

Sustainability of Traditional Retail in an Emerging Market: A Conceptual Framework Applied to a Vietnamese Wet Market

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Abstract

In emerging countries, traditional retail, such as wet markets, still accounts for a large proportion of retail sales. Traditional retail has poor infrastructure compared to modern retail, and is often associated with problems of waste, water, and environmental pollution. Therefore, traditional retail faces extreme difficulties in achieving sustainability. This study aimed to determine what value traditional retail contributes to sustainability. We generated and applied a conceptual framework of sustainability to explore this question. We used a single case study of a small-scale wet market in Vietnam. The results showed that wet markets have significant value for the development of sustainable retail, including economic, environmental, social, and community value. This study extends the literature by providing a comprehensive and accurate view about the value of traditional retail in contributing to sustainability. It suggests strategies for traditional retail in emerging countries to survive sustainably.

Keywords: Sustainability, Retail, Emerging market, Vietnam, Wet markets

1. Introduction

As sustainable development becomes an essential requirement for business, consumers are seeking products with sustainable value and retailers have to become more sustainable. Retailers must make efforts to reduce the negative impact of products throughout the supply chain, and ensure that all supply-chain participants reduce, reuse, and recycle to contribute toward sustainability goals (Vadakkappatt et al. 2021). A large number of retailers, especially leading retailers, report their activities and commitments to address the Sustainable Development Goals. For instance, Walmart, the largest United States retailer, reports its efforts to sell sustainable products, reduce waste and emissions, and protect natural resources.¹ Aeon, one of the biggest retail groups in Japan, is building stores with solar power, investing in electric vehicle recharging stations, planting trees, and reducing plastic.² For these large retail enterprises

in developed countries, sustainability not only contributes to the environment and society but also creates business and investment opportunities for sales and profits. These companies are increasingly reporting their performance on environment, social, and governance (ESG) indicators, because stronger ESG performance increases firm value.

However, the situation is totally different for the traditional retail formats in emerging countries. In the emerging economy context, traditional retail usually refers to small, mostly family-owned retail businesses. They sell a variety of items needed for consumers' daily life, such as meat, fish, fruit, vegetables, groceries, and household goods. While modern retail formats, such as supermarkets and convenience stores, are referred as "organized" retail, traditional retail, such as wet markets, is referred as the "unorganized" retail sector. Traditional wet markets in emerging countries often do not have as good infrastructure as modern supermarkets do. They lack a

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¹ <https://corporate.walmart.com/purpose/sustainability/sustainability-timeline> (Accessed: 27.07.22).

² Aeon Sustainability Data Book 2021 <https://www.aeon.info/en/ir/library/aeon-report/> (Accessed 27.07.22).

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conducive environment for maintaining food hygiene and safety. They are also associated with problems of waste, water, and environment pollution. In the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, whose origins have been speculated to have emerged at a wet market in Wuhan, China,³ there is increasing focus on the many serious problems of wet markets related to the health of humans and environment. Some have called for an international ban on wet markets to avoid future risks. Moreover, because of the “unorganized” nature of traditional retail, it is extremely difficult and may be impossible for traditional wet markets to devote activities to sustainability like the big retailers do.

Is it true that traditional retail cannot contribute much to sustainable development? What value does traditional retail contribute to sustainability? How can traditional retail contribute more to sustainability and use it as a strategy to survive and develop, as modern retail does? This study aims to address these research questions. We explore these questions using case study methodology. We conducted observations and in-depth interviews with retailers in a small-scale wet market in Vietnam. The results show that wet markets have significant value in developing sustainability, including economic, environmental, social, and community aspects. This study provides a comprehensive and accurate view about the value of traditional retail in contributing to sustainability. It also proposes various strategies to help traditional retail in emerging countries survive sustainably amid the massive competition from the modern retail formats of multinational retailers.

2. Literature review and a conceptual framework

2.1. Literature review

2.1.1. Definition and theory of sustainability

Sustainability is a concept that is widely used by researchers, practitioners, policymakers. However, there are many different definitions of sustainability and many debates among scientists about how to define it. It is unlikely that consensus on a single definition will be reached. This study investigated the origin of the concept of sustainability by tracing its historical roots. Since the 1950s, rapid industrialization has caused pollution in developed countries. The consumption of natural resources has increased dramatically in the process of industrialization. Many

countries in Africa and Asia, which are developing countries, have been left behind, because they have been unable to achieve the desired economic development. In the 1970s, the development gap between developed countries and developing countries widened. Developed countries became concerned about the world’s resource depletion and population explosion. In 1972, developed countries held the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. This was the first world conference to make the environment a major issue. However, developed countries’ concerns met with opposition from developing countries, because they placed a higher priority on development. Environmental conservation and economic growth were often perceived as opposing concepts. It was thought that conservation could not be achieved without sacrificing economic growth. However, in the 1980s, the concept of “sustainable development” was defined in a report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987, p. 41). The concept of “needs” in this definition indicates the needs of people, particularly the “essential needs of the world’s poor.” Sustainable development indicates the concept that environmental conservation and economic growth are not in conflict with each other but are compatible and mutually supportive. Environmental destruction and resource depletion harm people’s health and hinder economic activities. Steady economic growth is useful for developing resource-saving technologies and expanding investment in environmental conservation. Environmental conservation and economic growth are positioned as two wheels of good development for human society. Another definition of sustainable development commonly quoted in academic research is the definition of the International Institute for sustainable Development (IISD). The IISD has defined sustainability for business based on the original concept of the WCEF, that sustainable development is “adopting business strategies and activities that meet the needs of the enterprise and its stakeholders today while protecting, sustaining and enhancing the human and natural resources that will be needed in the future” (IISD 1992, p. 11). In 1992, The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit) was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In this conference, in addition to environmental conservation and economic growth, human social issues, such as poverty

³ www.thelancet.com/planetary-health Vol 4 June 2020.

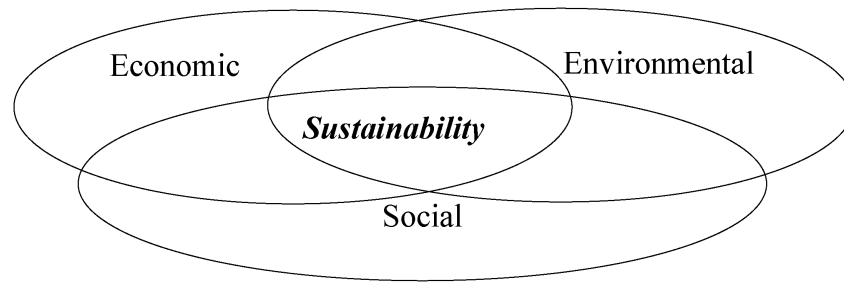


Fig. 1. Dimensions of triple bottom line sustainability. Source: Based on Elkington (1998).

and education in developing countries, were emphasized within the concept of sustainable development. The aspects of sustainable development have been delineated as the three elements of environmental, economic, and social. These are the elements of the “triple bottom line” (TBL) (Elkington 1998) of sustainable development. The “bottom line” normally refers to the last line of a company’s financial statements, which describe the net profit or loss. In other words, the bottom line shows the economic performance of an organization. However, Elkington (1998) suggested that the performance of an organization should be evaluated not only from economic dimensions, but also from the two other dimensions of environment and social (Fig. 1). These three dimensions are reflected in the guideline of Global Reporting Initiative, the international standard for sustainability reports.

Teriman, Yigitcanlar, and Mayere (2009) extended the TBL to the quadruple-bottom-line (QBL), which adds governance as the fourth dimension, because of its essential contribution to the sustainable development of organizations. Nowadays, TBL and QBL are used as the basic frameworks for research on sustainable development.

As indicated above, the concept of “sustainable development” began to be used among experts, scientists, and researchers from the 1980s. However, in the 2000s, this concept began to be used more broadly. It became the foundation for the concept of “sustainability,” which reflected various situations in a wider range of areas and fields. The term “sustainability” is “a noun used in ecology to refer to state or condition that can be maintained over an indefinite period of time” and “was introduced on a more regular basis than before into development discourses” (Du Pisani 2006, p. 91). Similar to the definition of sustainable development in the Brundtland report, Hart and Milstein (2003) defined sustainability as “the expectations of improving the social and environmental performance of the present generation without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their social and environmental needs”

(Alhaddi 2015, p. 7). The TBL of sustainable development and “sustainability” are two related constructs that are used interchangeably in the literature (Alhaddi 2015; Arowoshegbe and Emmanuel 2016).

2.1.2. Sustainability in retailing

Next, we review studies related to the topic of sustainability in retailing. Some research has analyzed the role of retailers in sustainability. Retail has a central position and an important role in connecting, selling, and distributing goods and service from manufacturers or wholesalers to the end-consumers (Dobson and Waterson 1999; Harris and Ogbonna 2001). With this position, retailers can drive sustainability in the supply chain by influence both upstream suppliers and downstream consumer.

For upstream suppliers, retailers can cooperate with suppliers and manufacturers to develop eco-friendly raw materials and components and to reduce waste. These activities help make the value chain sustainable (Nidumolu, Prahalad, and Rangaswami 2009). Retailers can cooperate with suppliers on compliance challenges over human rights and labor issues. They can also educate manufacturers and wholesalers about customers’ sustainability needs, willingness to pay for sustainable products, and ways to effectively communicate with consumers about sustainability (Durieu 2003; Erol et al. 2009). Retailers also can motivate suppliers to adopt sustainability by implementing standards, norms, and guidelines that help suppliers have more motivation and effort in dealing with sustainability. Many retailers can serve as a distribution point for reused, remanufactured, or recycled products from suppliers, etc. (Vadakepatt et al. 2021). With their unique position, retailers can impact suppliers by cleaning up their supply chains (Gielens et al. 2018).

As for the downstream, retailers hold the touching point with consumers, directly communicate with and obtain much information from customers. Therefore, they can understand the concerns and expectations of customers regarding sustainability

(Ytterhus, Arnestad, and Lothe 1999; Bonini and Openheim 2008). In some situations, customers might not have the ability, motivation, or opportunity to deal to sustainability. White, Habib, and Hardisty (2019) analyzed the important role of marketing in encouraging sustainable consumption and developed a framework to change consumers' behavior to deal to sustainability. This framework suggests that social influence, habit formation, individual self, feelings and cognition, and tangibility ("SHIFT") are psychological factors that make consumers "more inclined to engage in pro-environmental behaviors" (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019).

The concept of sustainability has been analyzed since the 1970s (Wynne, Coff, and Kamara 2006). However, research on sustainability in retailing is rather basic (Wiese et al. 2012; Wiese, Zielke, and Toporowski 2015), even though "practice and research alike have stressed the relevance of dealing with sustainability for retailers" (Saber and Weber 2019, p. 481.) Most research on sustainable retail focuses on the modern retail sector in developed countries. For example, Jones, Comfort and David (2005) analyzed the corporate social responsibility (CSR) issues of a leading food retailer in England; Higgins, Milne, and Gramberg (2014) investigated the uptake of sustainability reporting in Australia; and Dabija and Abrudan (2015) examined the sustainability of eight international and seven Romanian retail groups. However, there are very few studies on sustainable retail in developing countries. Therefore, analysis of the Vietnamese traditional retail sector would contribute to scientific research and have value for practitioners.

2.2. A conceptual framework

Based on the previous research, we built a conceptual framework for this study, as shown in Fig. 2.

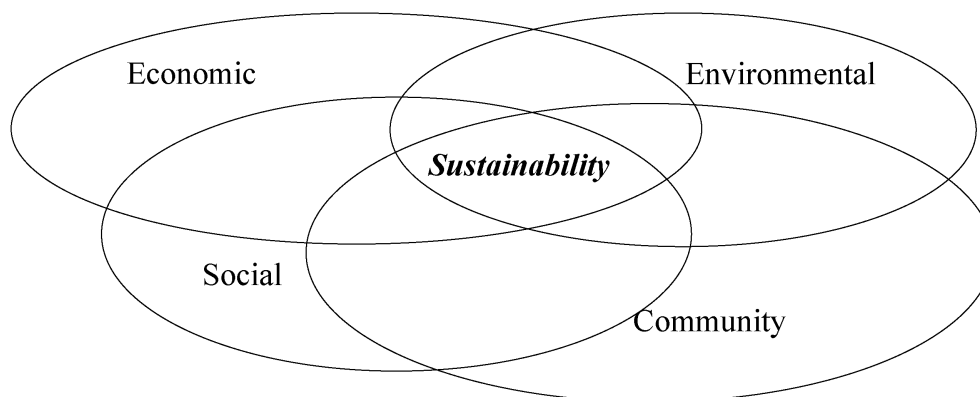


Fig. 2. Conceptual framework of sustainability. Source: Prepared by author.

This study applied TBL theory which indicated that sustainability comprises economic, environmental, and social. The economic dimension indicates the ability to contribute to economic development and growth. These contributions of the economic development base include protecting the environment by various activities, such as limiting the use of natural resources, minimizing harm to the ecosystem, and reducing energy consumption. The environmental dimension refers to controlling the environmental impacts of business activities, protecting the environment by saving natural energy, reducing carbon footprint and total greenhouse gas emissions, and decreasing waste, among others. The social dimension refers to activities of promoting equality and respect for diversity, human rights, women's equality, etc. We added the community dimension, which reflects the value in building relationships between people and creating a community's culture.

3. Research method

This study applied a single case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of sustainability of traditional retail in emerging countries. A case study method provides comprehensive descriptions and insightful explanations for the research (Yin 2003). Case studies assess a research phenomenon in its real-world context. We investigated a small-scale wet market in a city of Vietnam. Vietnam is one of the typical emerging countries in Southeast Asia. Vietnamese retail is a setting with many unexplored points. To design and create the case, we gathered data from multiple sources, such as direct and indirect observations; data from the Vietnamese General Statistics Office; data from a market research company; and other data sources, such as specialized books, newspapers, and magazines.

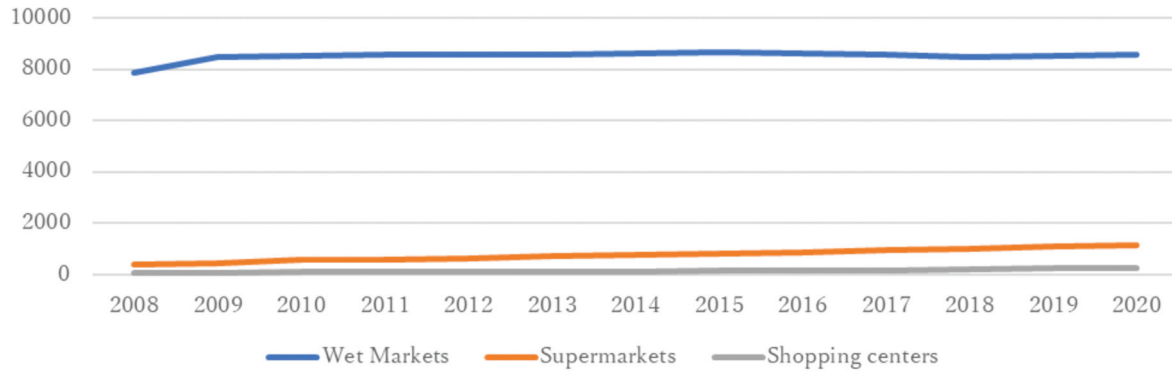


Fig. 3. The number of wet markets, supermarkets, and shopping centers in Vietnam (Prepared by another based on data from the Vietnam General Statistics Office).

3.1. Vietnamese retail

Vietnamese retail is transforming rapidly with implications for the environment, society, and economy. Vietnam initiated reforms under the Doi Moi policy in 1986. From that period, Vietnam opened its economy and increased regional and global trade. In retail, a variety of retail format entered Vietnam, such as supermarkets, convenience stores, and shopping malls. In a short period of time, numerous foreign retailers, such as Lotte Mart (Korea), Parkson (Malaysia), Auchan (France), Central Group (Thailand), Aeon, 7-Eleven, Takashimaya (Japan), have entered Vietnam and expanded their businesses. Additionally, Vietnamese modern retailers, such as Saigon co.op and Masan group, have created many development strategies to compete strongly with the foreign retailers. Recently, with the increasing of number of smartphones and the using of SNS, electronic retailing, such as e-commerce and SNS-based retail, have developed dramatically. In addition, there has been increased support for modern retail driven by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the share and number of modern retailers are still small compared with those for traditional retail. According to the data of the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, in 2021, Vietnam had 1,167 supermarkets and 254 shopping centers. However, the number of traditional wet markets⁴ rose to 8,549 (Fig. 3). Traditional retail formats (contain wet markets, small private grocery stores, street vendors) still account for 75% of the market share.⁵

3.2. A case study of a wet market in Hai Phong city, Vietnam

We investigated a wet market (wet market A) located in Le Chan district, Hai Phong city, Vietnam. Hai Phong city is an important city in the north region of Vietnam. It is far (about 120 km) from Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. It is a port city, an industrial center, as well as an economic center in the northern region of Vietnam. Based on the data of Vietnam's General Statistics Office, in 2021, Hai Phong had 156 wet markets.⁶ In detail, it has 9 wet markets of level 1, 20 wet markets of levels 2, 122 wet markets of level 3, and 5 wholesale markets. According to the definition of Vietnamese ministry of industry and trade, wet markets are divided in three levels from 1 to 3. A level 1 wet market has large scale with over 400 business stalls, has solid and modern construction, and is located in an important economic and trade position of a city or province. A level 2 wet market is a market has more than 200 to 400 business stalls, has solid or semi-permanent structures, and operates regularly or irregularly. A level 3 wet market has 200 or fewer business stalls, has not yet invested in solid or semi-permanent construction, and mainly serves the needs of people in the community, ward, town, or surrounding area of its location.

Wet market A is a level 3 wet market in Dong Hai ward, Le Chan district of Hai Phong City. We observed this wet market in the period of 10 days from July 2 to 12, 2022. Wet market A is open all day from 6am to 8pm. The most crowded time is during

⁴ <https://www.gso.gov.vn/en/trade-and-services/> (Accessed in 2022/07/06).

⁵ <https://www.gso.gov.vn/en/homepage/#> (Accessed in 2022/07/01).

⁶ <https://gso.gov.vn>. (Accessed in 2022/07/25).

Table 1. The characteristics of interviewees.

	Interviewer					
	1 (I1)	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6
Sex	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age (years)	60s	50s	40s	30s	30s	20s
Type of stall	Vegetable	Seafood	Meat	Cooked food	Noodles	Fruit
Total time working in the wet market (years)	Over 30	20	12	9	8	5

7–10 am and 3–5pm. Wet market A has 158 fixed stalls. However, some retailers carry goods by bicycle and stand or walk along the wet market. This wet market provides all items needed for the daily life of people in the area, such as fruit and vegetables, fresh food (e.g., meat: pork, beef, chicken, duck; sea food: fish, shrimp, squid, crabs, clams), and dried food (e.g., garlic, onions, dried noodles, rice) It also has many cooked food stalls, such as those selling pork rolls, beef rolls, fish rolls, squid rolls, roasted duck, and fried spring rolls. It also has many groceries stalls that sell baskets, dishes, pans, pots, etc.

3.3. In-depth interviews with retailers in the wet market

We conducted in-depth interview with six retailers in this market. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, on-site fieldwork was difficult, and thus, we received the cooperation of a Vietnamese interviewee, who have been living in this wet market's area for about over 30 years, and shopping at this wet market almost daily. Observations and interviews were designed and conducted in Vietnamese, and the interview results were translated into English. The characteristics of the interviewees are in [Table 1](#).

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Economic dimension

As the observation results, in 158 stalls of this wet market, 153 stalls are owned by women, and only 5 stalls by men. Most of the stall owners are middle aged. Many of them have been selling in this wet market for about over 10 years, and some for more than 20 years and even 30 years. The following answers from interviewees I2 and I3 were received about the time spent selling at the wet market and the ways they ran their businesses.

I2: "I've been selling seafood at this market for about 20 years. I am sitting here to sell seafood every day, but my husband also helps me to purchase and deliver the goods from wholesale market. My daughters also help me selling in this stall when I need to leave for some reasons or get sick. In general, the

whole family do this business because my family's income is mainly from this stall."

I3: "I've been selling meat at this market for about 12 years. We have two children, one in secondary school and one in high school right now. My husband does the motorbike taxi but in the early morning he helps me purchasing goods and delivery them from wholesale market to this stall. He also helps me delivery goods for customer when they require because I have many regular customers who buy goods at my stall almost every day. Especially in this COVID-19 situation, regular customers like to order goods by message or phone to me and require shipping to their house. My daughters also sometimes help me in selling, shipping, and other work to run this stall. My family income is from this stall and my husband's job. Anyway, motorbike taxi is the job that have unstable income. So, my family's life is mainly depending on the revenue of this stall in this wet market. We raise and let our children go to school by running this stall."

From this observation, first, we can deduce that the economic benefit of this wet market is to create and maintain jobs for a large number of people who work either directly or indirectly through stalls, such as purchasing and delivering goods from the wholesale markets. Wet markets play an essential function in direct and indirect job creation in the supply chain, from production to sale of products and services.

Second, wet markets help preserve the traditional family business model. Interviewees I4 and I5 inherited their businesses from their families. I4 inherited her stall from her grandmother and mother. I5 inherited her business in the wet market from her mother-in-law. The family of interviewer I4 had been making pork and beef rolls for four generations. The market, thus, has helped preserve the traditional products of the family business.

Third, wet markets are valued because they have capacity to generate local enterprise. Unlike supermarkets, whose merchandise is often delivered from other cities or even overseas, the items sold in wet markets mainly are local and national products. These local supply chains help generate local enterprises, especially rural enterprises.

Last, wet markets provide an important source of protein for populations in low-income regions and the food systems in which such markets are embedded. The interviewees indicated that their customers viewed the items in the wet market as fresher and better tasting than perishable goods sold in supermarkets. This shows that wet markets hold a key position within a sustainable food system. Some previous studies, such as Gorton, Sauer, and Supatpongkul (2011), Flor (2019), Kogan et al. (2019), and Petrikova, Cole, and Farlow (2020), have also indicated that wet markets have advantages over more modern forms of food retail, “which often sell produce that is high in fats, sugars, and preservatives with low nutritional content” (Makuch et al. 2021, p. 7)

4.2. Environmental dimension

We investigated the supply chain of goods in wet market A. Interviewees I1, I2, and I6 stated that they purchased goods from a wholesale market, such as the wholesale market in An Duong and Thuy Nguyen district. These districts are near the central of Hai Phong city and near the location of wet market A. It takes about 1 to 2 hours by motorbike to access the wholesale markets. The wholesale markets operate from 2 am until about 9 am. Business owners need to wake up early to purchase and delivery goods in time for sale in the market. Interviewee I3 said that: “I purchase pork from the slaughterhouse of a limited company located in Vinh Niem ward, Le Chan district. This company buys pigs from farmers in the suburbs, does slaughter, and supplies to retailers of wet markets in the city. The location of slaughterhouse is so near to wet market because they are in the same district. So, I need only about 30 minutes to access.” The interviewees highlighted the short local supply chain of wet markets, which not only provides fresh food for customers but also contributes to sustainability by reducing emissions and environment population, decreasing energy consumption. Compared to modern retail formats, such as supermarkets and shopping centers, which have national and international supply chains with long distance transportation, local supply chains of wet markets can reduce energy consumption and environmental impact. This finding is connected to the results of Lin et al. (2011), who indicated that the food supply chain in the traditional retail format is more environmentally sustainable than industrial food systems are. For instance, the greenhouse gas footprint of traditional small-scale meat production may be “lower than those of industrial farms once carbon sequestration of the soil on which animal feed is grown is accounted for” and is associated with “lower air and

water pollution and less antibiotic use, thus causing a significantly lower emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria” (Hu, Cheng, and Tao 2017).

In addition, wet markets significantly reduce food waste. Many items, such as fruit and vegetables, cannot be sold in supermarkets owing to stricter standards for the selection of goods. However, these items can be sold in wet markets, helping to decrease food waste. In addition, when asked how they handled unsold goods, interviewees said that they almost never threw goods away, because it directly impacted their sales and income for a day. If there were still a lot of goods at the end of day, they would reduce the price. If they still could not sell out all the items, they would take the items directly to the homes of regular customers. They sometimes also took the goods home to cook. They also gave them away to relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances. While a lot of food in supermarket is thrown away or destroyed every day, retailers in wet markets can minimize food waste, showing that wet markets can effectively contribute to sustainability.

4.3. Social dimension

Because most of the sellers in wet markets are woman, it is obvious that wet markets in emerging countries are the principal place for employment creation for women, helping them stabilize their lives, and protecting their rights in society. In the wet market that we investigated for this study, of the total 158 stalls, 153 stalls were run by women. All six interviewees had a low level of education, for such reasons as their family’s economic situation and poor rural hometown. Two of them could commute to work by bike. The other four people lived in distant rural towns, and thus, they rented a house to live with their family or shared with other women retailers in wet markets. If they did not trade in this wet market, these women would have great difficulties in finding jobs, and would likely be unemployed. This would have many other consequences, including dependence on other people, such as their husbands, and inability to control their own lives. Therefore, wet markets can be considered to contribute to gender equality, especially by helping women with low education levels. This is especially important in emerging countries, which have a large number of women and girls living in rural areas with low living standards and education levels. Compared to modern retail formats, such as supermarkets or shopping malls, which provide jobs for skilled and educated people, traditional wet markets create jobs for people with lower levels of skills. In particular, wet markets provide work and income

for women in difficult situations, such as the elderly without pensions or new mothers. Interviewee I1, aged in her 60s, noted that she and her husband did not have a pension and the business in the wet market helped them maintain their lives. Interviewee I6 stated that she had worked for a small-sized company, but after giving birth, her health deteriorated, and she could not return to work. Thus, she began selling fruit in the wet market for a living.

4.4. Community dimension

Wet markets have essential value in creating a community. One interviewee, I4, noted that: “Because my customers are familiar people who live in this area and go to my stall daily, so I always want to sell the items with good quality. I also want to build up and maintain the relationship with customers by having communication and interaction with them.” Her comments show that wet markets are not only places to trade items but also places where people can meet, communicate, and build up relationships within the community. The interviewee I6 also noted that “I have many customers who come to my stores daily. I talk to them and clearly know their habit of choosing items. Therefore, in cases that they cannot come to my store, they message me, and I will choose the items and deliver to their house. I will take money the next day.” This indicated that the relationship between buyer and seller in wet markets is warm and close. It is different to the relationship of customers and staff in a supermarket. In modern retail, such as supermarkets, customers rarely ask the staff for help, because the characteristic of this modern retail format is self-service. We sometimes witness interaction between customers and staff, but these interactions and communication tend to be formal, and have no human touch. Therefore, wet markets are a microcosm of society, a place to circulate goods, exchange information, and enhance relationships of people in a community.

Based on the results, this study finds that wet markets can contribute great value to sustainability. Wet markets provide local fresh food, and local supply chains are essential for the sustainable development of family farmers, who are also small family-owned retailers. These local supply chains require shorter transportation distances than the national and international food supply chains of modern supermarkets. Therefore, wet markets help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Wet markets also have important value of reducing food waste compared with supermarkets. They play an essential role in protecting woman’s rights, respecting diversity, and creating community. This value makes wet markets develop sustainably

and facilitates the co-existence of the traditional and modern retail format in emerging countries. [Tran and Hara \(2015, 2016\)](#) described the reasons for co-existence of modern and traditional retail formats in Vietnam as the strengths of traditional wet markets, such as providing a shopping experience and creating co-creation value with local customers. The present study adds the sustainability value of traditional retail as one of its strengths.

Based on the analysis, we recommend the following strategies to maintain the sustainability of wet markets. The infrastructure of wet markets should be improved to support hygiene, develop transportation, and create a clean environment for customers and retailers. Modern sanitation, waste management, and energy systems should be designed and applied to wet markets. Wet markets should also improve promotional awareness about the environment and healthy lifestyles for consumers by introducing organic products and should encourage the development of organic supply chains in local cities. These improvements would make the markets become more sustainable and raise profits. This study contributes a more accurate view about the value of traditional retail formats in emerging countries. However, it is limited by its single case study method. Further quantitative and qualitative research should be undertaken to further understand the sustainability of traditional retail.

5. Limitations and future research

This study deals with sustainability in a wet market, a traditional retail format in an emerging country. However, this study is based on observation of a small wet market in Vietnam. Vietnam has more than 8,500 traditional wet markets. Therefore, it is essential to expand research on other wet markets located from urban to rural areas in Vietnam. Moreover, future studies should consider wet markets in other emerging markets to analyze and compare their contribution to sustainable development. A cross-national market comparison also should be considered in future research because traditional retail between countries might have different characteristics. This study applied a qualitative method using secondary data, observations, and in-depth interviews. Future studies should apply the quantitative method for a more comprehensive view of this topic.

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