

THE INFLUENCE OF SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, SUPPLY CHAIN DIGITAL INNOVATION AND BIG DATA ANALYTICS CAPABILITY ON SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN MALAYSIA'S MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Norraeffa Md Taib^{1*}
Intan Liana Suhaime²
Najihah Abdul Rahim³
Suhaida Mohd Amin⁴
Nor Shahrina Mohd Rafien⁵

¹ Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Melaka Kampus Bandaraya Melaka, Malaysia (E-mail: norraeffa@uitm.edu.my)

² Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Melaka Kampus Alor Gajah, Malaysia (E-mail: intanliana@uitm.edu.my)

³ Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Melaka Kampus Alor Gajah, Malaysia (E-mail: najih410@uitm.edu.my)

⁴ Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Melaka Kampus Bandaraya Melaka, Malaysia (E-mail: suhaida294@uitm.edu.my)

⁵ Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Melaka Kampus Bandaraya Melaka, Malaysia (E-mail: norshahrina871@uitm.edu.my)

*Corresponding author: Norraeffa Md Taib, norraeffa@uitm.edu.my

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Abstract: *This conceptual paper develops an integrated framework explaining how sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) practices, supply chain digital innovation (SCDI), and big data analytics capability (BDAC) may enhance sustainable organizational performance through competitive advantage in Malaysia's manufacturing industry. The paper responds to a fragmented literature in which sustainability practices, digital innovation, and analytics capabilities are frequently examined in isolation, while the strategic mechanism that converts these capabilities into multidimensional performance remains insufficiently specified. Following a theory-synthesis approach, the framework integrates the dynamic capability view as the primary explanatory lens with the resource-based view, natural resource-based view, stakeholder theory, and the triple bottom line perspective. The proposed model argues that SSCM practices create efficiency, legitimacy, and relational value; SCDI strengthens visibility,*

connectivity, and adaptive coordination; and BDAC improves sensing, prediction, and evidence-based resource reconfiguration. These capabilities are expected to contribute to sustainable organizational performance when they are transformed into competitive advantages such as cost efficiency, quality, innovation, responsiveness, reliable delivery, and market reputation. Seven propositions are developed, comprising four direct relationships and three indirect relationships through competitive advantage. The paper contributes by positioning competitive advantage as a strategic conversion mechanism that links sustainable and digital supply chain capabilities to economic, environmental, social, and operational outcomes. It also provides a context-sensitive research agenda for future empirical testing among Malaysian manufacturing firms.

Keywords: *Sustainable Supply Chain Management Practices, Supply Chain Digital Innovation, Big Data Analytics Capability, Competitive Advantage, Sustainable Organizational Performance, Malaysia's Manufacturing Industry*

Introduction

Manufacturing firms operate within increasingly interconnected economic, environmental, technological, and social systems. Beyond traditional priorities such as cost, quality, and delivery, manufacturers are expected to reduce environmental impact, protect labour and community interests, strengthen supply chain resilience, and respond to rapidly changing stakeholder expectations. These pressures are particularly consequential in emerging economies, where firms must pursue sustainability while simultaneously maintaining competitiveness, upgrading technological capabilities, and managing resource constraints. Sustainable supply chain management has therefore evolved from a compliance-oriented activity into a strategic approach that integrates economic, environmental, and social objectives across purchasing, production, logistics, supplier relationships, and product recovery (Carter & Rogers, 2008; Seuring & Müller, 2008; Shekarian et al., 2022).

At the same time, supply chain digitalisation has altered how organisations coordinate activities and make decisions. Digital platforms, real-time connectivity, automation, and data integration can improve supply chain visibility and facilitate faster responses to operational and sustainability challenges. Chen et al. (2025) provide evidence that supply chain digital innovation can improve the sustainable development performance of manufacturing firms by supporting innovation investment, continuous innovation, and cost reduction. Big data analytics capability complements digital innovation by enabling firms to collect, integrate, analyse, and interpret high-volume and heterogeneous data. Guided by the dynamic capability view, Rahman et al. (2026) show that BDAC strengthens supply chain sustainability and that its value is enhanced when supported by green supply chain management practices.

Nevertheless, the adoption of sustainable practices and digital technologies does not automatically produce sustainable organizational performance. Firms may invest in environmental programmes, integrated systems, analytics platforms, and digital supply chain initiatives without achieving meaningful improvement because technologies and practices must first be converted into strategically valuable outcomes. Competitive advantage offers an important explanation for this conversion process. It reflects the firm's ability to outperform competitors through cost efficiency, quality, innovation, flexibility, delivery reliability, responsiveness, and reputation. Empirical evidence from manufacturing contexts demonstrates

that competitive advantage partially mediates the relationship between SSCM and organizational performance (Shebeshe & Sharma, 2024).

Research Problem and Gap

Three gaps motivate this conceptual paper. First, the literature remains fragmented. SSCM, SCDI, and BDAC are commonly investigated as separate antecedents of performance even though, in practice, they operate as complementary capabilities. Sustainable practices define the responsible direction of supply chain transformation, digital innovation establishes integrated processes and connections, and analytics capability converts data into decision-relevant knowledge. Examining these capabilities separately may underestimate their combined strategic importance.

Second, prior research often assumes a direct relationship between capability adoption and performance. This assumption overlooks the process through which sustainability and digital capabilities create strategic value. The present paper argues that competitive advantage serves as a conversion mechanism: capabilities generate sustainable performance when they improve the firm's cost position, differentiation, innovation, responsiveness, quality, reliability, and legitimacy. Although Shebeshe and Sharma (2024) establish this mediating role for SSCM, the logic has not been sufficiently extended to an integrated model incorporating SCDI and BDAC. Third, existing evidence is highly context dependent. Studies have been conducted in Ethiopia, Bangladesh, China, and India, among other settings (Chen et al., 2025; Gupta et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2026; Shebeshe & Sharma, 2024). Malaysia's manufacturing industry provides a theoretically important setting because firms operate within export-oriented supply chains, diverse technological maturity levels, growing sustainability expectations, and substantial differences between large firms and small and medium-sized manufacturers. A context-sensitive conceptual model is therefore needed before systematic empirical testing.

Research Objectives

- To integrate SSCM practices, SCDI, and BDAC within a unified conceptual model of sustainable organizational performance.
- To explain how competitive advantage transmits the effects of sustainable and digital supply chain capabilities to sustainable organizational performance.
- To develop theoretically grounded propositions for future empirical testing in Malaysia's manufacturing industry.
- To clarify the theoretical, managerial, and policy implications of aligning sustainability, digital innovation, and analytics capability.

Contribution of the Paper

The paper contributes in four ways. First, it integrates sustainability-oriented and digital supply chain capabilities that have frequently been studied independently. Second, it positions competitive advantage as the strategic mechanism that explains why capability adoption may or may not improve performance. Third, it combines the dynamic capability view with the resource-based view, natural resource-based view, stakeholder theory, and the triple bottom line to provide a multi-theoretical explanation. Fourth, it develops a research agenda tailored to manufacturing firms in Malaysia and other emerging-economy settings.

Conceptual Research Method

This paper adopts a theory-synthesis conceptual approach. Conceptual research seeks to clarify constructs, connect previously separated streams of literature, and develop logically coherent relationships that can guide subsequent empirical investigation. The review was organised around five focal constructs: SSCM practices, SCDI, BDAC, competitive advantage, and sustainable organizational performance. Priority was given to peer-reviewed studies that offered theoretical explanations, empirical evidence, or systematic reviews relevant to manufacturing and emerging economies.

The synthesis followed four stages. First, the core constructs and their conceptual boundaries were identified. Second, recent evidence was examined to determine the strategic outcomes associated with each capability. Third, theoretical mechanisms were mapped using the dynamic capability view, resource-based view, natural resource-based view, stakeholder theory, and triple bottom line perspective. Fourth, the relationships were integrated into a parsimonious framework and expressed as propositions. The paper does not report new primary data; rather, it provides an explanatory model for future quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method testing.

Theoretical Foundations

Dynamic Capability View

The dynamic capability view explains how firms sense environmental changes, seize opportunities, and reconfigure resources in turbulent environments (Teece, 2007). This perspective is the primary theoretical foundation because sustainability pressures, digital disruption, supply uncertainty, and stakeholder demands require continuous adaptation rather than the possession of static resources alone. SCDI and BDAC directly support sensing and seizing by improving connectivity, visibility, prediction, and decision quality, while SSCM guides the reconfiguration of supply chain processes toward economic, environmental, and social objectives. Rahman et al. (2026) explicitly conceptualise BDAC as a dynamic capability that improves supply chain sustainability.

Resource-Based View and Natural Resource-Based View

The resource-based view proposes that valuable, rare, difficult-to-imitate, and organisationally embedded resources can generate sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). The natural resource-based view extends this logic by arguing that capabilities associated with pollution prevention, product stewardship, and sustainable development can become sources of competitive advantage (Hart, 1995). SSCM routines, supplier relationships, sustainability knowledge, digital platforms, analytics skills, and integrated decision processes can be strategically valuable when they are embedded in organisational systems and combined in ways that competitors cannot easily reproduce.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory emphasises that organisational success depends on the ability to create value for multiple stakeholder groups, including customers, employees, suppliers, regulators, investors, communities, and society (Freeman, 1984). SSCM practices are partly motivated by stakeholder expectations for responsible sourcing, lower emissions, safe working conditions, transparency, and ethical supplier relationships. SCDI and BDAC can strengthen stakeholder responsiveness through traceability, timely disclosure, and improved monitoring. Competitive advantage may emerge when stakeholder trust and legitimacy produce customer preference, supplier commitment, regulatory support, and reputational differentiation.

Triple Bottom Line Perspective

The triple bottom line perspective broadens organisational performance beyond short-term financial outcomes to include environmental and social results. In this paper, sustainable organizational performance includes economic, environmental, social, and operational dimensions. This multidimensional view is consistent with SSCM research and avoids evaluating sustainability initiatives solely through financial returns (Carter & Rogers, 2008; Shebeshe & Sharma, 2024).

Conceptual Development of the Constructs

Sustainable Supply Chain Management Practices

Sustainable Supply Chain Management Practices (SSCM) practices refer to the systematic integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations into inter-organisational supply chain activities. They include sustainable procurement, supplier assessment and collaboration, eco-design, cleaner production, resource efficiency, green logistics, reverse logistics, ethical labour practices, and stakeholder engagement. Such practices reduce waste and risk, improve compliance, strengthen supplier relationships, and enhance corporate legitimacy. Systematic reviews indicate that SSCM practices influence both environmental and organisational outcomes, although their effectiveness depends on organisational commitment and contextual conditions (Mugoni et al., 2024; Shekarian et al., 2022).

Supply Chain Digital Innovation

Supply Chain Digital Innovation (SCDI) refers to the development and application of digital technologies, platforms, and digitally enabled processes that change how supply chain actors connect, coordinate, and create value. It includes digital traceability, cloud-based collaboration, Internet of Things applications, automated information exchange, digital twins, and platform-enabled supplier and customer integration. SCDI is more than technology adoption: it involves redesigned processes, decision rights, and relationships. Chen et al. (2025) demonstrate that supply chain digital innovation policy improves manufacturing firms' sustainable development performance, supporting the argument that digital innovation can contribute to sustainability when it enables sustained innovation and efficiency.

Big Data Analytics Capability

Big Data Analytics Capability (BDAC) is the organisational ability to acquire, integrate, analyse, and deploy large and diverse data sets for operational and strategic decision-making. It comprises technological infrastructure, data quality and governance, analytical talent, managerial capability, and routines that translate analytical insight into action. BDAC can improve demand forecasting, inventory planning, supplier risk assessment, production scheduling, emissions monitoring, and sustainability reporting. However, analytics creates value only when it is embedded in decision processes and aligned with sustainability objectives. Rahman et al. (2026) show that BDAC enhances supply chain sustainability and that GSCM practices strengthen this relationship.

Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage is defined as the firm's superior strategic position relative to competitors. In the proposed framework, it is reflected in lower cost, higher quality, stronger innovation, flexibility, responsiveness, reliable delivery, market reputation, and stakeholder trust. Competitive advantage is not treated as a single financial outcome but as an intermediate strategic condition through which capabilities are transformed into sustainable performance.

This positioning is supported by evidence that SSCM strengthens competitive advantage and that competitive advantage improves organisational performance (Shebeshe & Sharma, 2024).

Sustainable Organizational Performance

Sustainable organizational performance refers to the firm's capacity to achieve enduring economic, environmental, social, and operational outcomes. Economic outcomes include profitability, productivity, cost efficiency, and market growth. Environmental outcomes include emissions reduction, waste reduction, energy and material efficiency, and regulatory compliance. Social outcomes include employee wellbeing, ethical sourcing, community impact, and stakeholder fairness. Operational outcomes include quality, delivery, flexibility, resilience, and innovation. Gupta et al. (2025) demonstrate that GSCM practices can support low-carbon performance, sustainable manufacturing, and a sustainable society, reinforcing the multidimensional nature of the dependent construct.

Proposed Conceptual Framework and Propositions

The proposed framework positions SSCM practices, SCDI, and BDAC as complementary strategic capabilities. Each capability is expected to strengthen competitive advantage, which subsequently improves sustainable organizational performance. The model also proposes indirect effects through competitive advantage. The framework is deliberately parsimonious: it focuses on the strategic conversion mechanism rather than incorporating multiple moderators before the core relationships are empirically established.

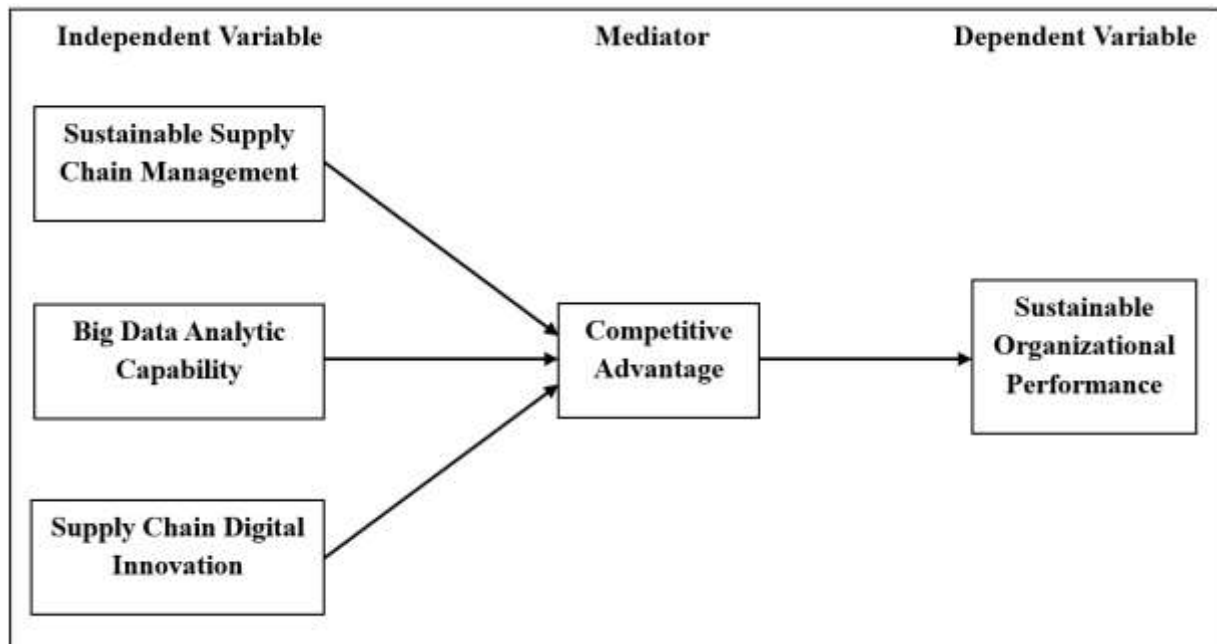


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

SSCM Practices and Competitive Advantage

SSCM practices can improve competitive advantage through cost savings, resource efficiency, risk reduction, quality improvement, regulatory readiness, stakeholder trust, and reputational differentiation. Sustainable procurement and supplier collaboration may reduce disruption and compliance risk, while cleaner production and reverse logistics may reduce waste and lifecycle

cost. Empirical evidence confirms a positive relationship between SSCM and competitive advantage in manufacturing (Shebeshe & Sharma, 2024).

SCDI and Competitive Advantage

SCDI enables faster information exchange, improved traceability, process integration, and coordination across organisational boundaries. These benefits can improve responsiveness, reduce transaction and coordination costs, accelerate innovation, and strengthen customer value. Digital innovation can therefore provide differentiation and efficiency advantages, particularly when digital investments are integrated with business strategy rather than implemented as isolated technologies (Chen et al., 2025; Queiroz et al., 2021).

BDAC and Competitive Advantage

BDAC improves the firm's ability to interpret market, operational, supplier, and sustainability data. Better forecasting, risk detection, resource allocation, and evidence-based decision-making can reduce uncertainty and increase agility. Analytics can also support innovation by identifying new customer needs, process inefficiencies, and sustainability opportunities. Accordingly, BDAC should create competitive advantage when analytical insights are converted into organisational action (Rahman et al., 2026; Waqas & Tan, 2023).

Competitive Advantage and Sustainable Organizational Performance

Competitive advantage allows a firm to capture the value created by its sustainable and digital capabilities. Cost efficiency and operational reliability support economic performance; innovation and flexibility support resilience and growth; reputation and stakeholder trust support social legitimacy; and superior process design can reduce environmental impact. Empirical findings support a positive relationship between competitive advantage and organisational performance (Shebeshe & Sharma, 2024).

Mediating Role of Competitive Advantage

The mediating logic addresses why the same sustainability or digital investment can produce different performance outcomes across firms. Capabilities do not create value merely because they exist. They must improve the firm's strategic position and operating model. SSCM can create performance through efficiency and legitimacy; SCDI through integration and responsiveness; and BDAC through insight and decision quality. Competitive advantage therefore represents the strategic pathway through which these capabilities influence sustainable performance.

Discussion

The framework suggests that sustainable performance is produced by capability orchestration rather than by isolated programmes. SSCM provides the normative and operational direction for responsible supply chain practices. SCDI enables connectivity and process transformation. BDAC provides the sensing and analytical capacity required to interpret complex information. Competitive advantage emerges when these capabilities are combined into distinctive routines that lower cost, improve quality, accelerate innovation, increase responsiveness, and strengthen stakeholder trust.

This argument also explains inconsistent findings in the broader literature. A firm may adopt digital technologies but fail to improve sustainability because data remain fragmented, decision rights are unclear, or sustainability objectives are absent. Conversely, a firm may implement SSCM practices but fail to achieve superior performance because the practices are compliance-driven and do not improve innovation, efficiency, or differentiation. The framework therefore shifts attention from adoption intensity to strategic conversion.

For Malaysia's manufacturing industry, the framework highlights the importance of capability complementarity. Export-oriented manufacturers face buyer sustainability requirements and international standards, while domestic manufacturers face cost pressures, technological constraints, and varying levels of analytics maturity. Firms are unlikely to benefit from a universal sequence of adoption. Nevertheless, alignment among sustainability strategy, digital architecture, analytics governance, supplier collaboration, and competitive priorities should be consistently important.

Theoretical Contributions

First, the paper extends the dynamic capability view by integrating sustainability practices with digital innovation and analytics. It proposes that sensing, seizing, and reconfiguration are not solely technological processes; they are also guided by environmental and social priorities. Second, the paper extends the natural resource-based view by showing how sustainability-oriented resources may be complemented by digital and analytical capabilities. Third, it advances the competitive advantage literature by specifying a mediating mechanism between capabilities and multidimensional performance. Fourth, the framework responds to fragmentation by connecting three capability streams in a single model.

Managerial and Policy Implications

Managers should avoid treating sustainability, digitalisation, and analytics as separate functional programmes. The framework suggests the need for an integrated capability portfolio. Sustainability teams should work with procurement, operations, information technology, analytics, finance, and supplier-development teams. Digital projects should be evaluated according to their contribution to customer value, resource efficiency, resilience, transparency, and sustainability outcomes rather than technical completion alone.

Manufacturing firms should also develop mechanisms that convert capability investment into competitive advantage. These mechanisms include cross-functional governance, supplier collaboration, common data definitions, analytics talent, sustainability-oriented performance measures, and management routines that translate insights into operational action. Competitive advantage should be monitored through measures such as cost-to-serve, innovation rate, response time, delivery reliability, quality, stakeholder trust, and market differentiation.

For policy makers and industry associations, the model indicates that digital adoption incentives should be linked to sustainability and capability development. Support programmes should not focus only on technology acquisition. Training, data governance, supplier integration, sustainability measurement, and change-management capability are required to ensure that technology produces strategic and societal value.

Directions for Future Empirical Research

Future research should test the model using data from manufacturing firms operating in Malaysia. A cross-sectional survey could provide an initial assessment using partial least squares structural equation modelling or covariance-based structural equation modelling. Researchers should sample respondents with knowledge of supply chain, sustainability, operations, digitalisation, and analytics. Firm size, industry subsector, export intensity, ownership, and technological maturity should be considered as control variables.

Longitudinal research would provide stronger evidence regarding capability development and performance over time. Qualitative case studies could examine how firms combine sustainability practices, digital technologies, and analytics routines, while comparative studies could explore differences between multinational corporations, large local manufacturers, and SMEs. Future extensions may test moderators such as stakeholder pressure, government support, supply chain turbulence, organisational culture, top-management commitment, and data governance maturity.

Measurement development is also important. SSCM should capture environmental, social, and economic practices; SCDI should distinguish technology adoption from process and business-model innovation; BDAC should include infrastructure, talent, governance, and managerial routines; competitive advantage should capture both cost and differentiation; and sustainable organizational performance should include economic, environmental, social, and operational dimensions. Mediation should be tested using bootstrapped indirect effects.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper proposes that SSCM practices, SCDI, and BDAC improve sustainable organizational performance through the strategic mechanism of competitive advantage. The framework addresses the limitations of fragmented research by integrating sustainability, digital innovation, and analytics capabilities within a unified explanation. Grounded primarily in the dynamic capability view and supported by the resource-based view, natural resource-based view, stakeholder theory, and triple bottom line perspective, the model explains how firms convert capability investments into cost efficiency, quality, innovation, responsiveness, reliability, reputation, and stakeholder value.

The paper's central argument is that capability adoption is necessary but insufficient. Sustainable organizational performance depends on the firm's ability to orchestrate capabilities and transform them into a superior strategic position. This insight is particularly relevant to Malaysia's manufacturing industry, where sustainability requirements, digital transformation, and competitive pressure are increasingly interconnected. The seven propositions provide a coherent basis for future empirical testing and for managerial action aimed at integrating responsible supply chain practices with digital and analytical transformation.

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