

Social Sustainability in the Supply Chain: A Literature Review of the Adoption, Approaches and (Un)intended Outcomes

Abstract

Purpose - The concept of sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) integrates the environmental and social sustainability dimensions into the management of supply chains. However, our understanding of the management of social sustainability in the supply chain is relatively underdeveloped. This paper, therefore, seeks to explore the adoption, emerging approaches and the (un)intended outcomes of social sustainability in the supply chain as well as supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper systematically reviews 396 peer-reviewed papers on social sustainability in the supply chain published between 1997 and 2020.

Findings – The review identifies and discusses three types of factors influencing the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain: drivers, enablers and barriers. The review also identifies four main approaches to tackling social issues in the supply chain, namely an internal approach (e.g. internal adaptation), a hands-off approach (e.g. supplier switching), a hands-on approach (e.g. collaboration practices) and a relational approach (e.g. justice). The review also reveals that although addressing these issues can generate positive outcomes, it can also lead to unintended negative outcomes such as increased social violations and the perception of unfairness among suppliers.

Originality/value – This study complements the existing literature reviews on the social dimension of SSCM by not only providing an update of the current literature and shedding light on emerging approaches (e.g. justice) to tackling social issues in supply chains, but also by exposing the unintended negative consequences of tackling social issues, a subject that has largely been overlooked to date.

Keywords Arab world; literature review; supply chain; social sustainability; responsible; practices.

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

The production of a particular product by a company usually includes several component parts and services from other companies in the upstream supply chain. With increased globalization and technological breakthroughs, outsourcing to suppliers, especially those in locations previously considered too remote, has become an increasingly popular cost-effective strategy among companies to obtain component parts or services or to manufacture complete products (Locke *et al.*, 2009; Smith and Barrientos, 2005). However, increased reliance on other parties in the supply chain comes with increased responsibility and risk for companies, often raising the costs of outsourcing (Stentoft *et al.*, 2016). Companies are facing enormous pressure from customers, the media, and non-government organisations (NGOs) to take immediate action to address environmental concerns (e.g. the use or production of toxic materials and growing carbon emissions) and social issues (e.g. child labor) in their supply chains (Alghababsheh *et al.*, 2020; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012). Thus, stakeholders now expect focal companies to bear the responsibility for their own environmental and social performance and that of their suppliers (Amaeshi *et al.*, 2008). This has necessitated some redefinition of the supply chain management (SCM) function (Carter and Rogers, 2008) and poses unique challenges that require new and unconventional SCM thinking. As a result, there has been a paradigm shift in SCM research to understand how environmental and social issues can be managed in supply chains. Informed by the concept of the triple-bottom-line (TBL) understanding of sustainability (Elkington, 1998), sustainable SCM (SSCM) asserts that a company should manage and coordinate the flows of material, information, and capital from original suppliers, and within the company, to end customers in such a way that enables simultaneous attainment of environmental, social, and economic goals to meet stakeholders'

expectations and subsequently improve the economic performance of the company and its supply chain (Carter and Rogers, 2008; Seuring and Müller, 2008).

SSCM is now receiving increased attention from scholars in SCM and adjacent fields, as illustrated by the large number of associated publications (Carter and Washispack, 2018). Nevertheless, it is evident that scholars' attention has varied greatly amongst the three dimensions of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. While research (and indeed practice) on the environmental aspect of sustainability has proceeded apace, that on the social aspect has been much slower to emerge and develop (Yawar and Seuring, 2017; Zorzini *et al.*, 2015). The dearth of research on the social dimension of SSCM can be attributed to several reasons that are manifest in the current literature. Firstly, the majority of the social issues of supply chains is perceived to be less important compared to the economic and environmental issues due to the relatively narrow range of their impact (Alghababsheh *et al.*, 2020). Secondly, an implicit assumption widely evident in the literature is that the findings relating to the environmental dimension in supply chains are equally applicable to the social dimension (Huq and Stevenson, 2020; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012). Finally, the lack of agreement on social issues in supply chains, partly due to their nature and fragmented evolution, has also impeded progress for scholars toward building and testing theory of social sustainability in SCM (Ahi and Searcy, 2015; Hutchins and Sutherland, 2008), and has made it especially difficult to explore the relationship between social sustainability in the supply chain and performance.

Despite these challenges, a recent stream of research within the broad SSCM literature has started to develop that is looking more deeply into the social dimension (Yawar and Seuring, 2017; Zorzini *et al.*, 2015). This research has begun to explore the factors influencing the establishment of social sustainability (i.e. tackling social issues) in the supply chain its approaches and its potential outcomes to both the focal company and its suppliers. The recent accumulation and richness of this research and the urgent need to develop an understanding of its current state has motivated scholars to analyze it through review studies. These studies provide a frame of reference for future research on the social dimension of SSCM to advance the associated theory and thus add some balance to the existing SSCM research, which predominately focuses on the environmental dimension (e.g., D'Eusanio *et al.*, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2018; Nakamba *et al.*, 2017; Yawar and Seuring, 2017; Zorzini *et al.*, 2015). However, although these studies have provided timely reviews of the social dimension of SSCM in general and have stimulated new research, they have paid much less attention to the approaches and outcomes of social sustainability (i.e. tackling the social issues) in the supply chain. In particular, a number of emerging approaches (e.g. hands-off and relational) and the unintended (negative) outcomes of addressing social issues have, surprisingly, been overlooked. Moreover, evaluating supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world – a context where serious social violations in its supply chains have been highlighted – has absent from these review studies. To fill this gap and substantially advance the knowledge of the social dimension of SSCM, this review seeks to answer the following questions:

- RQ1. What are the factors influencing the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain?*
- RQ2. What are the approaches to social sustainability in the supply chain?*
- RQ3. What are the (un)intended outcomes of social sustainability in the supply chain?*
- RQ4. To what extent, and in what terms, supply chain social sustainability has been investigated in the Arab world?*

By answering these research questions, we contribute to the SSCM literature in four ways. First, we comprehensively identify the salient factors leading companies to adopt social sustainability in the supply chain, the approaches that are being used to do so and the (un)intended outcomes of tackling social issues in the supply chain. Based on our review, multiple factors (i.e., drivers, barriers and enablers) influencing the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain were identified. We also identified four adoption approaches, namely an internal approach, a hands-off approach, a hands-on

approach and a relational approach. Further, we identified and differentiated the intended (positive) outcomes and the unintended (negative) outcomes of tackling social issues in the supply chain. Second, we complement the existing literature (e.g. Kim *et al.*, 2018; Nakamba *et al.*, 2017; Yawar and Seuring, 2017; Zorzini *et al.*, 2015) on the social dimension of SSCM by not only providing an update of the current literature and shedding light on an emerging approach (the relational) to tackling social issues in supply chains, but also by exposing the unintended negative consequences of tackling social issues, a subject that has largely been overlooked to date. Thirdly, we revealed the extent to which and in what terms supply chain social sustainability has been investigated in the Arab world. Finally, the review developed an important agenda for future theoretical and empirical research on the social dimension of SSCM.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In the following section, an overview of the social issues associated with supply chains is provided, before describing our review methodology in section 3. Section 4 reports the findings of this review. The paper concludes with section 5 where we identify current research gaps and outline important directions for further research.

2. Social issues in supply chains

Social failures or issues in the supply chain represent product- or process-related events or aspects that can have a detrimental impact on the well-being of employees, local communities or customers (Huq *et al.*, 2016; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012). From this perspective, a wide range of social issues can occur in the supply chain. However, consensus on the scope and nature of social issues that need to be addressed by focal companies in the supply chain has yet to be reached (Ahi and Searcy, 2015). This lack of agreement is likely to stem from the fact that social issues reflect society's current baseline expectations for improving human behavior; these change over time and indeed can vary according to the culture(s) in which the company and its suppliers operate (Awaysheh and Klassen, 2010; Hutchins and Sutherland, 2008). For example, while child labor is considered a major violation of human rights in developed countries, it is still considered acceptable practice to support the family in the majority of South Asian countries (Huq *et al.*, 2016; Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen, 2014). Thus, it is more challenging for buyers to tackle social issues related to suppliers located in different cultures (e.g. developing countries) as some are perceived to be ethically and legally acceptable.

The current literature highlights different social issues that can occur in the supply chain, which range from human rights and employment issues (e.g. child labor, freedom of association, fair payment, paid sick leave, paid over time and employee compensation) (Bai and Sarkis, 2010; Forsman-Hugg *et al.*, 2013; Huq *et al.*, 2016; Lund-Thomsen *et al.*, 2012; Robert, 2003; Sancha *et al.*, 2015), to working conditions (e.g. forced labor, corporal punishment, sexual harassment, working hours, health and safety and occupational welfare) (Awaysheh and Klassen, 2010; Sancha *et al.*, 2016; Yu, 2008), to societal/community issues (e.g., local well-being, purchasing from local suppliers and inclusion of marginalized people) (Carter and Jennings 2004; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012), to fair and responsible trade (e.g. paying premium prices, ethnic minority purchasing and female-owned purchasing) (Carter and Jennings, 2002a; Ciliberti *et al.*, 2008; Joo *et al.*, 2010; Maignan *et al.*, 2002; Worthington, 2009), and to product safety (e.g. suppliers using unclean and unsafe raw materials and unsafe use of food additives) (Forsman-Hugg *et al.*, 2013; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012). The extant literature predominantly focuses on human rights and employment issues and working conditions, which might be explained by the fact that these issues potentially have more wide-ranging and profound detrimental effects on human welfare compared to other social issues happening in the supply chain.

Whilst a wide range of social issues can exist in the supply chain, organisations seem likely to choose to address certain issues over others depending on a number of factors. According to Harwood and Humby (2008), individual's values and interests can give the socially responsible practices adopted by an organisation a particular focus in terms of the specific social issues addressed (e.g. labor conditions vs. safety-related issues). Other organisations might instead choose to deal with social issues that have

been raised and seen as critical by external stakeholders (e.g. media and NGOs), given their powerful ability to influence public opinion. Organisations might also prioritize tackling social issues that occur in the suppliers' internal environment (e.g. poor working conditions) rather than issues in their external environment (e.g. supporting local communities) because those in the internal environment might directly affect the suppliers' operations and hence cause supply chain disruptions (Pullman *et al.*, 2009; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016b). Organisations may also be more interested in resolving specific social issues that are more concentrated in their industry compared to other industries. For example, working conditions and human rights are more common, and accordingly receive greater emphasis in labor-intensive industries such as apparel manufacture (Jiang, 2009; Zorizini *et al.*, 2015), while product safety (e.g. safe raw materials) and animal welfare are more relevant to the food and agribusiness supply chains (Forsman-Hugg *et al.*, 2013; Maloni and Brown, 2006).

3. Methodology

This study adopted the systematic literature review (SLR) process, which includes three stages: planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting the findings (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). In the "planning the review" stage, the review questions (RQ1 – 4) have been clearly stated, the search strategy in terms of the keywords and search strings (Responsib* OR Ethic* OR Sustainab* OR Social* AND "Supply chain" OR "buyer-supplier" OR Supplier OR Purchasing OR Procurement OR Sourcing) and the search database were determined, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria were specified (see Table 1).

Table (1): Criteria used in searching the social sustainability research in the supply chain

No.	Criteria	Rationale
1.	The search was initiated using Scopus database.	The Scopus database represents the largest and the most frequently updated (daily) database with over 20,000 titles from different fields.
2.	Only articles published in the English language in peer reviewed scholarly journals were included in the review.	This procedure was followed to enhance the quality of the review (Alghababsheh and Gallear, 2020; David and Han, 2004).
3.	The initial substantive relevance of articles was ensured by requiring the article's title, abstract or keywords to include one of the combinations of search terms illustrated above.	This was to ensure that only relevant papers were included.
4.	Articles that equally consider the three sustainability dimensions simultaneously and those articles focusing solely on the social dimension in the upstream supply chain were included.	This was to ensure that we include all the relevant articles not only those focused exclusively on the social dimension of sustainability.
5.	Articles that only focuses on the adoption, approaches, and/or outcomes of social sustainability in the supply chain were included.	This enables our review questions to be answered, which were framed around the adoption, approaches, and outcomes of the social sustainability in the supply chain.

In the "conducting the review" stage, the aforementioned search strings were used to search article titles, abstracts, and keywords within the Scopus database. This process identified over 14,000 possible documents. Applying the review protocol inclusion/exclusion criteria one and two illustrated in Table 1 led to 8,721 initially relevant papers being retained. Each article's title, abstract and keywords were closely scrutinized to ensure they all contained the prespecified search terms consistent with inclusion/exclusion criterion three. In total, 7,053 articles were excluded following this step, resulting in 1,668 articles being retained. All the articles identified in the previous step were subjected to full-text analysis and evaluation against inclusion/exclusion criteria four and five. Through this process, a further tranche of articles was found not to be relevant and were excluded because despite the search terms' presence they were found to focus exclusively on the environmental pillar of sustainability in the supply chain or do not investigated the adoption, approaches or the outcomes

of social sustainability in the supply chain. Thus, after this detailed evaluation process had been completed, 396 articles remained and were included in the review.

In the final stage, “reporting the findings” stage, the 396 articles were analyzed in two sequential stages as recommended by Webster and Watson (2002). In the first stage, an author-centric synthesis approach was used in which the authors chronologically analysed and presented a summary of each identified article. In the second stage, a concept-centric synthesis approach was used from which a concept matrix was built. Using this matrix, the research on social sustainability in the supply chain was grouped into relevant concepts (i.e. adoption, approaches and (un)intended outcomes), which facilitated the analysis and discussion of these concepts to answer the three review questions. Based on this, a number of research gaps have been identified and subsequently a number of recommendations were put forward for further work. Figure 1 illustrates the review process stages.

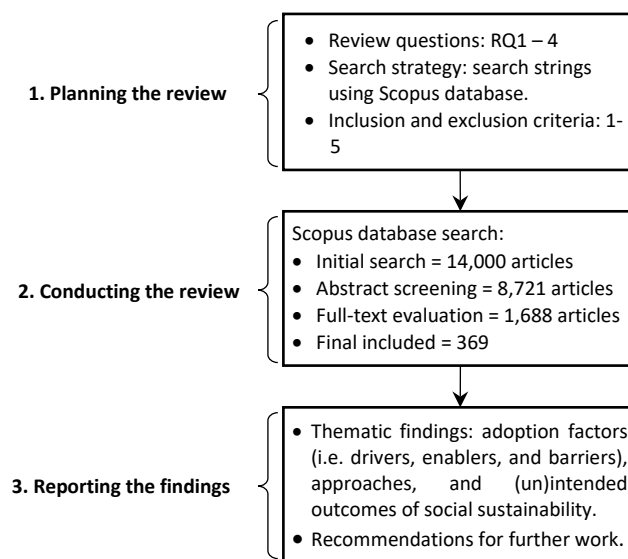


Figure (1): The review process stages

4. Social sustainability in the supply chain: adoption, approaches, (un)intended outcomes and the Arab world

This review was framed to answer four important review questions (RQ1 – 4) related to the adoption, approaches, (un)intended outcomes of social sustainability in the supply chain and the investigation of supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world. Each of these review questions will be answered in the following subsections based on the analysis and discussion of the relevant literature. Firstly, we discuss the research that has explored the factors that influence the adoption and introduction of social sustainability in the supply chain, including drivers, barriers and enablers. Secondly, we discuss the approaches through which companies might address social issues in the supply chain. Thirdly, we discuss the (un)intended outcomes from the implementation of social sustainability in the supply chain. Finally, we examine to what extent supply chain social sustainability has been investigated in the Arab world.

4.1 Factors influencing the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain – RQ1

The factors that influence the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain represent a mainstream area of research that has received considerable attention within the extant literature (e.g. Ehr Gott *et al.*, 2011; Gualandris and Kalchschmidt, 2014; Maignan and Mcalister, 2003; Meixell and Luoma, 2015; Park-Poaps and Rees, 2010; Reuter *et al.*, 2012; Wolf, 2014). The factors identified can be classified into three groups, namely drivers, enablers and barriers to the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain. While drivers represent forces that lead to the adoption of social

sustainability in the supply chain and enablers reflect factors that facilitate such adoption, barriers constitute obstacles that prevent or hinder the adoption.

4.1.1 Drivers

The current research has highlighted the critical role of stakeholder pressure on the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain. A stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives.” (Freeman, 1984; P. 46). Based on this perspective, Schneider and Wallenburg (2012) suggest that stakeholders promoting social sustainability in the supply chain can be both internal and external to the firm. Internal stakeholders including top management with ethical norms (Blome and Paulraj, 2013; Foerstl *et al.*, 2010; Walker and Jones, 2012), middle management in supply functions (Ehrgott *et al.*, 2011; Schneider and Wallenburg, 2012) and other internal employees (Goebel *et al.*, 2012; Mont and Leire, 2009), can all push firms towards embracing sustainable sourcing; however, with varying degree depending on the role and status they hold (Ehrgott *et al.*, 2011). External stakeholders such customers, NGOs, civil society organisations and the media also exert some pressure on companies in this respect. However, the level of pressure that they can have is a function of the resulting impact of their responsive actions to social violations in the supply chain on the involved companies. Customers, through their boycott campaigns and prevailing purchasing power, may force companies to either switch to responsible suppliers or enhance their suppliers’ internal working conditions to adequate and acceptable levels of labor standards (Ehrgott *et al.*, 2011; Gualandris and Kalchschmidt, 2014; Vachon and Mao, 2008). NGOs, civil society organisations and the media, with their predisposition to report (“name and shame”) irresponsible activities at the firm’s or their suppliers’ premises, can also drive companies to enhance the current level of social sustainability in the supply chain (Meixell and Luoma, 2015; Schrader *et al.*, 2012; Wright and Brown, 2013). Different stakeholders may emphasize different aspects in the adoption and implementation of social sustainability in the supply chain (Meixell and Luoma, 2015). NGOs and the media were identified as being more powerful in driving the adoption of sustainability approaches in the supply chain to address the social dimension rather than environmental dimension (Awaysheh and Klassen, 2010). In terms of sustainability practices, managers are more keen to use socially sustainable supplier selection as one of the core practices to manage social sustainability in the supply chain (Ehrgott *et al.*, 2011). However, generally speaking, employees and managers were highlighted as the most influential stakeholders in driving the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; Mani *et al.*, 2016).

While some companies adopted social sustainability initiatives in the supply chain as a response to stakeholders’ pressure, others were motivated to do so to gain some advantages from such initiatives. Potential competitive advantage (Mani *et al.*, 2015), retention of skilled labor (Huq *et al.*, 2014) and economic gains (e.g., increased productivity) are often motivations behind adopting social sustainability (Huq *et al.*, 2014).

4.1.2 Enablers

The adoption of and initiating social sustainability in the supply chain is a challenging task to achieve given the complexity of the social sustainability concept and the amount of resources. The existing research has also explored how the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain can be enabled and facilitated (e.g. Busse *et al.*, 2016; Huq *et al.*, 2014; Mani *et al.*, 2015). From a complexity perspective, taking the perspective of developing suppliers, Huq *et al.* (2014) revealed that establishing an industry-wide code of conduct and a code that reflects the socio-economic environment by buyers can clearly communicate their expectations of social sustainability on the part of suppliers and therefore enable the adoption of social sustainability in suppliers’ premises. From resources and investment perspective, sharing the costs of implementing social sustainability between buyer and supplier can enable its adoption, and is particularly beneficial to those suppliers for whom committing resources to sustainability is largely beyond their means (Yu, 2008). Additionally, Direct incentives from policymakers in the form of tax benefits (e.g. exemption) and extending property

rights can also enable the adoption of social sustainability initiatives in the supply chain (Mani *et al.*, 2015).

4.1.3 Barriers

The extant literature has also explored barriers that impede the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain. It has demonstrated that price pressure and lack of sharing implementation costs between buyer and supplier (Baden *et al.*, 2009; Huq *et al.*, 2014; Yu, 2008), misalignment between codes of conduct and local contexts (Huq *et al.*, 2014), lack of government-led legislation (Gopalakrishnan *et al.*, 2012; Mani *et al.*, 2016; Park-Poaps and Rees, 2010), lack of awareness of social sustainability measures (Mani *et al.*, 2016) and the complexity of the sustainability concept (Busse *et al.*, 2016) are the main barriers to implementing social sustainability. Surprisingly, Mont and Leire (2009) revealed that suppliers' workers can also represent an obstacle since some of the social sustainability requirements are perceived to reduce their incomes (e.g. reducing excessive overtime) or increase their expenditures (e.g. trade union subscriptions).

4.2. Approaches to social sustainability in the supply chain – RQ2

For our review, we define an approach to social sustainability in the supply chain as a set of policies, mechanisms, capabilities, practices, and/or activities through which a focal company seeks to manage and tackle social issues in the supply chain. Our review identified and differentiated four main approaches: an internal approach, a hands-off approach, a hands-on approach and a relational approach.

4.2.1 Internal approach

The internal approach refers to a set of necessary adjustments in the organisation's internal environment to accommodate the requirements and support the implementation of social sustainability in the supply chain (Huq *et al.*, 2016; Kumar and Rahman, 2016; Luthra *et al.*, 2017; Mani *et al.*, 2014). The extant research pointed out two main interrelated practices in this approach, namely: internal organisational adaptations and internal capability development.

The internal organisational adaptations for a successful implementation of social sustainability in the supply chain involves embedding social sustainability in the company and establishing internal and external formal communication routines. The process of embedding social sustainability in the company often begins by fully aligning and integrating a firm's sustainability strategy with its business strategy (Carter and Rogers, 2008; Zorizini *et al.*, 2015) and then building the commitment to manage sustainability within core aspects of the firm's operations (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; De Bakker and Nijhof, 2002). However, this requires defining what social sustainability in supply chain means to the firm and its employees (Gold *et al.*, 2013) after understanding all the various salient stakeholders' perceptions (Leigh and Waddock, 2006; Pagell and Shevchenko, 2014), including the perceptions of suppliers (Leigh and Waddock, 2006; Schneider and Wallenburg, 2012). This therefore requires the development of effective formal communication strategies (Yawar and Seuring, 2017) and knowledge-sharing activities (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2009) with internal and external stakeholders, as they not only help to increase the firm's awareness of social issues (Meixell and Luoma, 2015), but also help to provide skills and capabilities to support the firm's efforts in addressing these issues (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016a). The aim of communication with different stakeholders should not solely be directed towards understanding their expectations, but also to report the firm's efforts to address sustainability issues across the supply chain (Belal, 2002; Perrini *et al.*, 2007). This highlights the need to extend and develop firms' financial annual reporting to include sustainability outcomes (Tate *et al.*, 2010).

The implementation of social sustainability in the supply chain also requires firms to build and develop the necessary capabilities for this purpose and, in particular those of the purchasing function (Leigh and Waddock, 2006; Roberts, 2003; Schneider and Wallenburg, 2012). Improving the skills and capabilities of internal employees is considered to be a crucial aspect of the successful implementation

of social sustainability in the supply chain. In their study of Sainsbury's – a major UK food retailer – Leigh and Waddock (2006) highlighted two types of internal training of employees. The first focuses on providing appropriate information on the basic elements of ethical performance; the second, and most important, provides employees with the information and skills necessary to ensure effective monitoring and auditing (e.g. how performance can be assessed during supplier inspection). Similarly, in their study of IKEA's sustainability program, Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen (2009) reported that the associated internal training program and knowledge-enhancing mechanisms were key to the effective implementation of CSR in IKEA's supply chain. The internal training program covers different areas including production-related social issues, audit procedures, country-specific regulations, and local culture and language. IKEA ensured constant internal knowledge sharing of experiences among the employees within the purchasing department and others, including auditors. This is consistent with Schneider and Wallenburg's (2012) argument that sourcing departments should establish cross-functional cooperation for social sustainability with other departments within their firms.

4.2.2 Hands-off approach

The hands-off approach represents a risk avoidance approach in which the focal company (buyer) seeks to eliminate social issues in the supply chain using practices that require minimum involvement, resources and costs. Our review identified two main practices in this approach, supplier selection and supplier switching.

Supplier selection represents a pre-relationship stage in which the buyer evaluates a number of potential suppliers with the aim of choosing the best candidate(s) based on a set of pre-specified criteria (Ford, 1980). As outsourcing to suppliers has become a popular strategy to cut down costs and focus more on core competencies, organisations are becoming increasingly reliant on their suppliers for the design and production of certain component parts and services (Vonderembse and Tracey, 1999). As a result, supplier selection criteria are designed and developed to ensure the required levels of a supplier's quality, cost, delivery and flexibility performance will consistently be met (Kumar and Pani, 2014). However, to enhance the sustainability of their supply chains, buyers have also incorporated appropriate social criteria into the decision-making process of supplier selection (Ehrgott *et al.*, 2011; Goebel *et al.*, 2012; Luthra *et al.*, 2017; Reuter *et al.*, 2010; Yadlapalli *et al.*, 2017). Unlike other mechanisms (e.g. monitoring and collaboration), supplier selection is considered a more proactive technique to reduce the risks involved in the relationship and help in only selecting suppliers that meet buyer's social performance expectations and requirements (Goebel *et al.*, 2012; Reuter *et al.*, 2010; Yadlapalli *et al.*, 2017).

In the most worst-case scenario, buyers may turn to supplier switching as an option to reestablish social sustainability in their supply chains, thereby terminating relationships with existing non-complaint suppliers with or without prior warning ("zero-tolerance") and searching for alternative, more socially credible and responsible suppliers (Holloos *et al.*, 2012; Porteous *et al.*, 2015). As such, buyers are not willing to work and collaborate with suppliers to address their current social issues and advance their social performance under this option. However, switching to new suppliers may not be applicable or feasible when supplier switching costs are high. Supplier switching costs represent all the monetary and nonmonetary costs (e.g. time, effort, training, knowledge and supply disruption) that a buying firm would incur if it were to leave an established business relationship with a supplier for an alternative (Colwell *et al.*, 2011). Where this is the case, buying firms may shift towards a hands-on approach in which the focus is on driving, creating and building the social sustainability of existing suppliers.

4.2.3 Hands-on approach

Although the hands-off approach can be regarded as a fast and often cost-effective approach to the eradication of social issues and their associated risks, it might not be implementable with all types of suppliers, especially those with whom buyers have strategic relationships and partnerships. Therefore,

buying firms may move towards a hands-on approach in which they allocate time and resources to drive suppliers' social performance through the use of assessment practices (i.e. codes of conducts and auditing) and/or collaboration practices (i.e. supplier development training programs).

4.2.3.1 Assessment practices

Assessment practices refer to those policies, methods, and activities through which a company can guide, audit, monitor, and control suppliers' actions relating to their workplace conditions (e.g. child labor, forced labor, unfair payment and safety) against pre-specified and agreed standards (Alghababsheh and Gallear, 2021; Huq *et al.*, 2016; Marshall *et al.*, 2015; Sancha *et al.*, 2016). In this regard, companies have designed and developed a variety of assessment policies and practices, including codes of conduct, certification, and auditing.

Codes of conduct represent one of the oldest practices, which has been introduced for the first time in 1991 by Levi Strauss and Company in the garment industry, followed by Nike (Murphy and Matthew, 2001), and Gap Inc. in 1992 (Ansett, 2007). A code of conduct represents a set of written baseline guidelines and standards that cover a range of social (and environmental) issues that should be followed by the firm and its suppliers in the supply chain (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; Mamic, 2005). It is drafted based on the values with which the company aims to be associated, and its principles are frequently derived from different sources, including local legislation and international conventions, standards, and principles (e.g. International Labor Organization and United Nations) (Ahi and Searcy, 2015; Yawar and Seuring, 2017). However, codes of conduct have been criticized for being broad and legally unenforceable (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2009) and for not considering in its content suppliers' input and the cultural and economic contexts in which they operate (Ciliberti *et al.*, 2009; Huq *et al.*, 2014; Yawar and Seuring, 2017).

Companies also seek to ensure supply chain social sustainability by demanding suppliers obtain well-recognized certifications granted by high-profile independent bodies (Castka and Balzarova, 2008; Mueller *et al.*, 2009; Sartor *et al.*, 2016). While internationally recognized environmental and quality standards, such as ISO 9001 and ISO 14001, have existed for some time, standards on social sustainability have been advanced but are still somewhat underdeveloped. Lack of agreement on what constitute social issues amongst many different national and industry standards and the inconsistency and confusion caused have led the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) to initiate the development of ISO 26000 as a globally accepted standard for social sustainability (Castka and Balzarova, 2008). ISO 26000's international acceptance was gained by involving different stakeholders from governments, NGOs, industry, consumer groups and labor organisations around the world in a development process that took five years (ISO, 2010). ISO 26000 covers seven interrelated areas including human rights, labor practices, the environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues and community involvement and development (ISO, 2010). Another management system standard that is widely accepted is Social Accountability 8000 (SA8000) developed in 1997 by Social Accountability International (SAI) and based on the International Labor Organization's (ILO) conventions and the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights (Sartor *et al.*, 2016). SA8000 is an auditable set of requirements that cover nine different areas of social sustainability including child labor, forced or compulsory labor, health and safety, freedom of association, right to collective bargaining, discrimination, disciplinary practices, working hours, remuneration and management system (SAI, 2014).

Auditing has also been highlighted in the SSCM literature as another assessment practice that companies can use to address suppliers' social malpractice and thus establishing social sustainability in the supply chain. Auditing refers to "the procedures through which internal or external auditors systematically check whether a supplier is complying with the requirements contained in a given code of conduct" (Lund-Thomsen, 2008; p. 1013). This usually involves a physical inspection of the supplier's facilities, records, and documentation (e.g. timesheets), and interviews with workers (Ciliberti *et al.*,

2008), which can be conducted in various different ways. Buyers may ask suppliers to perform a self-risk assessment (i.e. self-auditing) of the current social conditions at their facilities against predetermined standards (Grosvold *et al.*, 2014; Sancha *et al.*, 2016). Buyers may alternatively request that suppliers initiate an audit of their level of internal social performance using a local independent third-party auditor (Huq *et al.*, 2016). Given the rise in the level of false information regarding the social conditions provided by some suppliers, local auditors and even government officials, buyers may choose to carry out the auditing process themselves by sending their own auditors to inspect suppliers' activities or by employing their choice of third-party auditor (Jiang, 2009; Huq *et al.*, 2016). Based on the results of auditing, buyers may ask non-compliant suppliers to develop corrective action plans detailing areas requiring improvement and timeframes for their execution (Mamic, 2005) and/or impose direct sanctions (e.g. reductions in order volumes), while offering incentives to compliant suppliers in the form of longer term contracts and/or increased order volumes (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen 2009; Pedersen and Andersen 2006; Porteous *et al.*, 2015). The selection of a specific way of conducting the auditing process may depend on its associated costs, the cultural and geographical distance between buyer and supplier, and the availability of trained auditors within the buying firms.

4.3.2.2 Collaboration practices

Collaboration practices are those through which buyers aim to improve the suppliers' capabilities and operations in order to improve the welfare of workers and workplace conditions (Huq *et al.*, 2016; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012). For collaborative practices, buyers work closely and directly with suppliers and other stakeholders in planning and managing suppliers' social deficiencies. Thus, collaboration practices are characterized by a higher level of involvement and investment by buyers, by two-way dialogue between buyer and suppliers, and by a longer term view of addressing social issues compared to the assessment practices (Huq *et al.*, 2016; Gualandris and Kalchschmidt, 2016; Jiang, 2009; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2017).

Supplier training and development has been highlighted as a key collaborative practice to improving suppliers' social performance (Alghababsheh and Galleary, 2020; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012). In supplier development, buying firms often allocate relationship-specific resources such as financial capital, technical skills, personnel resources, technologies and managerial capabilities to a supplier (Gualandris and Kalchschmidt, 2016; Krause *et al.*, 2007; Wagner, 2010; Zhang *et al.*, 2017). Sharing knowledge with suppliers, organising meetings and conferences, awarding suppliers subsidies to obtain third-party certification and jointly developing new products or processes that increase the health and safety of the employees are also emphasized as important socially sustainable collaboration practices (Jiang, 2009; Marshall *et al.*, 2015; Porteous *et al.*, 2015; Sancha *et al.*, 2016).

Recent advances in research have emphasized the vital role of collaboration with non-traditional supply chain actors (e.g. NGOs and civil societies) in the implementation of social sustainability in the supply chain. Although the collaboration with non-traditional supply chain actors who have different strategies, organisational structures, and goals (non-profit) can pose unique challenges (Pagell and Shevchenko, 2014), growing research has highlighted the benefits associated with buying firms extending the collaboration circle beyond suppliers to include such actors (e.g. Gold *et al.*, 2013; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016a, 2016b; Tencati *et al.*, 2008). NGOs can help companies to tailor supplier development programs to match supplier needs, bridge capability gaps, and provide complementary resources to increase the effectiveness of the implementation of supply chain social sustainability practices (Rodríguez *et al.* 2016b). However, to realize these benefits and successfully carry out social sustainability initiatives in the supply chain, the collaboration requires an inter-organisational fit between buyers and NGOs (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2016a). This inter-organisational fit can be accomplished through an alignment process that starts with value logic alignment, then NGO mission alignment, company strategy alignment, and finally company structure and routines alignment. The alignment process can be enabled by the NGO representatives' boundary spanning capabilities, the company's specialized purchasing function or the company's organisational routines.

4.2.4 Relational approach

Emerging, but very limited, research has recently called for new and unconventional effective approaches to address social issues and establish social sustainability in supply chains. This research suggests that relational aspects in the buyer-supplier relationship can be used to reduce social issues in suppliers' facilities. For example, Alghababsheh *et al.* (2020) argue that suppliers' social issues can emerge as a result of unfair purchasing practices and pressures by buyers (such as demands to reduce costs, for shorter lead times and for higher flexibility in order volumes) because such practices can lead powerless suppliers to shift the associated pressure onto their workers in the form of lowered wages, imposing excessive overtime and reducing investment in improving working conditions. Therefore, to reduce the likelihood of social issues, buyers should treat suppliers fairly by delivering equal returns (distributive justice), consistently applying the same relationship procedures (procedural justice) and providing timely information for any changes in the relationship (interactional justice) (Alghababsheh *et al.*, 2020). While Alghababsheh *et al.* (2020) highlighted the role of relationship overall justice on eradicating suppliers' social issues, Boyd *et al.* (2007) emphasized the role of procedural justice in implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, suggesting that more effective implementation processes and thus higher levels of supplier social compliance can be achieved when buyers apply CSR consistently, representing suppliers in designing CSR initiatives, treating suppliers ethically and providing transparency with respect to the information exchanged.

Relationship power and trust have also been suggested as relational approaches to promote and ensure socially sustainable suppliers. For instance, Marshall *et al.* (2016) explored how different relationship-mediated powers (coercive, legitimate and reward) and non-mediated power (expert and referent) held by first-tier suppliers can increase second-tier suppliers' social sustainability. Their data from 156 Irish suppliers showed that only mediated power (coercive, legitimate and reward) increased the second-tier suppliers' social sustainability, which took the form of management system and innovation and strategy practices for social sustainability.

4.3 The (un)intended outcomes of social sustainability in the supply chain – RQ3

The extant literature demonstrated that although tackling social issues in the supply chain can lead to a variety of intended (positive) outcomes to the focal company and its suppliers, it may also lead to a number of unintended (negative) outcomes. To facilitate the presentation and discussion of the intended (positive) outcomes, we divide them into performance outcomes and indirect outcomes.

4.3.1 Intended (positive) outcomes

4.3.1.1 Performance outcomes

The extant research has examined the impact of supply chain social sustainability practices on buyers' and suppliers' sustainability performance (i.e. financial, operational, social and environmental). Two streams of research on the relationship between supply chain social sustainability and performance were identified within the extant literature. The first stream combines environmental and social activities/practices into a single concept (construct). As such, this research implicitly assumes that the activities/practices that are designed to ensure environmental sustainability can be used to establish social sustainability in the supply chain. The second, on the other hand, has exclusively examined the supply chain social sustainability practices/initiatives in order to gain a clearer understanding of its performance implications. The two research streams are discussed next.

The first research stream has sought to link SSCM practices to performance outcomes (e.g. Akamp and Müller, 2013; Carter and Jennings, 2002a, 2002b; Eltantawy *et al.*, 2009; Gallea *et al.*, 2012; Gimenez *et al.*, 2012; Porteous *et al.*, 2015; Wang and Sarkis, 2013; Wolf, 2014). In the early studies in this stream, Carter and Jennings (2002a, 2002b) revealed that purchasing social responsibility (PSR) (i.e., environment, diversity, human rights, philanthropy and safety) improves supplier performance in terms of product quality, reduced lead times, and efficient supply. Akamp and Müller (2013) also showed that environmental- and social-related management activities (supplier selection and

evaluation, supplier development, and supplier integration) improve developing countries suppliers' operational performance (quality, delivery, cost, flexibility and a good service portfolio). However, while this research stream supports the notion that supply chain social sustainability activities (excluding assessment and monitoring activities) can create operational improvements, it showed mixed results regarding their impact on financial performance. For instance, while Wang and Sarkis (2013) found (using secondary data) that social sustainability in the supply chain improves firm financial performance, Gallear *et al.* (2012) did not find a direct relationship using objective measures (sales per employee and profit margin). This stream of research has also reported that SSCM activities can improve firms' sustainability performance, including the social and environmental (Gimenez *et al.*, 2012; Wolf, 2014) and, in particular, supplier training, increased business and public recognition were significantly associated with reduced suppliers' social and environmental violations (Porteous *et al.*, 2015).

A more recent emerging stream of research on the supply chain social sustainability-performance link has questioned how supply chain social sustainability has been claimed to impact performance, arguing that treating social and environmental activities as a single construct creates a theoretical limitation and lack of insight as to whether pursuing only social initiatives in the supply chain can actually pay off (Alghababsheh and Gallear, 2021; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012; Sancha *et al.*, 2015; Sancha *et al.*, 2016). This new stream has therefore started to look exclusively at the social dimension as a distinct construct to gain a clear and better understanding of the associated performance (e.g. Huq *et al.*, 2016; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012; Marshall *et al.*, 2016; Sancha *et al.*, 2015). This research has shown that using collaboration practices (i.e. supplier development) can make observable improvements in the working conditions and compliance with human rights standards in suppliers' facilities (Alghababsheh and Gallear, 2021; Huq *et al.*, 2016; Jiang, 2009; Marshall *et al.*, 2016; Sancha *et al.*, 2015), and in turn improve both the buying firm's operational and financial performances (Marshall *et al.*, 2016; Sancha *et al.*, 2016; Sancha *et al.*, 2015) and its economic performance in terms of market expansion, market preservation (Klassen and Vereecke, 2012) and reduced costs (Hollos *et al.*, 2012). However, this research has thus far reported widely conflicting results regarding the impact of the assessment practices (i.e. codes of conduct and auditing) on performance. For example, Sancha *et al.* (2016) and Alghababsheh and Gallear (2021) found that assessment has no effect on a supplier's social performance, while Lee (2016) and Zhang *et al.* (2017) found that responsible supply chain social practices (monitoring) does drive a supplier's social performance.

4.3.2.2 Indirect outcomes

In addition to performance outcomes, the implementation of social sustainability in the supply chain has been found to achieve positive indirect outcomes at the firm level, including enhancing buying firms' reputations (Sancha *et al.*, 2016), stakeholder relationships (Carter and Jennings, 2002b), employee job satisfaction (Carter and Jennings, 2002b) and learning (Carter, 2005; Ehrgott *et al.*, 2011), and at the buyer-supplier relationship level, increasing commitment (Colwell *et al.*, 2011), partnership development (Gallear *et al.*, 2012), and trust (Carter and Jennings, 2002a).

4.3.3 Unintended (negative) outcomes

While the mainstream literature promotes a "win-win" situation of addressing social issues in supply chains by suggesting that positive outcomes are also realized in addition to social outcomes, a growing but limited literature shows that it may also lead to unintended (negative) outcomes. These can occur at the buyer-supplier relationship and suppliers' workers levels. It was evident from our review that these unintended (negative) outcomes are more prevalent when specific practices are used by buyers to manage social issues in suppliers' operations. Mounting empirical research has pointed out that the use of assessment practices (i.e., auditing, codes of conduct, monitoring and certification), in particular by buyers to improve suppliers' social performance, is frequently ineffective (Locke *et al.*, 2009; Lund-Thomsen, 2008; Jiang, 2009; Sancha *et al.*, 2016; Yu, 2008). The implementation of a code of conduct and threatening non-compliant suppliers is not only ineffective at curbing low-wage payment

and promoting workers' right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, but has increased the scale of social violation actions by suppliers seeking to stay competitive in the marketplace where quality, price and delivery are the main criteria buyers use to grant contracts and orders (Lim and Phillips, 2008; Yu, 2008). Suppliers might largely depend on particular buyers because a significant proportion of their goods are purchased by those buyers. If a powerful buyer threatens to switch to a different supplier who can adopt costly social sustainability practices, the potential consequences of losing the buyer might be more detrimental to the supplier than if it accepted investment in these practices (Alghababsheh *et al.*, 2020). A powerless supplier may then seek to reduce the extra costs generated by social sustainability requirements (e.g. certification) by passing the associated costs on to its workers by eroding their welfare, reducing investments in working conditions, or even by employing child labor in its facilities (Alghababsheh *et al.*, 2020; Awaysheh and Klassen, 2010; Jiang, 2009). Thus, the assessment and monitoring practices seem to cause more harm than good and in turn can backfire in the form of opportunistic behavior on the part of suppliers (Jiang, 2009). The use of assessment-based governance has also been shown to create a perception of inequity by suppliers (given that suppliers usually bear the majority of costs of these practices), which can lead to non-compliance (Normann *et al.*, 2017) or purely symbolic compliance (e.g. suppliers have two sets of timesheets) (Huq *et al.*, 2014).

4.4 Supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world – RQ4

The Arab world setting was almost absent from the current empirical studies on social sustainability in the supply chain until recently. A handful of studies have recently examined supply chain social sustainability in this setting with a particular focus on understanding the adoption, approaches and outcomes. However, the approaches and outcomes of social sustainability in the supply chain have received relatively less attention compared to the adoption aspect.

Different motivations for adopting supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world have been examined and highlighted including, meeting customers' expectation and demands (Hussain *et al.*, 2018), media and reputation (Khan *et al.*, 2018a) and improving business performance (Hussain *et al.*, 2018). However, adopting social sustainability in the supply chain might be impeded by a variety of barriers such as lack of incentives and support (Al-Esmael *et al.*, 2019), lack of coordination among supply chain members (Hussain *et al.*, 2018) and differences in culture and regulatory environment between buyers and suppliers (Zayed and Yaseen, 2020). However, top management support (Al Nuaimi *et al.*, 2020), change management (Hussain *et al.*, 2018) and sharing the cost among supply chain partners (Al-Esmael *et al.*, 2019) can enable and facilitate the adoption and implementation of supply chain social sustainability.

A limited range of approaches to and outcomes of supply chain social sustainability have been explored in the current literature. The hands-off approach, and in particular, supplier selection practice was the main focus in the extant literature, while the economic performance outcome of supply chain social sustainability was the main. In their study of major service firms in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Hussain and Al-Aomar (2018) found that sustainable supply selection in terms of social responsibility can drive firm's competitiveness and economic performance. Similarly, in the context of UAE, Thornton *et al.* (2013) revealed that firms implement socially responsible supplier selection can enjoy financial advantages. Khan *et al.* (2018b) extended this and showed that sustainable supply chain can advance environmental and social performance. This was supported in the context of Egypt by Mamdouh *et al.* (2018) who uncovered that social supply chain practices can increase the economic, environmental, and operational performance.

5. Conclusions and future research

The aim of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of three important aspects of managing social sustainability in the supply chain: adoption, approaches and (un)intended outcomes, as well as supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world. Four review questions (RQ1-4) covering

these aspects were put forward, and subsequently, a systematic literature review was undertaken to answer them. In total, 396 papers published in peer-reviewed journals were identified and have been analyzed. The findings of our review of social sustainability in the supply chain research were used to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework of the adoption, approaches, and (un)intended outcomes of tackling social issues in supply chains (see Figure 2). The framework suggests that stakeholder pressure and various enablers positively drive firms to tackle social issues in their supply chains, while a set of barriers may hinder these efforts. As for the approaches, the framework suggests that a firm’s journey towards addressing social issues in the supply chain often begins by adopting an “internal approach”, thereby making necessary adaptations and changes within the firm to accommodate the requirements and support the implementation of social sustainability. These adaptations include aligning and integrating the firm’s sustainability strategy with its business strategy and embedding social sustainability into the core aspects of the firm’s operations. Internal adaptations also include building and developing the necessary capabilities and skills of the firm’s purchasing department and establishing a communication strategy to report and disclose its social sustainability activities in the supply chain to stakeholders. The framework also proposes that using a “hands-off approach” in which firms strengthen the supplier selection process by incorporating appropriate social standards in addition to the conventional criteria (e.g., cost, quality and delivery), and switch to more responsible suppliers, can eliminate social issues in supply chains. The framework also argues that using the “hands-on” approach, and in particular collaborative practices (e.g. supplier development), can help to address suppliers’ social deficiencies. It also reveals that relational aspects in the buyer-supplier relationship such as justice, power, and trust can be used to improve social issues in suppliers’ workplaces. Finally, the framework acknowledges that tackling social issues in the supply chain can lead to both intended (positive) outcomes, in the form of improved sustainability performance and indirect outcomes (e.g. improved reputation), but also unintended (negative) outcomes (e.g., increased social violations and the perception of unfairness).

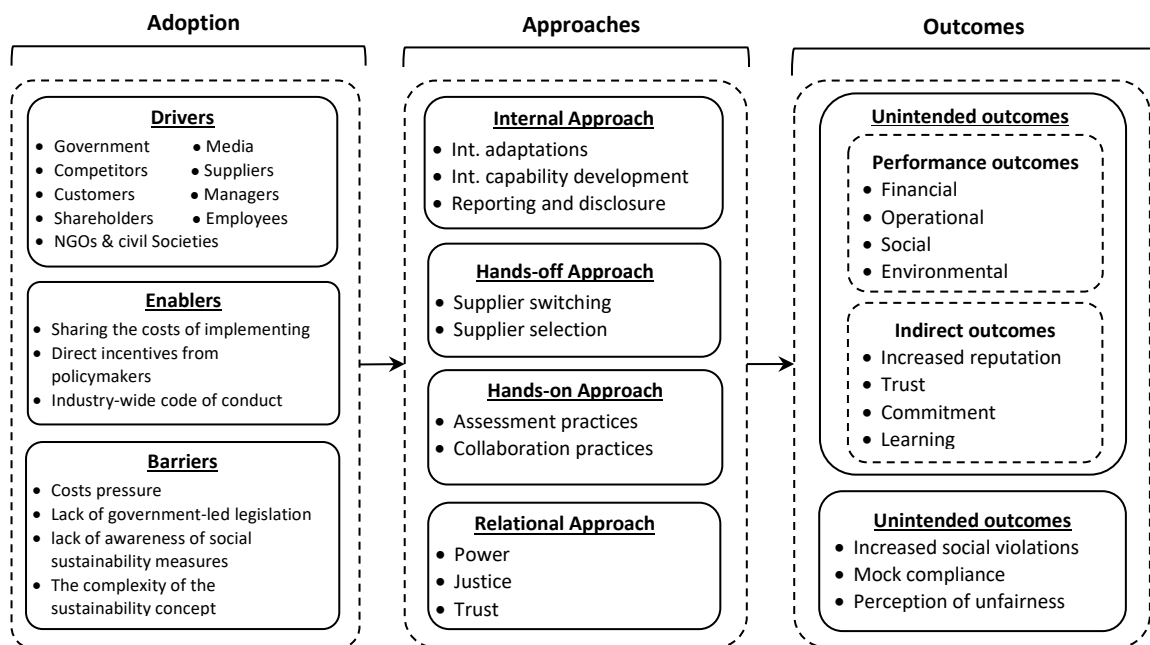


Figure (2): A conceptual framework of the adoption, approaches and outcomes of tackling social issues in the supply chain

The remainder of this section presents salient gaps observed in the extant literature relating to the adoption, approaches, and outcomes of tackling social issues in the supply chain and supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world and develops important directions for future research.

5.1 Future research regarding adoption

Although the existing research has explored several factors influencing the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain, there is a lack of understanding of the nature of the relationships among these factors. Specifically, we know little about which factors influence (or cause) other factors and, indeed, whether these factors have bidirectional causal links. Identification of the direct and indirect relationships between the factors would help to describe the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain more accurately than simply recognizing the individual factors in isolation. One could, therefore, use the interpretive structural modelling (ISM) approach to explore the relationships between these factors (for a guide, see Attri *et al.*, 2013). The ISM approach enables the identification of the causal links and interdependence between the factors influencing the adoption and implementation of social sustainability in the supply chain. The ISM approach could not only provide insights into the causal relationships between factors, but also help in developing a hierarchy of the factors based on their significance (Janes, 1988). This hierarchy or ranking could specify the relative importance of different factors as drivers and the dependent or independent factors. This would not only assist future scholars to select the relevant factors for further model development and validation, but also help to identify the significant factors (i.e. barriers and enablers) that practitioners need to manage to effectively create social sustainability in the supply chain through better planning and allocation of available resources.

Among the factors (i.e. drivers, enablers and barriers) that influence the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain, the barriers have received far less scholarly attention in the extant research. When considering firm size and the side of the buyer-supplier relationship, the perspectives of suppliers and small- and-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), who often lack the required capabilities, instruments, or resources, when it comes to investigating the barriers to the adoption of social sustainability in the supply chain has received comparatively little attention. In particular, the perspective of suppliers in developing countries, where we witnessed an increasing number of social issues in recent years (e.g. Raza Building), is largely absent in the current literature. Therefore, more in-depth research (e.g. case study) would be warranted to explore the barriers that suppliers and SMEs, including those in developing countries, encounter in pursuing social sustainability in the supply chain.

5.2 Future research regarding the approaches

The traditional governance view of social sustainability in the supply chain emphasizes the use of assessment and collaboration practices to generate supplier social compliance (Lund-Thomas and Lindgreen, 2014; Soundararajan and Brown, 2016). However, it was observed from our review that assessment practices (e.g., codes of conduct and auditing), in particular, are less effective to drive suppliers to sustain improvements in working conditions and living standards (Lund-Thomas and Lindgreen, 2014; Sancha *et al.*, 2016), and may lead to increased social violations by suppliers and/or opportunistic behavior (Jiang 2009; Lim and Phillips, 2008; Yu, 2008). Although the literature is more optimistic regarding the effectiveness of collaborative practices, growing research has revealed that some of its characteristics have hindered its widespread implementation (e.g. Lund-Thomas and Lindgreen, 2014). For example, the collaboration practices are costly, implemented with few suppliers and need comparatively longer time to establish, implement and achieve the expected outcomes (Alghababsheh *et al.*, 2020; Grosvold *et al.*, 2014; Klassen and Vereecke, 2012). Therefore, an important future research priority should be to identify and examine the conditions and circumstances under which the monitoring and collaboration practices, respectively, are more effective. For instance, it would be prudent to explore how relational aspect (e.g., social capital and justice) in the buyer-supplier relationship might moderate the relationship between assessment and collaboration practices and performance. It would also be prudent to explore how the 'quality' of suppliers' institutional environments (e.g. the level of corruption, enforcement of law, etc.) might moderate the relationship between social sustainability practices and suppliers' social performance. It might be

expected that 'low quality' institutional environments would undermine the effectiveness of using assessment practices and collaboration practices to address suppliers' social deficiencies.

The extant literature has extended the application of conventional practices (i.e. supplier selection and supplier development) into the context of social sustainability in the supply chain seeking to embed an acceptable level of sustainability performance in the supply chain. Although this has advanced our understanding of the different alternatives to eliminating suppliers' social issues, it has also been noted that this may not create true SSCM (Pagell and Shevchenko, 2014). Recently emerging but limited literature has pointed out that relational aspects such as relationship justice (Alghababsheh *et al.*, 2020) and power (Marshall *et al.*, 2016) might be more effective at tackling suppliers' social violations. More research effort is therefore needed to develop new alternative, more effective approaches that go beyond the existing conventional practices that were originally developed to achieve operational improvement rather than sustainability performance (Pagell and Shevchenko, 2014). Such approaches must, of course, be closely linked to the prevailing purchasing practices in the buyer-supplier relationship and the suppliers' institutional environment. However, scientific domains that draw from within themselves for extensions of concepts are inclined to become more insular over the years, reducing the likelihood that novel solutions will emerge (George *et al.*, 2008). SSCM scholars are therefore encouraged to adopt "knowledge recombination" as a way of generating new ideas to develop novel approaches to addressing social issues in the supply chain. Through "knowledge recombination" scholars may be more likely to generate new and creative solutions, by looking outside the field of SCM and building bridges with adjacent disciplines (Colquitt and George, 2011); for example, one could explore how the concept of psychological contract in the human resource management field could be used to develop a new governance approach for social sustainability in the supply chain.

5.3 Future research regarding outcomes

Although the measurement of supply chain social performance has been highlighted as one of the main challenges facing the progress of research on the social dimension of SSCM (Alghababsheh *et al.*, 2020), there has been handful studies that attempted to develop measurement methods and metrics. However, a real consensus on a commonly agreed set of metrics that would allow supply chain social performance to be appropriately and adequately captured has yet to be reached. Moreover, although a few studies have proposed different possible metrics (e.g. Hutchins and Sutherland, 2008), these are either limited to a relatively small number of social issues, are mainly quantitative, or are quite broad and do not account for the contexts (e.g. socio-economic, institutional, cultural) in which suppliers, particularly in developing countries, work. For example, several stipulations in the SA8000 standard clearly reflect Western values which, it has been argued, are incompatible with situations in developing countries (Ciliberti *et al.*, 2009). Our review also noted that certain social issues are more likely to occur in specific industries than others. Therefore, more research is needed to both incorporate qualitative and quantitative metrics into a single holistic model for overall guidance, and to develop context-based metrics (e.g. based on industry or culture) to provide more accurate measurement of social performance in the context of specific supply chains.

Our review revealed that the potential (un)intended (negative) outcomes may accrue from addressing social issues in supply chains have received scant attention. The implementation of certain approaches to social sustainability in the supply chain may create tensions in buyer-supplier relationships and collaborative relationships for social sustainability that include non-traditional supply chain actors such as NGOs. For example, to meet stakeholders' expectations of free social issues supply chains, buyers may request that suppliers invest and expend costs on certification, auditing, and improving health and safety in the workplace, whilst simultaneously demanding constant price reductions, reduced lead times, and higher quality component parts. This in turn may lead to suppliers' perception of exploitation and unfairness. Therefore, there is an urgent need for in-depth exploratory work to investigate whether specific approaches to tackling social issues (e.g. assessment and monitoring) can

lead to unexpected or even detrimental consequences in the relationship such as conflict, relationship dissolution and opportunistic behavior. These possible negative outcomes could be explored as possible mediating variables to better explain and understand why, for example, assessment practices do not always translate into positive social compliance and performance. While tensions for suppliers are more likely to emerge when assessment practices are implemented, tensions for buyers may arise when collaborative practices are implemented as these types of practice are likely to require higher levels of asset-specific investments, and hence initially at least will be accompanied by a higher perceived level of risk and uncertainty. Thus, further insights can be gained by exploring the unintended negative consequences of collaboration practices as this type of practices require not only allocation of resources but also some adaptations by both partners. Furthermore, research suggests that tension and conflict are more likely to occur in collaborative relationships as the number of partners increases and when they have incongruent goals (Alvarez *et al.*, 2010). Thus, another promising research opportunity is to investigate the tensions and challenges that may arise when buyers collaborate with non-traditional supply chain actors to manage suppliers' social issues.

5.4 Future research on supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world

The overall emerging picture from our review is that very limited studies have delved into and explored supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world. While growing number of studies have very recently examined the management supply chain social sustainability in some Arab states, our understanding of supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world is still underdeveloped.

In terms of the research context (i.e. country and industry) of the current studies, we observed that the majority has been conducted in one state (UAE) of the 22 Arab states, and therefore, we should be caution regarding the conclusions we draw on supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world at this stage. More valid conclusions can be made when empirical evidence accumulates in volume and across the Arab world. Future research should aim to expand the empirical setting across the Arab states in the Arabian Gulf, Asia, and north Africa (i.e. Egypt, Libya, Tunis, Algeria and Morocco). As for the industry context, the current studies have primarily focused on health care industry. Surprisingly, the intensive-labour industries (i.e. garment and construction), where social issues are more likely to emerge, have received limited empirical examination.

In terms of the methodological approach, the cross-sectional survey design is the dominated approach in the existing studies. While this approach allows for large-scale investigation and thus more generalisable results, the longitudinal case study design allows for gaining more in-depth insights and capturing the dynamics and evolution of supply chain social sustainability. Moreover, the perspective of a single side of the buyer-supplier relationship was the only data collection design used in the current literature. A dyadic perspective (both the buyer and the supplier) can help in understanding the implementation of social sustainability approaches in supply chains. Furthermore, the majority of the research examined supply chain social sustainability in domestic buyer-supplier relationships. Thus, we know little about how social sustainability in the supply chain can be managed in cross-cultural buyer-supplier relationships with one side of the relationship (the buyer or the supplier) being located in the Arab world.

In terms of the adoption, approaches, and outcomes of social sustainability in the supply chain, the extant literature has predominately focused on the factors influencing the adoption including, motivations (e.g. Hussain *et al.*, 2018), enablers (Al-Esmael *et al.*, 2019) and barriers (e.g. Khan *et al.*, 2018). This may reflect the infancy stage of supply chain social sustainability in the Arab world research. More research is required to look at the applicability of the conventional approaches and practices (e.g. collaboration) in the context of Arab states and if they can make progress towards social sustainability in the supply chain. Another fruitful opportunity for future research is to examine the impact of supply chain social sustainability initiatives on outcomes beyond the organisational level such as individual(employees) outcomes (e.g. motivation and organisational identification).

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