

Why Supply Chain Sustainability Matters for Developing Countries' Apparel Suppliers? An Integrated Framework



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1 Introduction

As globalization has increased in importance, the organization of cross-border trade and production has become more evident (Locke et al. 2013). Geographically dispersed firms and an accompanying outsourcing beyond local jurisdictions has prompted the rise of global supply chains (Locke et al. 2013). Global supply chains are defined as the complex network of quasi-hierarchical long-term relationships between buyers and suppliers, which are driven by global buying firms as lead firms (Gereffi 1994; Rahim 2016). The transformation in global supply chains has created employment opportunities and export earnings for the developing countries (Locke et al. 2013). However, intense competitive conditions have led to social or environmental misconduct in the apparel supply factories in developing countries (Locke et al. 2013). For example, in 2013, the eight-storey factory building Rana Plaza collapsed in Bangladesh (D'Ambrogio 2014). This disaster killed almost 1138 workers who were producing apparel products for at least 27 global brands including Benetton and Primark (D'Ambrogio 2014). According to Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen (2014), poor working conditions, insufficient safety hazards and faulty social audits are the key reasons behind this disaster. This incident has flagged issues around the implementation of supply chain sustainability practices among Developing Country apparel suppliers (Yawar and Seuring 2017). Therefore, the need to understand how to integrate sustainability into globally fragmented Developing Country apparel supply chains, is highly important.

In fact, sustainability and supply chain management have been raising significant attention over the last years from industry leaders, academics, and policy makers worldwide. This can be observed by the global and local daily news around the

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187

growing CSR and sustainability activities of global businesses and regulatory platforms. For example, on April 13, 2016, the United Nations Global Compact in collaboration with Global Sourcing Council arranged an event titled “Sustainable Supply Chains: Through the Lens of the 17 SDGs”. In that event, the implementation of supply chain sustainability practices was promoted as a practical pathway to contributing to the achievement of the all sustainable development goals (UN Global Compact 2016). Indeed, the concept of sustainable development, or sustainability, assumes a “holistic, balanced and integrated perspective on development” (ILO 2007, p. vi), which means that it includes more than just economic, or environmental issues. It requires the integration of all three pillars of sustainability, namely, economic, social, and environmental, also known as the triple bottom line developed by Elkington (1998). Zorzini et al. (2015) argued that the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability are linked with each other, and have some common drivers, enablers and barriers within a supply chain. Nevertheless, there might be differences on the relevance of one dimension in specific industries. For example, the brick-making and leather sectors are acknowledged for their negative environmental consequences while the outsourcing activity of apparel sector is acknowledged for its widespread social misconduct (Lund-Thomsen et al. 2016). Thus, there is need to consider three dimensions of supply chain sustainability simultaneously in specific industries (Seuring 2013).

Recent scholarship suggests that global buying firms are engaging in supply chain sustainability programs in order to improve economic, social and environmental performance within their supply chains (Acosta et al. 2014; Carter and Rogers 2008). Nevertheless, buying firms are facing challenges to implement sustainability practices at the supplier’s level, mostly when outsourcing from Developing Country apparel suppliers (Huq et al. 2014; Silvestre 2015). Buying firms’ key challenges include the identification of multi-tier suppliers, the assessment of these suppliers’ compliance levels, and the execution of these suppliers’ corrective actions (Grimm et al. 2016). On the other hand, Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers face dilemmas because of their critical viewpoints regarding sustainability standards as costly control mechanisms, which can reduce the competitiveness of their products in the global markets (Rahim 2016). As such, the implementation of supply chain sustainability practices is perceived as a simple box-ticking exercise, and remains fragmented as institutionalized myths among these suppliers (Jamali et al. 2015). Hence, the implementation of the entire dimensions of supply chain sustainability from multi-tier suppliers’ perspective has remained small in scale (Acosta et al. 2014; Grimm et al. 2016).

Against this background, this study aims to provide an integrated multi-disciplinary framework to understand (a) why supply chain sustainability matters for Developing Country apparel suppliers and (b) what mechanisms are likely to emerge for integrating sustainability practices into their supply chains. This framework integrates three multidisciplinary theoretical perspectives; a specific global value chain approach, integrative stakeholder theory, and institutional theory to guide the research inquiry. Based on in-depth investigation from the extant literature and other secondary sources, this paper argues that embedding sustainability

practices into multi-tier apparel suppliers could be influenced by a confluence of governance mechanisms. These mechanisms are drivers (instrumental and moral) as well as forces (coercive, mimetic and normative), which form as a result of sustained demands and pressures from global and local institutional actors. Accordingly, this study develops two propositions related to the interactions between global and local governance actors that affect the implementation of sustainability practices among Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers. Thus, the propositions developed in the study can be used for future empirical research and theory development in the context of a developing country multi-tier apparel supply chains.

In the remainder of this chapter, we proceed as follows. The next section provides a brief summary of recent sustainable supply chain management-related literature including the sustainability practices of global apparel supply chains. In the next section, we outline an integrated framework for supply chain sustainability examining multi-disciplinary theoretical perspectives, specifically global value chain approach, integrative stakeholder theory, and institutional theory. In the final section, this paper presents the contribution and directions for future research.

2 Review of Literature

2.1 Sustainable Supply Chain Management

By addressing the objectives of integrating supply chain sustainability into Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers, this paper is positioned within the field of sustainable supply chain management (Carter and Rogers 2008; Seuring and Müller 2008). Seuring and Müller (2008) defined sustainable supply chain management as “the management of material, information and capital flows as well as cooperation among companies along the supply chain while taking goals from all three dimensions of sustainable development, i.e., economic, environmental and social, into account which are derived from customer and stakeholder requirements” (p. 1700). Within the sustainable supply chain, there are three important actors: focal firms, suppliers, and stakeholder groups (Seuring and Müller 2008). While focal firms play a central role in supply chain management, and cooperation with suppliers to fulfill customer needs, the stakeholders play a more vital role (Seuring and Müller 2008). Furthermore, Carter and Rogers (2008) conceptualized the discipline of sustainable supply chain management based on triple bottom line due to the significance of economic, social and environmental performance of sustainability reporting of global businesses. For example, around 68% of the Global 250 firms generated a separate annual sustainability report in 2004 indicating environmental, social, and economic performance dimensions wherein 80% of these reports discuss supply chain sustainability-related issues (KPMG 2005 cited in Carter and Rogers 2008, p. 361). Thus, sustainable supply chain management has been considered as a holistic perspective based on the integration of all three dimensions of sustainability.

As an important dimension, economic sustainability includes sustained financial performance, its long-term competitiveness, and company's economic impact on stakeholder groups at the firm level (Steurer et al. 2005). In addition, Steurer et al. (2005) define the environmental dimension of sustainability as the protection of natural capital at a certain level which includes three aspects: using resources accountably, avoiding emissions, and reducing environmental damage. Some business practitioners consider environmental protection in the form of regulations as being anti-business which may hinder firms' competitiveness alongside increased manufacturing costs (Wilkinson et al. 2001). However, progressive organizations seek ways to improve their environmental performance to address their multiple stakeholders, and achieve reputation and competitive advantage in the marketplace (Epstein 2008; Porter and Van der Linde 1995).

On the other hand, social dimensions of sustainability deal with the management of human and social capital issues (Huq et al. 2014). Although it is difficult to pinpoint commonly used human and social capital issues of measuring social sustainability performance, Yawar and Seuring (2017) have broadly identified and defined seven social sustainability issues. These include labour conditions, child labour, human rights, health and safety, minority development, disabled people inclusion and gender (Yawar and Seuring 2017). Within the sustainability performance research, the management of social sustainability is considered as a latent way of reducing risk and improving economic performance (Klassen and Vereecke 2012). Thus, it can be observed that many studies investigate sustainable supply chain management under the umbrella of the triple bottom line concept to propose conceptual frameworks for further research, specifically theory building in the field (Carter and Rogers 2008; Seuring and Müller 2008). In the context of this paper, the triple bottom line concept has also been adopted to investigate sustainability practices of Developing Country apparel supply chains.

2.2 Sustainability and CSR Practices in Global Apparel Supply Chains

Apparel supply chains are becoming increasingly global (Rahim 2016) and the rising level of outsourcing to developing countries has emphasized the focus on CSR and sustainability practices (Zorzini et al. 2015). Typically, the apparel supply chain involves a large number of partners and is relatively long (Gereffi 1994; Rahim 2016). The use of water, energy, chemicals in the manufacturing process, as well as the generation waste and pollution in the production and transport processes of textile and apparel are the main contributors to environmental damage (Gereffi and Lee 2016; Rahim 2016). On the other hand, improper working conditions in developing countries such as safety issues in factories, forced labour and low wages are the main contributors to social misconduct in the supply chain (Gereffi and Lee 2016; Rahim 2016). Thus, both environmental and social non-compliance

behavior in the apparel supply chains have brought into sharp focus on entire dimensions of sustainability practices in the literature.

Generally, the literature on sustainability and CSR associated with global apparel supply chains has concentrated on issues, such as retail buyers' perceptions and workers' perceptions (Hughes 2005), social sustainability of retail buyers and first-tier suppliers (Huq et al. 2014), and a new governance approach in laws (Rahim 2016). The reported findings from these studies have suggested that the application of sustainability standards such as codes of conduct, ethical/social audits, and multi-stakeholder initiatives are the guiding mechanisms to promote sustainable business practices in global apparel manufacturing (Rahim 2016). Hence, it is suggested that CSR and sustainability practices have often considered as compliance mechanisms in apparel supply chains (Welford and Frost 2006).

For apparel suppliers, CSR codes of conduct as compliance mechanisms increase costs and eventually reduce competitiveness in the global market (De Neve 2009). Moreover, these codes are criticized for being framed in corporate headquarters in Europe or North America without any notable involvement from the anticipated beneficiaries in the Global South (De Neve 2009). Instead, there are no noticeable facilities to be compliant with these codes for apparel suppliers (Rahim 2016). As such, global apparel buying firms are basically concentrated on the quest for profit maximization through encouraging price competition (Rahim 2016). Lin (2007, cited in Rahim 2016, p. 4) defined this situation as "policy schizophrenia", which drives apparel suppliers to display socially and environmentally responsible practices without actually creating any reforms. Rather, these practices are perceived as a plain box-ticking exercise (Ruwana 2013). Therefore, the implementation of CSR and sustainability practices remain fragmented as institutionalized myths in developing countries (Jamali et al. 2015).

For apparel businesses, the costs of not addressing these sustainability issues are rising. The potential costs include reputational risks due to poor labour health and safety hazards, declining market share, as well as an inability to attract and retain a stable workforce in this sector (D'Ambrogio 2014; McKinsey and Company 2016). Moreover, it has been estimated that the apparel industry accounts for 10% global carbon emissions and remains the second largest industrial polluter, second only to oil (Conca 2015). As the level of competition and consumer spending increases, the apparel industry's environmental impact in terms of CO₂ emissions, water use, and land use could expand greatly by 2025 in developing countries (McKinsey and Company 2016). Despite the significance of all dimensions of supply chain sustainability of the apparel industry, the literature barely acknowledges the perspectives and experiences of developing countries' multi-tier apparel suppliers regarding the implementation of sustainability practices. Scholars also claim that implementing sustainability practices into supply chains is dynamic and contextual, which requires a bottom up theoretical and empirical exploration in a social context (Lim and Phillips 2008; Silvestre 2015; Yawar and Seuring 2017). Against this background, the implementation of all aspects of sustainability must be urgently addressed. Based on an in-depth investigation from the extant literature and other secondary sources, the following discussion introduces the theoretical perspectives and an integrated

framework for governing supply chain sustainability of Developing Country apparel suppliers.

3 Theoretical Perspectives and Framework

3.1 Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical perspective in a research proposal reflects the researcher's theoretical orientation, which plays a role as the filter for focusing and interpreting the data in a qualitative study (Kilbourn 2006; Van Maanen et al. 2007). At present, theoretical perspectives linking the notions sustainability and multi-tier supply chains are few and still in its infancy (Tachizawa and Wong 2014). Several scholars have emphasised the necessity to take opportunity from multiple theoretical perspectives to better comprehend the concepts of sustainability and multi-tier supply chains (Tachizawa and Wong 2014; Wilhelm et al. 2016). For instance, Wilhelm et al. (2016) applied double agency and institutional perspectives to discover the circumstances relating to three case industries (agriculture, tea, and consumer electronics) under which first-tier suppliers will act as agents who fulfill the lead firm's sustainability requirements (the primary agency role) and implement these requirements in their suppliers' operations (the secondary agency role). Since global apparel supply chain is recognized as multi-actors, multi-tiered, and geographically dispersed phenomena, there is a need for an integrated multi-disciplinary perspective to embed sustainability into global apparel supply chains (Quarshie et al. 2016). In doing so, this study aims to employ the global value chain approach, integrative stakeholder theory, and institutional theory as the core theoretical lens. The following sub-sections will attempt to address and justify three theoretical perspectives in relation to research questions, particularly to understand the implementation of sustainability practices into Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers.

3.2 Integrative Stakeholder Theory

The sustainability model is driven by ever-increasing stakeholder expectations for a more ethical, transparent, and responsible role of firms in society (Epstein 2008). However, in the wake of the recent Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh and other human tragedies in developing countries, growing stakeholder demand for the implementation of sustainability practices has extended to the actions of upstream multi-tier apparel suppliers based in developing countries (Huq et al. 2016). Businesses must address demands of major stakeholders who have the potential to damage businesses' reputation in the marketplace (Eweje 2006). This is the key reason why this study employs the integrated stakeholder theory.

Table 1 Different types of stakeholder theory [adopted from Horisch et al. (2014, p. 330)]

Types of stakeholder theory	Focus	Exemplary literature
Descriptive/empirical stakeholder theory	Description of how companies are managed; identification of relevant stakeholders.	Agle et al. (1999), Donaldson and Preston (1995)
Instrumental stakeholder theory	Effects of stakeholder management on the achievement of corporate objectives.	Donaldson and Preston (1995)
Normative stakeholder theory	Discussion of the purpose of business; moral justifications of stakeholder theory.	Donaldson and Preston (1995)
Integrative stakeholder theory	Considers the descriptive, instrumental and normative aspects of stakeholder theory to be inextricably linked.	Freeman (1999), Jones and Wicks (1999)

Donaldson and Preston (1995) differentiate stakeholder theory into three categories—descriptive/empirical, instrumental, and normative stakeholder theory. While normative stakeholder theory attempts to provide the ethical reasons why the firm should take into account stakeholder interests, instrumental stakeholder theory attempts to answer whether it is beneficial for the firm to do so (Donaldson and Preston 1995). In contrast with Donaldson and Preston (1995), Jones and Wicks (1999) propose convergent stakeholder theory, which aims to converge instrumental and normative stakeholder theories. Like convergent stakeholder theory, Horisch et al. (2014, see Table 1) propose integrative stakeholder theory, which aims to intimately integrate descriptive/empirical and instrumental aspects with normative cores of stakeholder theory for “managing stakeholder relationships” (p. 330). Integrative stakeholder theory is relevant since the main concern is to converge all aspects of sustainability.

Managing stakeholder relationships is challenging because of power, legitimacy, and urgency of diverse stakeholders’ sustainability interests (Mitchell et al. 1997). According to Horisch et al. (2014) integrative stakeholder theory is a suitable framework to address challenges for managing sustainable stakeholder relationships through three mechanisms: education, regulations and value creation. Therefore, this approach is employed in this paper to understand the dynamics (sustainability interests, challenges and mechanisms) among diverse stakeholders for promoting sustainability practices into Developing Country apparel suppliers.

3.3 Global Value Chain (GVC) Approach

A GVC approach suggests two network-centric mechanisms (governance and upgrading) that explain how firms can better understand export-based industries’ operations, patterns, and dynamics to enhance overall performance in the connected global economy (Gereffi 1999; Lee and Gereffi 2015). Lim and Phillips (2008) have applied GVC approach for embedding CSR values into buyer-driven global

footwear chains. Buyer-driven chains are characterized by labour-intensive supply industries like apparel, toys and footwear where low cost is a major driver; and brand-owning retail buyers govern how the chains work (Gereffi 1994, 1999). Since the research setting is buyer-driven apparel industry, the GVC approach is useful to explain how Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers are embedding sustainability practices into global supply chains.

One of the fundamental mechanisms of GVC approach is governance, which highlights the top-down approach to integrate geographically dispersed economic activities (Gereffi 1994). According to Ponte and Sturgeon (2014, p. 8), the GVC “governance as linking” perspective focuses on the numerous inter-firm networks that connect suppliers and global buyers at specific junctures. Gereffi et al. (2005) have suggested five types of GVC “governance as linking”: market (arms-length transactions) and hierarchy (vertical integration), along with three distinctive network-types (modular, relational and captive). It suggests that the particular type of GVC governance is influenced by a blend of three crucial dynamics: the complexity of inter-firm transactions, the codifiability of the transactions, and suppliers’ capability to meet buyers’ requirements (Gereffi et al. 2005). Lee and Gereffi (2015) claim that the GVC governance perspective encompasses the “market–hierarchy” dichotomy in transaction cost economics theory (Williamson 1985), and offers a most robust typology of inter-firm linkages. Furthermore, this approach has been connected to a vital concern about how opportunities and unequal distributions of rewards for GVC participation can be confronted on behalf of workers and suppliers (Ponte and Sturgeon 2014). In the context of this chapter, this perspective explains how might implementation of sustainability practices among apparel suppliers be impeded and facilitated.

Another fundamental mechanism of GVC approach is upgrading. GVC upgrading focuses the bottom-up approach whereby it highlights the significance of home-grown embeddedness, particularly the views of local suppliers and workers (Lee and Gereffi 2015). Developing a country industrial cluster and global value chain, the literature suggest that there are three types of upgrading: economic, social and environmental (Gereffi and Lee 2012; Lee and Gereffi 2015). Therefore, the GVC approach is employed in this chapter because it allows the researcher to examine diverse streams of governance and upgrading mechanisms to build a broad, cohesive framework for understanding why and how Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers might implement supply chain sustainability practices.

3.4 Institutional Theory

Recent scholarship suggests that a wide range of powerful factors and institutional actors external to GVC can shape governance through the impact of social or environmental regulations, civil-society campaigns, and third-party standard making (Campbell 2007; Ponte and Sturgeon 2014). Institutional theory provides an overarching framework that explains how firms progressively respond to a combination

of pressures from powerful factors and actors within their institutional field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The process of institutional field converges a set of homogeneous business practices, which become the legitimate way to organize within a social context (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). In the context of this chapter, the main concern is how the implementation of sustainability practices might become legitimate within Developing Country apparel supply firms in response to a combination of pressures from global and local actors.

The legitimacy in the process of institutional field is shaped by three types of isomorphic pressures: coercive, mimetic, and normative (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Coercive pressures are coming from the influence of regulatory authorities through conformity with visibly codified laws (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). For instance, the National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA) acts as a regulatory platform to implement fire safety and structural integrity in the apparel sector in Bangladesh, and could be considered as coercive isomorphism. Mimetic pressures are occurring when organizations seek legitimacy through copying best practices of successful competitors in face of uncertainty. For instance, apparel suppliers may feel pressured to copy sustainability practices of other successful firms when social or environmental failures are reported in the media worldwide. Normative pressures are coming from educational and professional experts, through which norms and behaviours are accepted as legitimate and transferred to individuals. For example, universities, business schools, and networks of sustainability experts exert normative pressures. Thus, these three isomorphic pressures help increase the homogeneity of practices associated with relevant institutions (Scott 2008).

However, Oliver (1991) claims that outward institutional pressures could encourage not only compliance and compromise (also known as isomorphism) but also avoidance and defiance (also known as heterogeneous response). For instance, heterogeneous response may occur when practices do not reflect local circumstances (Scott 2008). As such, institutional theory is valuable to investigate how firms are addressing the diversity and dynamic structures of sustainability practices ranging from micro-local context to macro-global context (Aguilera and Jackson 2003). Therefore, institutional theory allows the researcher to examine why and how apparel suppliers might respond to the influence of the institutional pressures regarding the implementation of sustainability practices, and understand the local ground-level realities concerning apparel suppliers' practices which may differ from social and environmental audited practices.

To sum up, integrative stakeholder theory is useful to address why Developing Country apparel suppliers implement sustainability practices within their supply chains. However, this theory cannot fully address issues beyond coercive pressures (Acosta et al. 2014). In this regard, institutional theory examines how institutional pressures (e.g., isomorphic and heterogeneous forces) influence the implementation of sustainability practices among these apparel suppliers. The main limitation of institutional theory is that the mechanisms of this theory have been considered as implicit tools. That means, it explores why firms adopt behaviors that conform to normative demands but conflict with the rational attainment of economic goals (Suddaby 2006). To overcome this limitation, integrative stakeholder theory allows

instrumental aspects to integrate with the normative core of stakeholder theories (Horisch et al. 2014). Moreover, a wide range of powerful factors and institutional actors external to global value chain can shape governance through the impact of social or environmental regulations, civil-society campaigns, and third-party standard making (Campbell 2007; Ponte and Sturgeon 2014). Furthermore, the tensions between business-driven and multi-stakeholder forms of CSR and sustainability, extend to the transactional level, where the form and meaning of CSR and sustainability remain highly contested (Brammer et al. 2012). With respect to the implementation of sustainability practices into Developing Country apparel supply chains, both integrative stakeholder theory and institutional theory can help to integrate, and better understand the roles and influences of these external institutions and powerful actors (Brammer et al. 2012; Campbell 2007; Horisch et al. 2014; Ponte and Sturgeon 2014). Thus, despite several challenges relating to integrating these three theoretical perspectives, all of them complement each other and have been used as effective tools in the context of sustainable supply chain management. The next section presents an integrated framework based on these theoretical perspectives.

4 Theoretical Framework

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a theoretical framework represents “either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, constructs or variables—the presumed relationships among them” (p. 18). This research attempts to propose a framework (see Fig. 1) based on previously mentioned theoretical perspectives and in-depth exploration from the existing literature.

An integrated theoretical framework for embedding the sustainability practices into Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers is illustrated in Fig. 1. According to the framework, embedding sustainability practices into Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers would be influenced by a confluence of forces/views: integrative view and sociological view. Integrative view is basically composed of instrument and normative reasons that lead apparel companies to integrate sustainability practices. On the other hand, sociological view refers to sustained isomorphic pressures (coercive, mimetic and normative) as well as heterogeneous pressures from multiple global and local institutions and relevant stakeholders that lead apparel suppliers to integrate sustainability practices into their supply chains. The conceptual framework of Seuring and Müller (2008) also suggest that the focal firm passes pressures deriving from external demands such as non-government organizations (NGOs), on to suppliers, with the purpose of encountering the challenging issues relating to supplier risk and performance management practices, particularly supply chain management for sustainable products. Likewise, Luken and Stares (2005) argue that global buyers’ pressure continues to be major factor prompting apparel suppliers’ improvement, usually with specific CSR practices as prerequisite to gain buyers’ orders. Non-governmental organizations’ (NGOs)

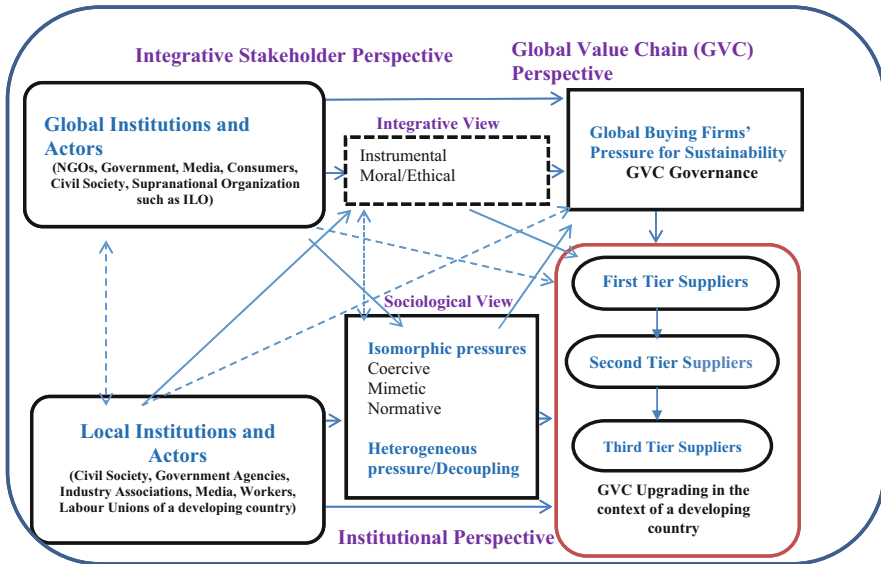


Fig. 1 An integrated theoretical framework for embedding supply chain sustainability practices into Developing Country apparel suppliers

reaction in the form of public demonstrations to poor working conditions is another major factor in advancing the sustainability practices (Huq et al. 2016). Furthermore, the media play a vital role by observing and reporting on social and environmental failures, which sensitise consumers and other stakeholders (Park-Poaps and Rees 2010). For example, with intense publicity regarding the recent Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh by media, sustainability issues in apparel supply chains are becoming better known within the global consumers (Rahim 2016). With the purpose of improving business relations with the key stakeholders, supply firms need to identify these stakeholder groups along with their interests on sustainability issues (Sangle and Ram Babu 2007). Therefore, Developing Country apparel suppliers intend to address sustainability issues and practices into their supply chains due to mounting pressures from a range of major stakeholders such as global buying firms, final consumers, NGOs and the media.

Grob and Benn (2014) investigated the applicability of institutional theory to explain the adoption of sustainable procurement. They found that diverse institutional mechanisms could help the transmission of sustainable procurement such as coercive mechanisms (regulation, public procurement policies and programs, and supplier assessment programs), mimetic isomorphism (voluntary frameworks, environmental management systems, and sustainability programs and alliances), and normative pressures (educational institutions and professional bodies and associations). However, apparel suppliers may face a variety of barriers and enablers towards the implementation of sustainability practices into their production and supply networks.

With regard to barriers, Perry and Towers (2013) pointed out the difficulties of code implementation of Developing Country suppliers in the highly competitive, dispersed and complex nature of the apparel industry. The main reasons behind this obstacle are the confusion among suppliers due to the lack of uniformity across buyers' codes of conduct, increased costs to implement codes, lack of incentives from stakeholders, and lack of workers' training and monitoring. In the course of pursuing economic benefits, faulty social and environmental auditing processes from the part of both third party auditors and suppliers are other crucial barriers to implement supply chain sustainability practices into Developing Country apparel suppliers. Moreover, Developing Country apparel suppliers do not have trust in strong unions as they perceive that they would be disruptive to supply chains and thus weakening corporate control (Anner 2012). Another key barrier is factory workers' lack of awareness about labour rights since they are mostly uneducated (Huq et al. 2014).

On the other hand, the most vital support a supplier can receive as a driving factor is that of the buyer or stakeholder collaboration and assessment efforts (Köksal et al. 2017). Besides, top management and supplier orientation towards sustainability commitment is another key enabler to integrate supply chain sustainability of apparel suppliers (Perry and Towers 2013). Furthermore, the development of one uniform code of conduct among suppliers, including all requirements of various buyers, can be helpful to increase clarity, and ease the supply chain sustainability compliance process (Huq et al. 2014). Thus, this broad framework illustrates the network of complex relationships among global apparel buyers and developing country multi-tier apparel suppliers.

In parallel with this conceptual framework, we develop two propositions related to the interactions between local-focused and global-focused institutional dynamics to embed supply chain sustainability into the network of developing country multi-tier apparel suppliers.

Proposition 1 Vertical governance (a confluence of global institutions and actors) can put pressure on global buying firms to extend sustainability into the developing country apparel supply chains.

Vertical governance represents a chain of buying firms and suppliers in various countries which functions along the global supply chains (Gereffi and Lee 2016). Since the nature of global apparel chains is buyer-driven, Developing Country apparel industry is confined in the "iron triangle" of global brand-owning buying firms or retailers who demand lowest prices with high quality alongside quick delivery (Brown 2011 cited in Haque and Azmat 2015, p. 17). Moreover, most suppliers are often culturally diverse and geographically dispersed, buying firms may be sluggish to maintain and monitor their relationships (Wilhelm et al. 2016). As a result, global buying firms ignore (or decouple) the resilience of upstream Developing Country suppliers as well as the plight of workers and local communities (Jamali et al. 2015). However, companies that bypass their sustainability and CSR goals (for example, by outsourcing their raw materials or finished products from suppliers using child labour) leave themselves exposed to bad publicity, sustained

stakeholder pressures to their activities, and even consumer boycotts (Gray 2004). Likewise, international social and environmental activists often raised their voices against these global buying firms (Taplin 2014). For example, many North American and European human-rights groups raised their voices and argued that Western brand-owning buying firms should be held accountable for Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh (Taplin 2014). Furthermore, international government procurement policies and programs as coercive mechanisms have the potential to put pressure on global brand-owning retailers with regard to promoting sustainability practices along the global supply chains (Grob and Benn 2014).

In fact, global buying firms have a substantial role to execute and ensure sustainability policies and practices in the global supply chains as they are the buyers of Developing Country apparel supplies (Hoskin 2011). For example, because of the increasing consumers' bargaining power as well as sensitivity regarding social and environmental issues and their respective effects on industrial firms in the United Kingdom, normative pressures usually shift along the supply chains from consumers to manufacturing suppliers (Hill 1997). Likewise, numerous multinational corporations face coercive and mimetic isomorphic pressures to meet overt CSR criteria in their operations through membership of business alliances (such as UN Global Compact and Dow Jones Sustainability Index) alongside social and environmental standards (such as International Standard Organization's (ISO) 14000 series, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), SA 8000, Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, EU's Eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS) and so on) via MNC-led supply chains linked in the developing countries of the Global South, where there are weak governance institutions and instruments (Matten and Moon 2008). Therefore, it is expected that vertical governance can put pressure on global buying firms to extend mutually sustainability interests along the developing country apparel supply chains.

Proposition 2 Horizontal governance (a confluence of local institutions and actors) can enable Developing Country apparel suppliers to engage effectively into the network of global apparel production.

Horizontal governance represents home-grown based harmonisation of the economic and social relationships between developing country's industrial suppliers as well as institutions within and beyond their boundaries (Gereffi and Lee 2016). If Developing Country apparel suppliers are not devoted to organize dialogue among local external and internal stakeholders (for example, social and environmental activists, local government, local NGOs, domestic labor union, industry associations, and local media), local communities cannot able to create their voice hard on these suppliers (Garvey and Newell 2005). Lund-Thomsen and Nadvi (2010) conducted a study to explore the tensions that arise between demands for CSR compliance found in many global value chains and the search for locally appropriate responses to these pressures. They also argued that local collective action, expressed through industry associations, can perhaps not only decrease costs but also stimulate home-grown incorporation of CSR initiatives. This study differentiated global value chains in terms of two categories wherein 'highly visible' value chains, directed by

globally famous brands as lead firms and ‘less visible’ chains, directed by less dominant small brands (Lund-Thomsen and Nadvi 2010, p. 10). According to further findings of their study, horizontal governance played a vital role concerning less visible value chains in case of initiation, execution and funding of joint action CSR responses.

In the similar vein, Lund-Thomsen et al. (2016) have recently offered several propositions, arguing that labor rights violations and environmental pollution are extensive in less visible global value chains, particularly Developing Country manufacturers because the dynamics encouraging CSR policies and practices are either inadequately present or entirely absent. The fundamental challenges behind this argument are: non-enforcement of domestic regulations, developing country suppliers’ bribing practices, owners-suppliers’ dominance over local trade unions, small and medium sized suppliers’ lacking CSR awareness/capacity, third-party sub-contracting processes with informal low-tier suppliers, inadequacy of industrial suppliers’ upgrading and governance. Developing Country apparel suppliers alone cannot overcome these challenges, instead with the help of industry associations or private-public partnerships these suppliers can increase competitive advantages by engaging in joint action (Nadvi 1999). Moreover, the development of course curricula within normative institutions such as universities, business schools and technical training institutes can encourage awareness of the significance of high social and environmental standards wherein local industry associations can enable to implant these standards among Developing Country suppliers (Campbell 2007; Lund-Thomsen et al. 2016). Therefore, it is expected that horizontal governance (a confluence of local institutions and actors) can enable Developing Country apparel suppliers to implement supply chain sustainability practices effectively into the network of global production.

5 Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

Based on how discussion, we can conclude that the implementation of supply chain sustainability of apparel industry is problematic, as the supply chain is globally fragmented, with numerous multi-tier suppliers located in developing countries, and thus lacks transparency. As a consequence, many global brand-owning buying firms are struggling with the embeddedness of sustainability into the complex global supply chains, particularly when outsourcing from highly labour-intensive multi-tier apparel supply factories based in developing countries. On the contrary, Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers are facing challenges due to their critical viewpoints towards CSR and sustainability standards as specific control mechanisms since these mechanisms could increase manufacturing costs in the global market (Rahim 2016). While the scholars who investigate these phenomena tend to concentrate on diverse echelons of exploration ranging from global to local level—there is a need for explicit frameworks that displays why supply chain sustainability

matters for Developing Country apparel suppliers, and what mechanisms facilitate supply chain sustainability governance to become institutionalised.

In response to the growing implementation debate, pressures, and challenges over the critical investigation link to the new kind of supply chain governance and upgrading, we have argued that a supply chain sustainability governance framework could be employed to embed mutually sustainability interests into the complex global apparel supply chains. In doing so, this chapter offers two propositions in parallel with this framework, and illustrates the network of complex sustainability relationships among global buyers and Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers across the apparel supply chains. The first proposition is that vertical governance (a confluence of global institutions and actors) can put pressure on global buying firms to extend sustainability into the global apparel supply chains. The second proposition is that horizontal governance (a confluence of local institutions and actors) can enable Developing Country apparel suppliers to integrate supply chain sustainability effectively into their networks of global production. For instance, the Better Work Program (vertical public governance), a partnership between the ILO and the International Financial Corporation (IFC), premises its conditionality on compliance with local labor standards (horizontal local public governance) (Kolk and Van Tulder 2004). Thus, these two types of governance would enable to embed supply chain sustainability practices into Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers.

This study contributes to the business ethics and sustainable supply chain management scholarship in a number of ways: First, based on an in-depth literature review and secondary sources, this study has explicitly conceptualized an integrated supply chain sustainability governance framework for Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers. Researchers have indicated the importance of supply chain sustainability from multi-tier suppliers' perspective; however, explicit models remain relatively unexplored (Acosta et al. 2014; Tachizawa and Wong 2014), and this chapter has addressed this issue. Second, this broad framework provides several useful and timely implications for both academics and practitioners as they are required to have an up-to-date knowledge and insights of implementing all dimensions of sustainability practices in the context of Developing Country multi-tier apparel suppliers' perspective. Finally, this study contributes to policy-making in apparel suppliers of developing countries (particularly, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Cambodia) by providing robust recommendations for improving CSR and sustainability practices of lower-tier suppliers.

Future research endeavors should focus on improving supply chain sustainability governance framework by taking an in-depth look at specific sub-bodies from a research methodology viewpoint, either qualitatively or quantitatively. For example, it can be an exploratory multiple case study design to explore the perceptions and experience of a developing country apparel suppliers including sub-suppliers (suppliers' supplier or second-tier or third-tier suppliers) in an embedded industry or multiple industries. Although it is challenging task for a subsequent quantitative study, testing our propositions against a large cross-sectional data set would allow drawing more generalized conclusions regarding the effectiveness of operating

developing country multi-tier apparel suppliers under the umbrella of the sustainable supply chain management principles. Moreover, forthcoming research is needed to investigate empirically whether apparel supply chain sustainability of the developing world is simply a story of the “Emperor’s new clothes—all appearance, tools of promotion, and little real content” (Jamali et al. 2015, p. 480). Likewise, more attention is required to examine institutional decoupling of CSR and supply chain sustainability in the developing world to govern their salience, dynamics and extent.

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