustainable operations

Sustainable business operations are not only about improving financial or operational efficiency but also about the ability to combine strategic, environmental, and social factors to contribute to global sustainable development and create sustainable competitive advantages. Many studies emphasize that integrating sustainability activities such as information disclosure (Laskar, 2018; Orazalin & Mahmood, 2018) and green innovation (Al-Nimer, 2024; Rustiarini et al., 2022) can help businesses improve their competitiveness, especially in the context of emerging economies (Lucas et al., 2024; Xin et al., 2023). In addition, long-term contributions to society and the environment through the harmonization of financial performance, risk management, and social responsibility are

necessary strategic directions (Lu & Khan, 2023; Xiao et al., 2018). Short-term negative impacts may occur when businesses launch sustainability initiatives; however, in the medium- and long-term, these efforts will promote innovation, financial stability, and inclusive growth (Al-Nimer, 2024; Das & Rangarajan, 2020). The balance of economic, social, and environmental benefits is also evident through the mediating role of factors such as innovation (Zhou et al., 2023), intellectual capital (Rustiarini et al., 2022), and external pressures that drive strategic actions (Fazli et al., 2023). Thus, sustainable business in the 21st century is not only a business goal but also an essential contribution to social prosperity and environmental conservation, bringing benefits in both the short and long term.

Topic 5: Measurement of sustainability performance

Studies on the evaluation of SUSP ranges over diverse industries and countries, indicating contextual variation and a strong demand for methodologically sound measurement tools. As can be seen in Appendix 9 (*see Appendix 9 online*), three dominant clusters can be found, which are similar to Saulick et al. (2023), and as a collective, they appear to form an emerging methodological toolkit which can assist sustainability-oriented decision makers.

One strand applies existing good practice sustainability norms, e.g., the triple bottom line, to assess economic, social and environmental performance (Dwivedi et al., 2019; Jamali et al., 2006). Associated work offers normative models to organize evaluation across dimension, particularly concerning social aspects in the context of production (Labuschagne et al., 2005). To solve trade-offs in the SUSP evaluation, multi-criteria decision-making methods are proposed in the literature (Arukala et al., 2019; Işık & Adalar, 2025).

A second line of research addresses indicator-based frameworks designed for specific industries such as building, transport, and manufacturing (Ait Hammou & Oulfarsi, 2025; Dabirian et al., 2017; Santoso et al., 2024;

Ullah et al., 2020;...). Few researches take use of specialized indices, e.g. CO₂ metrics to benchmark firm performance in India (Choi et al., 2020) or the World Energy Council Energy Triplet Index to rate on energy-related sustainability (Ponomarenko et al., 2022).

4. Discussions and potential research directions

The results show a clear upward trend in the number of SUSP publications over time, with particularly strong growth after 2016. This pattern reflects a gradual shift toward viewing sustainability in more strategic terms, where SUSP is increasingly associated with long-term value creation and the development of organizational capabilities.

In terms of geographical distribution, the literature is heavily concentrated in a few developing countries, mainly in Asia such as Pakistan, China, and India. This concentration suggests that existing evidence is strongly shaped by specific institutional and industrial contexts, which may limit its broader applicability. By contrast, Southeast Asia remains relatively underexplored beyond Vietnam and Indonesia, despite facing significant pressures related to urbanization, resource depletion, and climate change. Future research should therefore expand to less-studied ASEAN countries, as well as regions such as Latin America (e.g., Brazil, Colombia) and sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Nigeria, Ethiopia), where different institutional conditions and development trajectories may yield new insights. Comparative studies across these contexts are particularly valuable, as they help identify how sustainability strategies vary under different governance systems, socio-economic constraints, and institutional environments.

Although cross-national research is still limited, some studies have begun to adopt comparative designs (Laskar, 2018; Sarwar et al., 2024; Hemmati et al., 2024). These approaches are important because they allow for a more nuanced understanding of how internal

capabilities and external pressures jointly shape sustainability outcomes. Comparisons between developing and developed countries are especially useful, as they provide opportunities to learn from both successful and less effective practices. From a theoretical perspective, such work can help bridge the gap between the resource-based view and institutional theory, which are often examined separately in the current literature.

Much of the existing research focuses on how firms build capabilities to enhance sustainability, often by integrating sustainability into core strategies and operations. While many studies report positive relationships between SUSP and outcomes such as competitiveness, innovation, and inclusive growth, the evidence remains largely descriptive. There is still limited understanding of causal mechanisms, particularly regarding how technology, innovation, and public policy influence sustainability outcomes in developing countries. This gap becomes more evident when considering industry differences, as high-emission sectors may experience more direct sustainability impacts than service-oriented industries.

Another limitation lies in the relatively narrow focus on leadership and managerial roles. While research on sustainability capabilities has grown, especially up to 2021, less attention has been given to the interaction between technological and human factors. In the context of digital transformation, technology is not merely a supporting tool but a strategic enabler of sustainability (Karmaker et al., 2023; Tasleem et al., 2019; Umar et al., 2022). At the same time, employees play a crucial role in driving cultural change, particularly in developing countries (Kayar & Yeşilada, 2024; Rathee et al., 2025). This suggests that sustainability should be understood as a socio-technical process shaped by the alignment between technology, people, and governance.

From a methodological standpoint, SUSP research is still dominated by quantitative

approaches, with relatively limited use of qualitative or mixed methods. This imbalance restricts deeper insights into context-specific and behavioral dynamics. In addition, most studies rely heavily on the resource-based view, while other perspectives such as stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and dynamic capabilities are less frequently integrated. A more diverse theoretical approach would better capture the complexity of sustainability phenomena. Future research could also draw on alternative frameworks such as Transaction Cost Theory, Resource Dependence Theory, or Resource Productivity Theory, especially in contexts characterized by resource constraints and complex supply chains.

5. Conclusion

This study provides a systematic review of SUSP research in developing countries, aiming to clarify how existing approaches are connected within real business contexts. Results show that SUSP has progressively evolved from a limited factor-based conceptualization towards a more comprehensive multidimensional and strategically coupled organization-level construct. The literature can be generally classified into five topics, in which capabilities are essential for firms to take on practices such as green supply chain management, environmental risk management, and sustainable production. These practices are not ends in themselves but serve as mechanisms through which firms create more tangible outcomes, including sustainable products and services that deliver both economic and social value.

Several practical implications follow. Policymakers should consider more differentiated approaches instead of relying on general sustainability frameworks. Industries with high environmental impact may require stricter regulations combined with financial support for technological upgrading, while service sectors may benefit more from certification schemes and capacity development. In developing economies,

targeted interventions – such as tax incentives, public-private partnerships, and investments in digital infrastructure – can help firms overcome adoption barriers.

From a managerial perspective, sustainability should be treated as part of core strategy rather than a separate initiative. Strengthening internal capabilities, especially through the integration of digital technologies with sustainable practices, appears to be a key pathway toward improved performance. Firms that align

technological innovation with process changes tend to achieve more stable improvements in both financial and non-financial outcomes.

Despite these contributions, the review is limited by its reliance on English-language publications indexed in Scopus and by the use of predefined keywords. Future research could benefit from broader data sources, comparative designs across countries, and longitudinal approaches to better capture contextual differences and causal dynamics.

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