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# KHUNG LÝ THUYẾT CỦA NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA TRUY VẾT NGUỒN GỐC THỰC PHẨM VÀ ĐỊNH HƯỚNG THỊ TRƯỜNG ĐẾN HOẠT ĐỘNG MANG TÍNH BỀN VỮNG CỦA CHUỖI CUNG ỨNG THỰC PHẨM TẠI VIỆT NAM

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## Tóm tắt

Bài nghiên cứu này đề xuất mô hình khám phá nhằm kiểm chứng ảnh hưởng của truy vết chuỗi cung ứng (SCT) và định hướng thị trường (MO) đến hoạt động mang tính bền vững (SP) của doanh nghiệp Việt Nam trong ngành thực phẩm, bên cạnh đó cũng xem xét vai trò điều hòa của năng lực động (DC) và vai trò trung gian của định hướng thị trường. Với sự mở rộng nhanh chóng của chuỗi cung ứng toàn cầu và sự tăng cao trong kỳ vọng dành cho các hoạt động bền vững nâng tầm quan trọng của việc hiểu rõ ảnh hưởng của SCT và MO đến SP, đặc biệt trong bối cảnh quốc gia đang phát triển như Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu này nhằm bổ sung những thiếu sót trong các nghiên cứu trong phân tổng quan lý thuyết với mô hình đề xuất. Thông qua mô hình lý thuyết dựa trên ý thuyết và các nghiên cứu trước, nhóm tác giả đang cố gắng làm sáng tỏ mối tương quan giữa các nhân tố trên trong bối cảnh ngành công nghiệp thực phẩm tại Việt Nam.

**Từ khóa:** truy vết chuỗi cung ứng, định hướng thị trường, hoạt động bền vững, năng lực động, công nghiệp thực phẩm tại Việt Nam

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# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF FOOD TRACEABILITY AND MARKET ORIENTATION ON SUSTAINABILITY PERFORMANCE OF FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN IN VIETNAM

## Abstract

This study proposes an exploratory model to examine the influence of supply chain traceability (SCT) and market orientation (MO) on the sustainability performance (SP) of firms in Vietnam's food industry, while also considering the mediating role of dynamic capabilities (DC) and the moderating role of MO. The fast expansion of global supply chains and rising expectations for sustainable practices underline the necessity of understanding how SCT and MO contribute to SP, particularly in developing countries like Vietnam. This study aims to fill substantial gaps in the literature by outlining the direct impact of SCT on SP, evaluating the possible mediating role of DC, and analyzing the moderating effects of MO on the SCT-SP and DC-SP interactions. Through a conceptual framework anchored on current theories and literature, this study tries to throw light on the complex dynamics between these factors within the context of Vietnam's food sector.

**Keywords:** supply chain traceability, market orientation, sustainability performance, dynamic capabilities, Vietnam's food industry

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## 1. Introduction

The sustainability performance (SP) of businesses is a crucial indicator of their long-term survival and competitiveness in the quickly changing global food market (Busse, Meinlschmidt, and Foerstl, 2017). For businesses operating in Vietnam's thriving food sector, sustainability is a comprehensive approach that takes into account social, economic, and environmental factors in addition to legal and environmental considerations. Adoption and application of supply chain traceability (SCT), which enables businesses to follow a food product's path from its origin through all phases of production, processing, and distribution, is one of the major factors influencing sustainability performance (Bechini, Cimino, Marcelloni, & Tomasi, 2008). Traceability not only ensures food safety and quality, but it also helps companies function more sustainably by fostering accountability, openness, and dynamic capabilities (DC). Lately, the infancy of the traceability system has led to social and environmental issues in the food sector, affecting industries rigorously. However, it appears that the cost to implement a traceability system (TS) is astronomical which hesitates business leaders to invest in. When traceability procedures are used, the diffusion of information and the traceable institutional arrangement are facilitated not only by the efforts of external stakeholders but also by those of internal stakeholders. Consequently, we describe the traceability practice in the FSC as the component of input (supplier), process (FC), and output (consumer) traceability. Input traceability involves the technique of gathering and tracking information between the FC and its main suppliers (Zhou et al., 2021).

Dynamic capabilities enable a company to both perceive product markets and adjust to change using sustainable methods (Hill and Rothaermel, 2003). Firms may use these to establish improved long-term objectives, develop strategies and managerial expertise, and eventually gain distinctive competitive advantages (Irfan et al., 2019; Wilden and Gudergan, 2015). Pavlou & El Sawy (2011) grouped dynamic capabilities into sensing, learning, integrating, and cooperating. Sensing assesses sustainability chances. Learning capacity is updating operating capabilities with fresh knowledge. According to Zahra and George (2002), absorptive capacity (learning) is a dynamic process of collecting, digesting, transforming, and applying knowledge. Capability integration entails adding individual expertise to the unit's new operational capabilities. Fluid abilities literature is highly linked to providing, representing, and linking individual contribution to the business unit (Okhuysen & Eisenhardt, 2002). Coordinating capability involves organising and deploying tasks, resources, and activities in new operational capabilities (Helfat & Peteraf, 2003). Our research examines the specific dynamic capacity of sensing in connection to the adoption of sustainability and traceability standards. In order to effectively address the demands for product quality and other changes in the external environment, FCs and their supply chain partners implement product traceability practices through the efficient integration, establishment, and reconstruction of product information resources. This encourages firms to enhance their dynamic sensing capabilities and ultimately achieve higher performance.

The concept of market orientation (MO), the gathering and use of market data while emphasizing the organization of resources to provide superior value to customers (Slater and Narver, 1994, 1995), enables firms to provide better service and products to customers. Companies with a strong market orientation may more effectively recognize and adapt to changes in consumer preferences (Carr and Lopez, 2007). Therefore, firms become more competitive with resource-advantage over firms that do not (Wilburn Green et al., 2015). Market orientation, comprising customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interfunctional coordination (Narver and Slater, 1990), not only directly affects a firm's financial success but also plays a moderating role in the link between dynamic capacities and sustainable performance. This shows that organizations who are more market-oriented may better exploit their dynamic skills to boost sustainability results, indicating a more comprehensive awareness of consumer wants, competition tactics, and the need of internal coordination in attaining sustainable development.

Despite the accepted relevance of supply chain traceability, dynamic capacities, and market orientation interconnecting with sustainability performance, there remains a major study vacuum in understanding how these factors interact within the unique context of Vietnam's food business. The bulk of prior research has concentrated on broad correlations between these variables and company performance, with less emphasis given to the complex ways in which market orientation could modify the link between dynamic capabilities and sustainability performance. Moreover, the specific constraints and possibilities given by Vietnam's economic climate, regulatory landscape, and cultural setting demand for a more extensive research into how these global themes apply locally. Hence, our research will examine the relationship between supply chain traceability and

sustainability performance of food manufacturing firms with the moderating role of environmental dynamics and market orientation in the context of Vietnam.

## **2. Literature review and Theoretical framework**

### ***2.1 Food Supply Chain Traceability (FSCT)***

The definition of traceability was first established in ISO 8402 1994 and defined as “the ability to trace and track history, application or other relevant information with regards to all stages in the supply chain including production, processing, and distribution” (Olsen and Borit, 2013). Lupien (2005) treated traceability as a method for risk management; Canavari et al. (2010) view this as a competitive advantage for firms; Engelseth et al. (2014) perceive it as value-related knowledge resources.

In general, the use of information technology to capture, archive, and display information for each respective component of a product at every step of the supply chain to acquire transparency and visibility. Its application also helps firms to facilitate operating activities such as vertical integration, process engineering, and quality assurance (Hobbs, 2004; Hobbs 1996). According to Opara (2003), a credible and transparent food supply chain depends on traceability and cooperation among stakeholders. Moe (1998) then segmented the definition of traceability into “chain traceability”, referring to the ability to retrieve and display the history of the material flow from procurement to processing, distribution, and sales backward (tracing) and forward (tracking). Tracking indicates actions in which tracking a product as it moves forward through the chain while tracing does vice versa.

Thus, Zhou et al. (2021) elaborate on the traceability practice in the food supply chain consisting of input (supplier), process (food supply chain), and output (customer) traceability. Input traceability refers to the practice of acquiring and tracing information between the food supply chain and its suppliers. Process traceability means processing within the chain the unified management and coordination of activities of the traceability. Output traceability refers to retrieving and tracing information relating to customer demand, and market trends in food products’ origins.

**H1a:** Input traceability is positively related to improved sustainability performance.

**H1b:** Process traceability is positively related to improved sustainability performance.

**H1c:** Output traceability is positively related to improved sustainability performance.

### ***2.2 The mediating role of Environmental Dynamism***

Priem et al. (1995) conceptualise environmental dynamism as “uncertain conditions” resulting from 2 factors: (1) market dynamism (referring to the volatility of customer demand) and (2) technological dynamism (referring to technical advancement in the industry). In a turbulent market, organizations with high dynamic capabilities (which will be later discussed in section

2.4.1) can grasp the change in customer demand, product preferences, and technology innovations (Zhou et al., 2021). Alfaro and Rábade (2009) also suggest that with the use of tracking technology, firms can strengthen their quality control capabilities to adapt to fluctuating customer demand and preferences in a turbulent context. Additionally, Li and Liu (2014) discover that in a static environment where demand and technology changes are relatively consistent, customers do not necessarily change their preferences in products and firms do not have to be highly responsive and adaptive to the external environment. In such environments, firms are only required to use general knowledge, and technical, and information resources; hence, decreasing the potential effectiveness of firms' dynamic capabilities. Therefore, we propose the hypothesis as follows:

**H5:** Environmental dynamism moderates the relationship between dynamic capabilities and sustainability performance such that the relationship is weaker when environmental dynamism is high.

### ***2.3 Market Orientation and Sustainability Performance***

#### ***2.3.1 Market Orientation***

To different extents, market orientation generally represents the abilities of an organisation to capture the essence of a market sense, in other words, is the skills in understanding and satisfying customers of an organisation. Thus, several studies provide multiple definitions of market orientation. From the definitions from different studies, this research agrees that, as a whole, market orientation would commonly be defined as the degree to which an organisation utilizes the knowledge from the market and customer information analysis to make final decisions on designing, manufacturing the products, and approaching the market (Narver and Slater, 1990; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990).

Several studies demonstrated that the more an organization aligns itself with its clients and with the demands of the market, in other words, the greater the level a business increases its market orientation, the more appropriate this organization provides its products or services, and the higher its performance (Narver and Slater, 1990; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990).

Market orientation, firstly, has a positive influence on the organization's responsiveness. Market orientation strategies of the firm would encourage not only to focus on cultural emphasis when doing research about customer behavior but also to act on the most updated knowledge developed based on customer needs, therefore, enhancing customer service and boosting organizational performance sustainability (Hult et al., 2005).

In addition, market orientation was found to be an important determinant of profitability. A study of Narver and Slater in both 1990 and 1994 found that there is a positive relationship between market orientation and business profitability. Market-oriented positively associated with the ROA, sales growth and of the organization, which is found most among businesses that are above the median in market orientation (Slater & Narver, 1994)

Furthermore, market orientation also has a substantial direct and indirect effect on environmental performance via green supply chain management practices. Market orientation could influence the implementation of eco-friendly supply chain processes, which could help to enhance the organization's environmental performance. Therefore, a strong market orientation capability is crucial for firms in order to effectively implement their environmental sustainability strategies and achieve a higher level of sustainable performance (Wilburn Green et al., 2015).

### *2.3.2 Sustainable Performance*

Sustainability performance has recently become a central focus that goes beyond economic performance in company strategic plans (Zhou et al., 2021). Sustainability performance, which was a new term in the last years of the last decade, is defined as the overall positive or negative economic, environmental, and social impacts of an entity compared to a set standard (Büyüközkan & Karabulut, 2018). Therefore, sustainability performance is considered a comprehensive and integrated output of an organization's implementation of environmental and social-related strategies on its operations, which can be observed through three distinct impacts: economic sustainability, social sustainability, and environmental sustainability (Zhou et al., 2021).

The food business is also subject to a growing emphasis on sustainability. Sustainability is gaining importance in agriculture due to its substantial utilization of land, water, and resources (Aigner et al., 2003). Food industry organizations must secure a food supply, mitigate agriculture's environmental consequences, uphold fair labor standards, and offer safe and healthful products to preserve the organization's sustainability performance (Becker & Ellis, 2017).

Most food companies' sustainability reports focus solely on environmental factors, which shows that companies put the strongest emphasis on environmental information. Embracing sustainability by becoming more environmentally friendly is a key aspect of a food organization's performance strategies. This attribute has the potential to enhance firms' competitiveness so that firms can achieve revenue growth and gain a competitive edge by reducing expenses (Simpson et al., 2004; Aragón-Correa & Sharma, 2003). In other words, through an eco-innovation strategy, companies in the agri-food sector can enhance their performance.

### *2.3.3 The direct effect of Market Orientation on Sustainability Performance*

#### *2.3.3.1 Customer Orientation*

Sampling from 225 plant-level managers in US manufacturing organizations, Kenneth et al. (2014) suggested that by edging the firm with the most recent insight regarding the ever-changing customer demand for eco-friendly products and services, firms can create competitive advantage in the marketplace through environmentally-sustainable innovation and strategies. In this case, market orientation has been proven to positively affect environmental performance - one of the three components of sustainability performance - through the implementation of green supply chain management. According to Rehman & Shrivastava (2011), customer pressure is one of the two primary influences that cause the incurrence of green supply chain practices. Additionally,

those practices have a positive effect on environmental performance as they drive firms to robustly and continuously attempt to reduce emissions and wastes during manufacturing and distribution. Moreover, Narver & Slater (1990) have also discovered that firms with a strong sense of customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination are able to create “continuous superior value” throughout the buyer value chain; hence increasing firms’ economic performance and profitability. Matear et al. (2002) additionally show the significant and positive correlation between market orientation and financial and market performance of service suppliers.

#### *2.3.3.2 Inter-functional Coordination*

Coordinatively, cross-functional integration, alongside customer orientation and competitor sensitivity, acts as a driving force for firms to edge their internal business performance; thus gaining competitive advantage and ability to satisfy consumer demand. Through the analysis of 147 manufacturing firms across 5 sectors, Charles et al. (2012) suggest that by accepting the value of customers, companies strive for rigid internal coordination in a synergistic fashion. Besides, by adopting green practices and promoting inter-functional coordination within the organisation, firms can increase environmental performance (Ryoo and Koo 2013; Seuring and Müller, 2008). Although the direct relationship between inter-functional coordination and environmental performance has yet to be found, Li et al. (2020) suggest that interplant coordination is proven to play a moderating role between CSR practices and environmental performance. Hence, it is plausible that inter-function cooperation may have a positive effect on environmental performance, leading to our hypothesis:

**H6b:** Inter-functional coordination is positively related to improved sustainability performance.

#### *2.3.3.3 Competitor orientation*

In addition to customer orientation and inter-functional coordination, firms also prioritize market intelligence regarding competition accordingly to maintain their competitiveness in the industry. Competition hence forces them to be continuously updated on the most recent trends in the market. Jaworski & Kohli (1993) also suggest competitive sensitivity is one of the crucial components for a firm to gain significant business performance. The extent of competitive hostility, defined by Slater and Narver (1994) as “a market in which firms pay close attention to competitors’ costs and strategies to uncover weaknesses that represent opportunities to form competitive advantage”, positively affects the sales growth of firms as firms have to become more market-oriented in order to acquire superior performance in the industry (Slater & Narver 1994; Kohli & Jaworski 1990). With an emerging focus on sustainability and green supply chain practices, it is thus comprehensible to form a possible link between competitor orientation and sustainability performance as previous researches have provided grounds to illustrate the effect of competitor orientation on a firm's sustainable performance. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H6c:** Competitor orientation has a positive impact on the sustainability performance

## ***2.4 The moderating role of Market Orientation on Dynamic Capabilities - Sustainability Performance relationship***

### ***2.4.1 Dynamic Capabilities***

Building upon the resource-based view (RBV), the theory of dynamic capabilities (DCs) was first introduced by Teece et al. (1997) as a strategic management framework to elucidate how firms can achieve and maintain competitive advantage in rapidly changing markets. This theory emphasises the critical role of developing, integrating, and reconfiguring both internal and external resources & capabilities to navigate dynamic business environments effectively, ultimately allowing firms to secure competitive advantage (Teece, 2007; Helfat et al., 2007).

The concept of dynamic capabilities has also been adapted to the sustainability setting, defined as ‘the firm’s ability to address the rapidly evolving sustainable expectations of stakeholders by purposefully modifying functional capabilities for the simultaneous pursuit of economic, environmental and social competences’ (Wu et al., 2012). With strong dynamic capabilities, firms are not only enabled to better sense emerging market trends and opportunities but also adapt to changes through integrating knowledge resources in different technical fields and activating sustainable actions (Hill & Rothaermel, 2003; O’Reilly & Tushman, 2008). Furthermore, dynamic capabilities enhance firms’ ability to set long-term goals and forge strategies and management insights, giving firms unique competitive advantages later on (Irfan et al. 2019; Wilden & Gudergan 2015).

**H2c:** Output traceability is positively related to improved dynamic capabilities.

**H4c:** Dynamic capabilities mediate the relationship between output traceability and sustainability performance.

Dynamic capabilities can be categorized into three micro-groups of capabilities, namely sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring (Teece, 2007). Sensing capabilities refer to the identification, development, and assessment of technological opportunities for sustainability, and are the prerequisite to seizing and reconfiguring capabilities. Seizing capabilities refer to the mobilization of internal and external resources in response to current demand and opportunities. Reconfiguring capabilities refer to the continuous alignment and realignment of resource base with changes in business settings (Parmigiani & Howard-Grenville, 2011; Teece 2007).

**H2a:** Input traceability is positively related to improved dynamic capabilities.

**H4a:** Dynamic capabilities mediate the relationship between input traceability and sustainability performance.

It is noteworthy, however, that competitive advantages are transient; hence, clinging to initial advantages would not guarantee firms long-lasting success (O’Reilly & Tushman, 2008). According to Pavlou and Sawy (2011), the frequency with which firms engage in sensing and reconfiguring activities directly correlates with the enhancement of their dynamic capabilities, leading to improved sustainability performance. In addition, as Barney (1991) suggested,

sustainable financial and marketing performance gains are attainable only through the continuous and proactive disruption of the status quo to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

In the food industry characterized by its dynamic nature with constantly changing consumer trends and ever-evolving technology, it is especially pivotal that firms adapt rapidly in terms of strategies and resources configuration, which is essentially the foundation upon which the principles of the dynamic capabilities concept has been built (Teece et al., 1997; Foerstl et al., 2010). In particular, through the leveraging of dynamic capabilities with product information resources, food industry participants would be able to respond timely to changes in the external environment to the food supply chain, and attain higher performance as a result (Zhou et al., 2021).

**H2b:** Process traceability is positively related to improved dynamic capabilities.

**H4b:** Dynamic capabilities mediate the relationship between process traceability and sustainability performance.

Against the setting of sustainability in the food supply chain, dynamic capabilities would enable firms to respond swiftly to consumer demand for green products, to reduce the incidence of environmental accidents via pre-designing green and sustainable strategies, to advance employee knowledge and capabilities, or to meet public expectations for product information transparency (Zhu et al., 2005; Zaid et al., 2018). Firms' social influence and product reputation, in turn, would be augmented (Das, 2018). In sum, there seemingly exists a positive relationship between dynamic capabilities and firms' sustainability performance in the food industry.

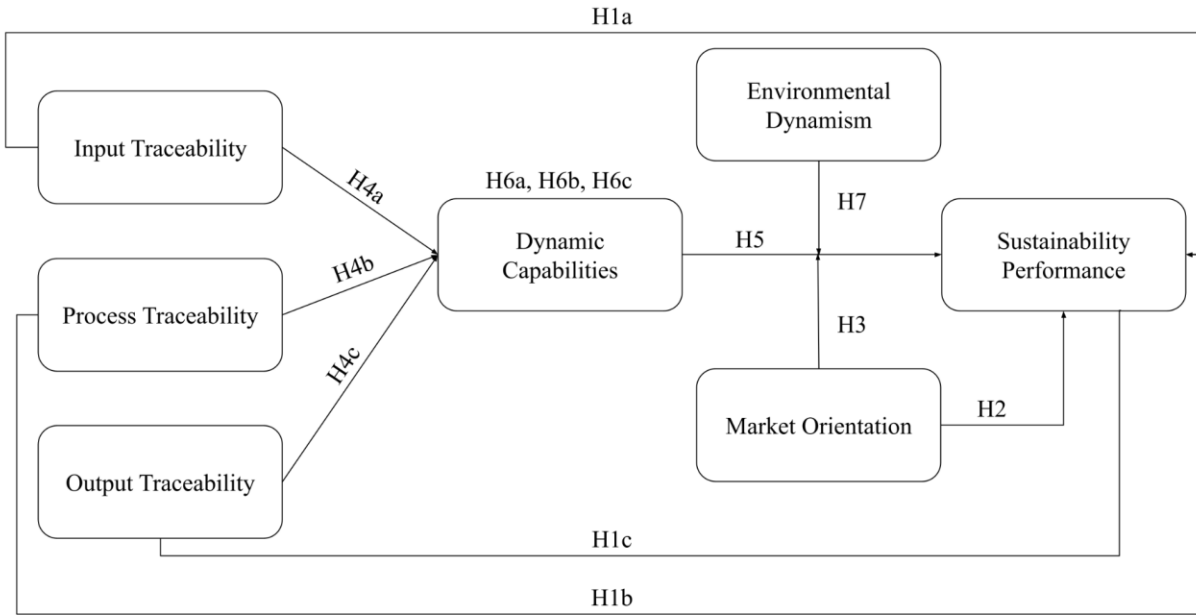
**H3:** Dynamic capabilities are positively related to improved sustainability performance.

#### *2.4.2 The moderating effect of Market Orientation on DC - SP*

Market orientation consists of three main pillars: (1) Customer Orientation - a focus on customers, (2) Competitor orientation - a focus on understanding competitors, and (3) Integrated coordination - the interactive integration within the company, with the goal to creating customer value (Narver and Slater, 1990). With regard to sustainable development, market orientation can have a strengthening effect on the impact of dynamic capabilities on firm sustainability performance. Past research has shown a positive relationship between market orientation and firm performance. By providing superior customer value, firms can create long-term profitability (Narver and Slater, 1990) and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage in the field (Kumar et. al, 1998). The ability to adapt to market demand provides support to leverage the capability within the firm, leading to positive firm performance.

**H7:** Market orientation moderates the relationship between dynamic capabilities and sustainability performance such that the relationship is **weaker/stronger** when environmental dynamism is high.

Based on the above theoretical basis and the research model adopted from Zhou et al. (2021), the authors propose a model to study the model to evaluate the impact of traceability and market orientation on sustainable performance in the food supply chain.



**Figure 1.** Research Model

The research model is illustrated in Figure 1

### 3. Conclusion and further research

The authors have proposed a theoretical model of the impact of traceability and market orientation on sustainable performance in the food supply chain. This model will be the premise for the authors to conduct surveys and inspections, as well as analyze the relationship between traceability market orientation and sustainable performance, with the moderating role of dynamic capability and environmental dynamism. From there, recommendations to achieve sustainable development within the food supply chain of Vietnam shall be proposed.

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