



The Relationships between Stakeholder Pressure, Organizational Motives, and Organizational Learning in the Context of Green Innovation Adoption in SMEs in Thailand: The Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

This study presents a conceptual framework illustrating the dynamic interplay between stakeholder pressure, organizational learning, and organizational motives in driving green innovation adoption within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Thailand. Recognizing the multifaceted and intensifying influence of regulatory, competitive, and customer pressures, this framework explores how these external forces interact with internal organizational factors, shaping organizational motives and learning, which, in turn, drive sustainable innovation adoption. By positioning organizational learning and motives as key mediators, the framework identifies key mechanisms through which Thai SMEs can strengthen their sustainability strategies, enhance innovation capabilities, and respond effectively to environmental challenges. It offers valuable insights for business leaders, policymakers, and sustainability advocates seeking to drive green innovation through leveraging stakeholder influence and cultivating a learning culture. This research contributes to the literature on green innovation by emphasizing the interconnected role of external pressures and internal enablers in advancing environmental sustainability, business resilience, and long-term competitiveness of SMEs.

Keywords: Green Innovation Adoption, Stakeholder Pressure, Organizational Learning, Organizational Motives, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Introduction

The growing urgency of environmental sustainability has positioned green innovation as a crucial strategy for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Dangelico & Pujari, 2010). In Thailand, where SMEs account for 99% of businesses and employ the majority of the workforce, understanding the drivers and barriers to green innovation is essential for fostering sustainable business transformation—an imperative for future growth and alignment with global sustainability trends (Paweenawat & Korwatanasakul, 2020). Despite regulatory pressures and rising market demand, many SMEs face challenges



in adopting green practices due to resource limitations, strategic misalignment, and restricted organizational learning capabilities (Takalo, Tooranloo, & Parizi, 2021).

Stakeholder pressure—from regulators, competitors, and customers—plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational motives and learning, thereby influencing green innovation adoption (Soewarno, Tjahjadi, & Fithrianti, 2019). While prior studies have explored stakeholder pressure and green innovation (Shahzad, Qu, Ur Rehman, Ding, & Razzaq, 2023; Wang et al., 2021), limited research has examined how these external forces interact with internal mechanisms such as organizational motives and learning, particularly within Thai SMEs. Addressing this gap, the present study proposes a conceptual framework that integrates both external pressures and internal enablers, offering practical insights to strengthen SME competitiveness, enhance resilience, and advance environmental sustainability in Thailand's evolving business landscape.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to examine the influence of stakeholder pressure, organizational motives, and organizational learning on the adoption of green innovation among SMEs in Thailand. The two objectives are as follows:

1. To review the literature on stakeholder pressure (regulatory, competitive, and customer), organizational motives, and organizational learning as key drivers of green innovation adoption in SMEs in Thailand.
2. To propose a conceptual framework illustrating the relationships between stakeholder pressure, organizational motives, and organizational learning in the context of green innovation adoption.

Literature Review

This section reviews the literature on stakeholder pressure, organizational motives, and organizational learning in relation to green innovation adoption among SMEs in Thailand. It examines existing studies that explore the influence of external and internal factors on green innovation adoption in businesses, highlighting key theoretical constructions and empirical findings. Additionally, this section identifies the core variables, develops research hypotheses, and proposes a conceptual framework for the present study.

Green innovation adoption

Green innovation adoption is increasingly vital for SMEs striving to balance economic growth with environmental responsibility. Chen, Lai, & Wen (2006) define green innovation as the development and application of eco-friendly products, processes, and technologies that minimize environmental impact while sustaining business competitiveness. However, despite its benefits, many SMEs face adoption challenges due



to resource constraints, strategic misalignment, and knowledge gaps, limiting their ability to implement sustainable practices effectively (Takalo et al., 2021). Effective stakeholder engagement and strong organizational learning play a crucial role in bridging these gaps, equipping SMEs with the knowledge, resources, and strategic direction needed to integrate green innovation into their business models. By fostering collaborative networks, enhancing regulatory compliance, and driving continuous improvement, SMEs can overcome sustainability barriers, strengthen their market position, and build long-term resilience in an increasingly eco-conscious economy.

Stakeholder Pressure

Stakeholder pressure is a key driver of green innovation adoption among SMEs, particularly as they respond to growing environmental challenges and sustainability demands. Wang et al. (2021) identify three primary forms of stakeholder pressure: regulatory pressure, which mandates compliance with environmental policies and sustainability standards; competitive pressure, where firms integrate green practices to maintain market relevance and gain a strategic edge; and customer pressure, driven by increasing demand for eco-friendly products, corporate transparency, and responsible business operations. These external pressures push organizations to adopt a more sustainable and environmentally friendly approach as well as influence organizational motives and learning, determining how SMEs internalize sustainability goals and develop green innovation strategies. By proactively addressing stakeholder expectations, SMEs can enhance sustainability performance, foster trust among stakeholders, and strengthen long-term competitive positioning in an increasingly eco-conscious market.

Organizational Motive

Organizational motive plays a critical role in driving green innovation adoption among SMEs, shaping their commitment to sustainability and approach to innovation. Motivations for adopting green practices vary, with Shahzad et al. (2023) categorizing them into instrumental, relational, and moral motives. Instrumental motives focus on profitability, competitive advantage, and regulatory compliance, pushing firms to adopt sustainability as a strategic opportunity. Relational motives stem from the need to build strong stakeholder relationships, enhance corporate reputation, and align with industry expectations, making green innovation a tool for business credibility and trust. Moral motives arise from a genuine commitment to environmental responsibility, where businesses prioritize sustainability as an ethical obligation rather than a market-driven necessity. Beyond influencing green innovation adoption, organizational motive acts as a mediator between stakeholder pressure and green innovation, determining how SMEs internalize and respond to external demands. However, the extent to which SMEs adopt green innovation depends on how these pressures are internalized through organizational



motives. By fostering strong sustainability-driven motives, SMEs can translate regulatory, competitive, and customer pressures into initiative-taking green innovation strategies, ensuring both compliance and long-term resilience in an increasingly eco-conscious business environment.

Organizational Learning

Organizational learning is a key driver of green innovation adoption among SMEs, shaping their ability to adapt, innovate, and respond to sustainability challenges. It involves knowledge acquisition, experience-based learning, and continuous improvement, enabling businesses to integrate eco-friendly practices and comply with evolving regulations (Argote, Lee, & Park, 2021). SMEs that actively engage in learning processes, such as collaborating with industry experts, adopting best practices, and leveraging sustainability knowledge, are better equipped to implement green innovation strategies. Furthermore, organizational learning acts as a mediator between stakeholder pressure and green innovation adoption, influencing how SMEs interpret and internalize external demands. While regulatory, competitive, and customer pressures create incentives for sustainability, firms with strong learning capabilities transform these pressures into actionable strategies, ensuring both compliance and long-term environmental responsibility. By fostering a culture of continuous learning, SMEs can enhance their innovation capacity, improve operational efficiency, and strengthen their competitive position in an increasingly eco-conscious market.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing a literature review to examine the influence of stakeholder pressure, organizational motives, and organizational learning on the adoption of green innovation among SMEs in Thailand. Peer-reviewed articles were identified through searches in scholarly databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using targeted keywords aligned with the research objectives. From an initial pool of 219 articles in top-tier international journals between 2006 to 2024, 35 studies were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria: English language articles directly relevant to the research objectives. To strengthen the rigor of the review process, thematic synthesis was employed to analyze the selected studies. Key themes and recurring patterns were identified and organized under the core constructs of stakeholder pressure, organizational motives, and organizational learning. In addition, a comparative and critical synthesis was conducted to deepen academic insight and provide a more nuanced understanding of the interrelationships among these variables within the proposed framework. The findings from the synthesis informed the development of the conceptual framework and guided the formulation of research hypotheses for this study.

Results

Based on the literature review on the interrelationships between key variables, Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework developed for this study. The proposed model examines the influence of stakeholder pressure on organizational motives and organizational learning, which in turn drive the adoption of green innovation among SMEs in Thailand. By offering a comprehensive perspective on the factors shaping green innovation adoption, this framework offers strategic insights into how SMEs can respond to sustainability demands, thereby enhancing their competitiveness and resilience in an increasingly dynamic market environment.

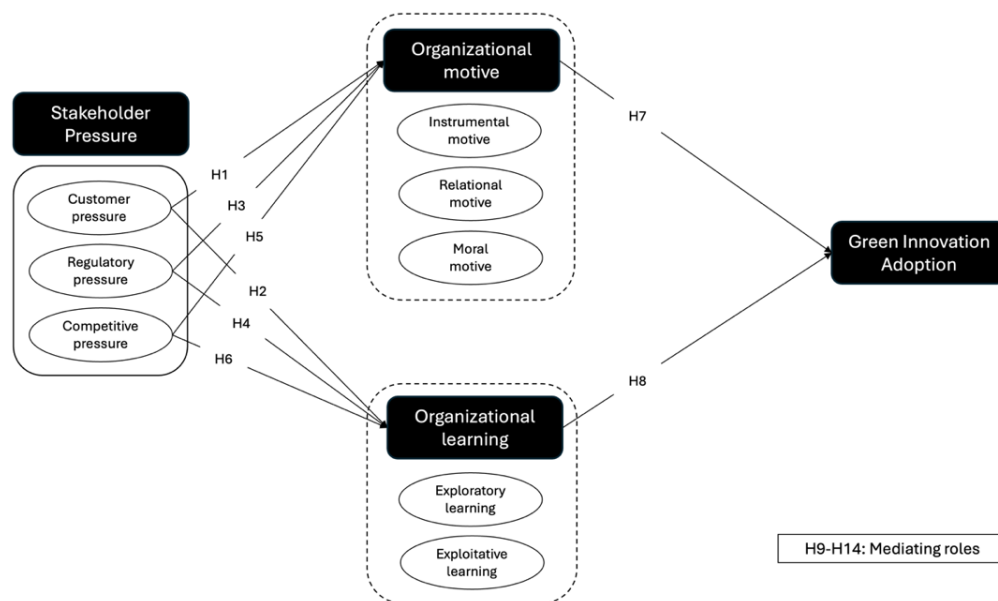


Figure 1: The Proposed framework

At the core of this framework lies the relationship between stakeholder pressure, organizational motives, organizational learning, and green innovation adoption in SMEs. Stakeholder pressure, comprising customer, regulatory, and competitive pressures, plays a crucial role in shaping how firms perceive and respond to sustainability demands. Customer pressure reflects the increasing preference for eco-conscious businesses, regulatory pressure stems from compliance requirements and industry standards, while competitive pressure compels firms to adopt green practices to maintain market relevance and differentiation. These external influences shape organizational motives (H1–H6) and organizational learning (H7–H8), which serve as key internal mechanisms for green innovation adoption. Organizational motives mediate the relationship between stakeholder pressure and green innovation adoption, determining how SMEs interpret and act upon external sustainability demands. These motives fall into three categories:



instrumental motives, which focus on financial incentives, regulatory compliance, and competitive positioning; relational motives, which emphasize stakeholder engagement, corporate reputation, and social expectations; and moral motives, which stem from a genuine commitment to environmental responsibility. SMEs with strong organizational motives are more likely to integrate sustainability into their core strategies (H7). Similarly, organizational learning serves as a critical mediator, equipping SMEs with the knowledge and capabilities needed for green innovation adoption. It consists of exploratory learning, which fosters experimentation with new sustainable technologies and business models, and exploitative learning, which focuses on refining and optimizing existing green initiatives. Firms that develop both learning mechanisms are better positioned to adapt to sustainability challenges and enhance innovation effectiveness (H8). This framework highlights that both organizational motives and learning mediate the impact of stakeholder pressure on green innovation adoption (H9–H14), ensuring that SMEs effectively transform external pressures into initiative-taking sustainability strategies. By examining these relationships, this study provides valuable insights into how SMEs can leverage stakeholder influence, foster internal drivers, and enhance organizational learning to support sustainable innovation. The proposed model serves as a strategic guide for improving sustainability performance, meeting regulatory expectations, and maintaining competitiveness in an eco-conscious market. Based on this framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Customer pressure has a positive impact on organizational motivation.
- H2: Customer pressure has a positive impact on organizational learning.
- H3: Regulatory pressure has a positive impact on organizational motive.
- H4: Regulatory pressure has a positive impact on organizational learning.
- H5: Competitive pressure has a positive impact on organizational motive.
- H6: Competitive pressure has a positive impact on organizational learning.
- H7: Organizational motive has a positive impact on green innovation adoption.
- H8: Organizational learning has a positive impact on green innovation adoption.
- H9: Organizational motive mediates the relationship between customer pressure and green innovation adoption.
- H10: Organizational learning mediates the relationship between customer pressure and green innovation adoption.
- H11: Organizational motive mediates the relationship between regulatory pressure and green innovation adoption.
- H12: Organizational learning mediates the relationship between regulatory pressure and green innovation adoption.
- H13: Organizational motive mediates the relationship between competitive pressure



and green innovation adoption.

H14: Organizational learning mediates the relationship between competitive pressure and green innovation adoption.

Conclusions and Discussion

The conceptual framework developed in this study highlights the role of stakeholder pressure, organizational motives, and organizational learning in driving green innovation adoption among SMEs in Thailand. Regulatory, competitive, and customer pressures function as external forces that influence how firms internalize and respond to sustainability demands. These are mediated by organizational motives—instrumental, relational, and moral—and supported by learning processes such as exploratory and exploitative learning, which together enable SMEs to convert external pressures into effective green innovation strategies.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, the framework offers practical guidance for SME leaders, policymakers, and sustainability advocates. In the face of rising regulatory demands, market competition, and shifting consumer expectations, understanding the link between stakeholder pressure and internal enablers is key to sustaining relevance and competitiveness. SMEs can adopt customer-driven green practices, ensure regulatory compliance, and differentiate through sustainable strategies.

To effectively internalize stakeholder expectations, SMEs must cultivate strong organizational motives that drive sustainable commitment—whether through economic incentives (instrumental), stakeholder engagement (relational), or ethical values (moral). Actions may include obtaining green certifications, implementing transparent reporting, and cultivating a culture of environmental responsibility.

Finally, strengthening organizational learning equips SMEs with an ability to navigate sustainability challenges. Exploratory learning drives innovation through experimentation, while exploitative learning refines existing green practices. These capabilities can be enhanced through cross-sector collaboration, sustainability training, and internal knowledge sharing platforms.

By aligning stakeholder expectations with internal motivations and learning strategies, SMEs can successfully adopt green innovations that not only improve environmental performance but also strengthen business competitiveness. Firms that embrace sustainability-driven innovation benefit from regulatory compliance, operational efficiency, enhanced stakeholder trust, and access to emerging green market opportunities. Importantly, this framework contributes to the green innovation literature by presenting an integrated model that illustrates how various forms of stakeholder pressure are internalized through distinct organizational motives and supported by internal learning



processes. While previous studies have often explored these factors separately, this study bridges the gap by unifying them within a single framework. It introduces theoretical novelty by emphasizing the mediating role of internal drivers in transforming external sustainability pressures into concrete innovation outcomes. As such, the framework not only advances theoretical understanding but also offers a foundation for future empirical validation and cross-context comparisons in sustainability research.

This study presents a comprehensive framework that examines the interplay between stakeholder pressure, organizational motives, organizational learning, and green innovation adoption among SMEs. As sustainability becomes a core business priority, SMEs must effectively navigate regulatory demands, market competition, and evolving consumer expectations to implement green innovation effectively. This framework emphasizes how organizational motives help firms internalize external pressures and translate them into strategic sustainability initiatives. Organizational learning further supports this process by equipping SMEs with the knowledge and adaptability to implement and refine eco-friendly practices.

By positioning motives and learning as internal enablers, the model illustrates how SMEs can transform sustainability pressures into initiative-taking innovation strategies, enhancing compliance and market competitiveness. Green innovation not only improves efficiency and resource use but also builds brand reputation, stakeholder trust, and long-term resilience. For business leaders and policymakers, the framework offers insights into fostering a sustainability-oriented mindset, highlighting the importance of internal motivation and continuous learning. Embracing this approach enables SMEs to turn environmental challenges into strategic advantages in an increasingly eco-conscious market.

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