THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN ENHANCING VALUE CREATION IN THE WILD COFFEE INDUSTRY: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF MARKET DIFFERENTIATION AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

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Abstract: In this study, sustainable practices were used as the independent variable, value creation as the dependent variable, market differentiation as the mediating variable, and stakeholder collaboration as the moderating variable. The core conceptual framework is established through demographic variables such as production scale and farm size. This study proposes the following hypotheses: H1: Sustainable practices have a positive and significant impact on value creation in the wild coffee industry. H2: Market differentiation mediates the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation in the wild coffee industry. H3: Stakeholder collaboration moderates the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation in the wild coffee industry, and the relationship between the two is stronger when the level of stakeholder collaboration is high. H4: Demographic factors (farm size, production scale, geographic location and market access) significantly influence the impact of sustainable practices on value creation. A total of 454 questionnaires were distributed in this study, and 400 valid questionnaires were returned, with a recovery rate of 88%.

This study found that 1. sustainable practices have a positive effect on value creation; 2. market differentiation partially mediates the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation; and 3. stakeholder collaboration plays a significant positive moderating role between sustainable practices and value creation. This study provides valuable insights to support the sustainability of the coffee industry, explores the role of sustainable practices in enhancing value creation in the wild coffee industry, and enriches the relational role of existing knowledge in the wild coffee industry.

Keywords: Sustainable Practices, Value Creation, Market Differentiation, Stakeholder Collaboration

Introduction

The wild coffee industry plays a vital role in the global coffee market, contributing significantly to economic development, environmental conservation, and social sustainability in coffee-producing regions. Unlike conventional coffee farming, which relies on cultivated coffee plantations, wild coffee is harvested from naturally occurring coffee plants within biodiverse forests, primarily in Ethiopia, Madagascar, and selected regions of Latin America (Davis et al., 2021). These forests serve as natural habitats for indigenous coffee species, preserving genetic diversity and maintaining ecological balance. Given the increasing global demand for ethically and sustainably sourced coffee, sustainable management practices have become crucial to ensuring the industry's long-term viability. However, while sustainability is widely regarded as a driver of value creation, the mechanisms through which sustainability influences value generation in the wild coffee sector remain underexplored.

1. Understanding Value Creation in the Wild Coffee Industry

Value creation in the wild coffee industry extends beyond mere economic profitability to include social and environmental dimensions. The transition toward sustainable coffee production has not only been driven by economic incentives, such as premium pricing and consumer demand for ethical products, but also by the need to preserve forest ecosystems and enhance social equity within coffee-producing communities (Pancsira, 2022). Several key value dimensions can be identified:

Economic Value: Producers who adopt sustainable certifications (e.g., Fair Trade, Organic, Rainforest Alliance, UTZ) often gain premium market access and higher price points, leading to increased revenues (Grabs, 2020). These certifications signal compliance with environmental and ethical standards, attracting conscious consumers who are willing to pay a premium for sustainability.

Social Value: The adoption of fair trade principles and equitable labor practices within the wild coffee sector ensures better wages and working conditions for farmers. Cooperatives and community-driven models further enable capacity building, gender inclusion, and rural development (Woyesa & Kumar, 2021).

Environmental Value: Wild coffee cultivation promotes biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, and deforestation prevention. Unlike monoculture coffee plantations, wild coffee grows in harmony with native vegetation, maintaining ecosystem health and ensuring long-term agricultural resilience (Duguma & Bulitta, 2021).

While these three dimensions collectively contribute to value creation, sustainability alone does not automatically translate into higher financial returns. Instead, market differentiation plays a critical role in ensuring that sustainability-driven efforts are effectively recognized and rewarded in the marketplace.

2. The Mediating Role of Market Differentiation

Market differentiation serves as an intermediary mechanism that enhances the impact of sustainable practices on value creation. Differentiation allows wild coffee producers to capitalize on the unique attributes of their products, such as:

Geographical origin and terroir: Wild coffee is often associated with distinct ecological conditions, influencing flavor profiles and sensory characteristics. Emphasizing single-origin coffee and geographical indication (GI) labeling can improve market positioning (Rich et al., 2018).

Traditional and organic production methods: Highlighting forest-grown, shade-grown, or chemical-free cultivation can appeal to eco-conscious consumers seeking authenticity and sustainability in their coffee purchases.

Cultural heritage and storytelling: Branding strategies that incorporate narratives of indigenous farming communities, their ancestral knowledge, and ethical production methods can enhance brand equity and consumer loyalty (Pancsira, 2022).

Certification and traceability: The growing consumer preference for transparent supply chains has increased the importance of blockchain-based traceability and QR-coded authentication systems that verify sustainability claims (Gupta et al., 2022).

These differentiation strategies allow sustainability-focused producers to move beyond commodity pricing models and enter specialty coffee markets, where higher margins can be achieved.

3. The Moderating Role of Stakeholder Collaboration

Effective stakeholder collaboration is essential in reinforcing sustainable coffee production and improving value realization. In the wild coffee industry, stakeholders include farmers, cooperatives, government agencies, non-profits, certifying bodies, and supply chain actors. Collaborative efforts facilitate:

Access to financial support: Smallholder farmers often lack the capital required to implement sustainability certifications or transition to organic farming. Through microfinance programs, public-private partnerships, and NGO-led initiatives, farmers can gain the resources needed to invest in sustainability (Ochago et al., 2024).

Knowledge transfer and capacity building: Training programs conducted by research institutions and agricultural extension services help farmers adopt sustainable techniques, optimize productivity, and improve post-harvest processing methods (Woyesa & Kumar, 2021).

Supply chain integration and market access: Partnerships between producers and exporters enable farmers to reach international markets, bypass exploitative intermediaries, and establish direct trade relationships with specialty coffee roasters (Davis et al., 2021).

Despite these advantages, limited research has examined the moderating role of stakeholder collaboration in the sustainability-value creation nexus. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing how collaborative engagement enhances or mitigates challenges related to market access, financial constraints, and compliance with sustainability standards.

4. The Influence of Demographic Factors on Value Creation

Beyond sustainability and stakeholder collaboration, demographic factors such as farm size, geographic location, production scale, and market access influence how sustainability-driven value creation unfolds. Previous research suggests that:

Small-scale farmers face challenges in obtaining sustainability certifications due to high compliance costs and logistical barriers, limiting their ability to fully capitalize on sustainability premiums (Duguma & Bulitta, 2021).

Larger-scale producers benefit from economies of scale, enabling them to absorb certification expenses and gain competitive advantages in high-value markets.

Geographic location affects the extent to which producers can access premium coffee markets, as remote farmers often struggle with transportation inefficiencies and weak infrastructure (Melo et al., 2021).

Market access mechanisms such as direct trade vs. auction-based selling can influence farmers' bargaining power and ability to secure better pricing arrangements.

By integrating demographic variables into the analysis, this study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how sustainability-driven strategies function across different types of wild coffee producers.

5. Conclusion and Research Implications

The wild coffee industry represents a unique intersection of ecological conservation, economic opportunity, and social sustainability. However, despite growing consumer demand for ethically sourced coffee, the mechanisms that drive sustainability-based value creation require further investigation. This study contributes to the literature by exploring:

How sustainability influences economic, social, and environmental value creation.

How market differentiation mediates the sustainability-value creation relationship.

How stakeholder collaboration moderates this relationship.

How demographic factors shape sustainability-driven value realization.

By addressing these questions, this research provides theoretical insights and practical recommendations for policymakers, businesses, and sustainability advocates working to enhance the long-term viability of the wild coffee sector. Future studies should incorporate longitudinal data to assess the long-term effects of sustainability initiatives, explore consumer purchasing behavior in different markets, and examine the role of digital technology in sustainable coffee traceability.

Research Objectives

Objective One: To examine the impact of sustainable practices on value creation in the wild coffee industry.

Objective Two: To analyze the mediating role of market differentiation in the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation.

Objective Three: To investigate the moderating effect of stakeholder collaboration on the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation.

Objective Four: To assess the influence of demographic factors (such as farm size, production scale, geographic location, and market access) on the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation.

Literature Review

The wild coffee industry plays an important role in biodiversity conservation, economic sustainability and cultural preservation. In recent years, sustainability, market differentiation, stakeholder collaboration and value creation have emerged as key themes in the study of the industry's long-term viability. These factors contribute to the resilience of wild coffee producers by ensuring environmental protection, financial stability and fair-trade relations (Pascucci, 2024).

Sustainable development not only refers to the sustainable development of human society, but also includes the sustainable development of enterprises. The goal of enterprises is mainly to pursue economic benefits, but with the reduction of natural resources and the emergence of social problems brought about by economic development, people have come to realize that if enterprises do not pay attention to solving environmental and social problems, the development of enterprises is unlikely to last long. In order to realize sustainable development, enterprises must fulfill their social responsibilities and carry out environmental protection activities. And it is unsustainable to trade off corporate development at the expense of environmental and social interests.

Sustainable development includes understanding the environmental impacts of economic activities in developing countries and industrialized economies (Erlich and Erlich, 1991); ensuring global food security (Lal et al...2002); ensuring that basic human needs are met (Savitzand Weber, 2006); and ensuring the conservation of non-renewable resources (Whiteman and Cooper,2000). However, this macro-definition is difficult for firms to apply and does not suggest how firms can identify current and future needs, determine the technologies and resources to meet their own needs, and understand how to effectively balance organizational responsibilities among stakeholders (Hart, 1995; Starik and Rands, 1995).

WCED's (1987) macro-definition actually integrates social, environmental and economic issues. This is usually achievable through the triple bottom line, a concept developed by Elkington (1998), which considers and balances economic, environmental and social issues simultaneously from a micro perspective.

The concept of CSR can be traced back to the term “social responsibility of the businessman” introduced by Bowen in 1943. Since then, the degree of attention to CSR in the academic world has shown a significant growth trend. Davis (1973) further deepened it, pointing out that CSR not only covers the economic and legal level of responsibility, but also involves a wide range of responsibilities beyond these categories, such as the social level, the environmental level of responsibility, etc.; Some experts and scholars to further explain the broad connotation of CSR, pointing out that its scope is not only limited to the mandatory scope of responsibility, but also the social responsibility of the businessman, the social responsibility of the businessman and the social responsibility of the businessman. Some experts and scholars further explain the broader meaning of CSR, pointing out that its scope is not only limited to mandatory legal obligations, but also includes voluntary responsibilities. For example, Sethi (1975) proposes that CSR consists of three dimensions: social obligation, social responsibility and social response, of which, social obligation mainly refers to actions taken by enterprises to satisfy the requirements of the market and the law, and this obligation has a clear mandatory character; while social responsibility further transcends the scope and is related to mainstream social norms, and has the same characteristics as social norms. The social responsibility is further beyond this scope, and is consistent with the mainstream social norms and values of corporate behavior; social response refers to the enterprise in meeting the needs and expectations of society, completely in the voluntary behavior. In international academic research, scholars generally adopt the U.S. Dominion Socially Responsible Investment Index (KLD) to measure the level of corporate social responsibility, which covers seven key areas: community involvement, cultural diversity, employee well-being, environmental protection, corporate governance, respect for human rights and product responsibility (Davis, 1973). In contrast, in the domestic academic community, the understanding of CSR tends to focus on four core dimensions for in-depth discussion: social responsibility, environmental protection, stakeholder relations, and ethics (Jia Ming et al., 2023).

In the turbulent market environment, enterprises can only maintain the stability of revenue in order to develop gradually in the stability, so the continuous value creation is an important element of enterprise operation.

In the scenario of the new era, the mode of enterprise value creation is no longer the enterprise itself, but transformed into the value creation of the community of interest, including users, suppliers, third-party service providers, etc. (Mentao et al., 2020).Coughlan et al. (2009) argued that the focus of enterprise value creation is on the three ways of interfacing with the customer, interacting with the customer, and reorganizing the business model. Chen Yantai et al. (2015) pointed out that there are two main influences on the reasons why companies want to always maintain a core position in the competition, one of which is related to the resources that the company itself possesses and the ability to utilize new resources to innovate, and the second one is related to the external innovation atmosphere in which the company is located and the degree of competition in the industry, and it was found that the degree of competition intensity in the industry and the cooperative relationship within the industry affects the value of the company. Priemetal.(2018) from the user's perspective, found that high value creation enterprises have closer relationships with customers, they like to launch some marketing exhibition activities involving customers among themselves, they will investigate the service feelings of users and the room for improvement through questionnaires and other ways, and they pay more attention to the fulfillment of the unique needs of the users and the provision of services. Lu Fucai et al. (2023) believe that enterprise value creation refers to the overall activity process of the enterprise through the production and operation management activities, to create a service product to meet customer demand. Teppoh (2007) and SethA (1990) believe that value creation is the process of integrating different knowledge and resources within the enterprise to promote the externalization of enterprise value.

Market differentiation theory is the foundation of the whole differentiation strategy, mainly including market segmentation theory and STP theory. Market segmentation (Market Segmentation) refers to the enterprise according to the diversity of market demand and the differences in consumer behavior to the overall market is divided into a number of detailed characteristics of the market or customer groups, in order to choose the appropriate target market. STP theory is based on the segmentation theory, further development and improvement of the theory, including market segmentation (Segmentation), selecting the target market (Targeting) and positioning (Positioning), the above constitutes the core three elements of market differentiation marketing theory.

The purpose of market segmentation is to achieve greater economic benefits through the positioning of customer demand differences. As we all know, product differentiation will inevitably lead to the corresponding increase in production costs and marketing expenses, so enterprises must make a trade-off between the benefits of market segmentation and the increased costs of market segmentation. The essence of market segmentation is the segmentation of customers and their needs. Different customers have different hobbies, different personalities, different value orientations, different income levels and different consumption concepts, which determines that they have different demand focus on products and brands. On the basis of market segmentation, enterprises can develop products and services with different characteristics to meet the specific needs of customers in segmented markets. Market segmentation plays an important role in the production and marketing of enterprises: it is helpful to guide enterprises to choose appropriate market segments and develop appropriate marketing strategies; it is beneficial to enterprises to improve the inadequacy of existing products and guide the development of new products; it is beneficial to enterprises to focus resources on the target market segments. Enterprise resources are limited, high opportunity cost, must use their own limited financial resources, material resources, human resources, focus on investment in selected market segments, in order to quickly gain an advantage, improve the market share of segments as well as the competitiveness and profitability of enterprises.

In the 1960s, countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have been adopting the external control style of corporate governance. It is against this background that the stakeholder theory has gradually developed. Compared with the traditional enterprise theory dominated by shareholders' interests, stakeholder theory is different. It believes that the development of enterprises cannot ignore the input and participation of various types of stakeholders, such as creditors, shareholders, employees, suppliers, consumers, etc. While pursuing the interests of shareholders, enterprises must also protect the rights and interests of other types of stakeholders. In 1963, Stanford Research Institute for the first time put forward the concept of "stakeholders", referring to all individuals closely related to the enterprise. Subsequently, the American scholar Ansoff introduced the term into the field of management and economics in 1965, emphasizing that "in order to determine a desirable corporate objective, it is necessary to consider the conflicting claims of the various stakeholders in the enterprise in a comprehensive and balanced manner, which may include managers, employees, shareholders, suppliers and distributors". Against this background, stakeholder theory has developed rapidly, and two typical schools of thought have gradually emerged, including the social responsibility school and the strategic systems school. The social responsibility school is mainly based on social interests and believes that the interests of stakeholders should be taken into account and given a certain status in the enterprise, because stakeholders exist as the purpose of corporate governance; while the strategic system school believes that stakeholders are the means to achieve the company's goals, and that the scientificity of the company's strategic decision-making can be improved by giving full play to the role of stakeholders. The scientific nature of corporate strategic decision-making can be improved by giving full play to the role of stakeholders.

The concept of project stakeholders is based on the concept of enterprise stakeholders in corporate governance. The most important feature of the project is its one-time and uniqueness, and the participating organizations form a one-time temporary project team based on the project, and these project participants, as well as individuals and organizations affected by the implementation of the project, become the project stakeholders. The study of project stakeholders initially stayed only at the level of project management with the project manager as the core, but with the in-depth study and practice of modern project management theory, it was found that many of the problems that led to the failure of engineering projects could not be solved at the level of the project manager, this is because the resources used by the project manager come from outside the project and are provided by the stakeholders outside the organization and the internal functional departments, which need to be coordinated by the senior leaders of the organization, and planning and control, which is centered on the iron triangle of the project (schedule, cost, and quality), makes such coordination and communication difficult at the project management level. When project management fails to solve project problems, managers want to coordinate the collaboration at the project organization level through project governance, because project management at the project manager level can only be effective if the stakeholders are fully committed at the organization level, which also draws attention to project governance at a higher level.

Stakeholder collaboration in the coffee industry is essential to ensure sustainability, improve market efficiency and enhance value creation. Since coffee production involves a complex supply chain and multiple players, effective collaboration among farmers, cooperatives, government agencies, private companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) plays an important role in addressing economic, social and environmental challenges (Peluso, 2023).

The interconnectedness of sustainable practices, value creation, market differentiation, and stakeholder collaboration in the coffee industry has received increasing attention from scholars and industry practitioners. Sustainable practices drive economic, social, and environmental improvements, while value creation enhances profitability, reputation, and competitive advantage (Bager & Lambin, 2020). Market differentiation enables producers to differentiate themselves on the basis of quality, sustainability and ethical sourcing (Grabs & Ponte, 2019). Stakeholder collaboration, including partnerships between farmers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government agencies, and companies, enhances knowledge sharing, investment opportunities, and supply chain efficiency (Jacobi et al., 2024). This theoretical review builds on the established framework and explores the relationship between these four concepts, including stakeholder theory, resource-based view (RBV) and institutional theory.

1. Sustainable practices as a basis for value creation and market differentiation

Sustainable practices and value creation

Sustainable practices in the coffee industry focus on environmental protection, ethical labor conditions and fair-trade principles. These practices contribute to value creation by enhancing brand reputation, ensuring long-term resource availability, and meeting consumer demand for ethical products (Jacobi et al., 2024).The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework introduced by Elkington (1998) has since been adapted to sustainable coffee production, emphasizing economic, social, and environmental value creation.

Empirical studies have confirmed the economic benefits of sustainable coffee farming, including premiums for obtaining organic certification or Fairtrade coffee (Lai et al., 2024). In addition, investments in shade-grown coffee and agroforestry systems improve long-term farm resilience and soil fertility, further enhancing economic and environmental sustainability (Adane, 2024). However, challenges such as high certification costs and difficulties in measuring sustainability outcomes remain barriers to widespread implementation (Syofya, 2023).

Sustainable practices and market differentiation

Sustainable practices have become a key factor in market differentiation, enabling producers to differentiate their products through eco-labeling, ethical sourcing, and transparency initiatives (Contreras-Medina & Contreras-Medina), 2020). Studies have highlighted geographical indications (GIs), organic certification, and direct trade relationships as differentiation strategies to attract ethically conscious consumers (Maspul & Almalki, 2023).

According to institutional theory, companies adopt sustainability not only to comply with regulations but also to gain legitimacy in the marketplace (Buranasiri et al., 2024). For example, coffee brands that emphasize carbon-neutral production and regenerative agriculture have been able to position themselves as premium ethical brands, garnering higher prices and greater consumer loyalty (Ramirez-Gomez et al., 2022). However, some scholars argue that sustainability certification has been over-commercialized, leading consumers to be skeptical of its true impact (Grabs & Ponte, 2019).

2. Market differentiation as a mediator in the sustainable practices-value creation nexus

Market differentiation as a competitive strategy

Market differentiation is a key mechanism for translating sustainable practices into value creation. By emphasizing quality, traceability, and sustainability, coffee brands can access premium markets, build consumer trust, and justify higher pricing (Lai et al., 2024). The Resource-Based View (RBV) suggests that companies with unique resources (e.g. processing expertise from a particular region or unique flavor profiles) can gain a sustained competitive advantage (Pereira et al., 2021).

Several studies confirm that consumer perceptions of quality and sustainability are intertwined, especially in the boutique coffee market (Suvattanadilok, 2024). High-end coffee brands, such as Blue Bottle and Stumptown Coffee Roasters, utilize ethical sourcing narratives and direct trade partnerships to create a sense of exclusivity and authenticity (Contreras-Medina & Contreras-Medina, 2020). However, market access restrictions and price volatility remain major challenges for smallholder farmers attempting to differentiate coffee based on sustainability factors (Jacobi et al., 2024).

Digital transformation and market differentiation

The rise of blockchain-enabled traceability systems and digital marketing strategies further strengthens opportunities for market differentiation (Jell-Ojobor & Kramer, 2022). Blockchain technology allows consumers to track the journey of coffee from farm to cup, resulting in increased transparency, trust and willingness to pay a premium price (Piboonrungroj et al., 2024).

Despite the advantages of digital differentiation, financial and technical barriers make it difficult for smallholder farmers to adopt these technologies (Maspul & Almalki, 2023). Government initiatives and support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a key role in promoting digital inclusion among sustainable coffee producers (Weber & Wiek, 2021).

3. Stakeholder collaboration as a moderator of value creation and differentiation

The role of multi-stakeholder partnerships

Stakeholder collaboration enhances the impact of sustainable practices and market differentiation by facilitating knowledge transfer, infrastructure investment, and policy advocacy (Civera & Freeman, 2019). Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) between farmers, companies, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) help to scale up sustainability programs and ensure a more equitable distribution of value in the coffee supply chain (Ramirez-Gomez et al., 2022).

For example, the Sustainable Coffee Challenge (SCC) - a coalition of coffee producers, retailers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) - has been successful in increasing the adoption of sustainable practices and improving price stability for smallholder farmers (Lai et al., 2024). , 2024). However, power imbalances between multinationals and local farmers often undermine equitable stakeholder participation, and stronger governance mechanisms are needed to ensure fair negotiations and benefit sharing (Grabs & Ponte, 2019).

Public-private partnerships and policy support

Governments play a key role in facilitating stakeholder collaboration through incentive programs, policy frameworks, and infrastructure investments (Buranasiri et al., 2024). Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have played a key role in expanding financial support and market access for smallholder farmers, especially in Latin America and Africa (Maspul & Almalki, 2023).

However, research has shown that many partnerships focused on sustainable development rely heavily on donor funding, which makes them vulnerable to short-term financial constraints (Suvattanadilok, 2024). To ensure long-term impact, scholars recommend implementing inclusive business models that integrate sustainability into core business strategies rather than viewing them as corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs (Jacobi et al., 2024).

The theoretical review highlights the interdependence of sustainable practices, value creation, market differentiation and stakeholder collaboration in the coffee industry. While sustainable practices contribute to long-term value creation, their effectiveness is moderated by market differentiation strategies and moderated by stakeholder collaboration efforts. However, some research gaps remain:

There is limited empirical research on the long-term economic benefits of sustainable practices in different coffee-producing regions.

Comparative studies on various models of stakeholder collaboration in the coffee supply chain are needed.

Explore scalable financing models to support the digital transformation of smallholder farmers.

Assess consumer trust in sustainability certification and the impact of digital traceability on purchasing behavior.

Addressing these gaps will provide valuable insights for industry practitioners, policymakers and researchers seeking to develop sustainable and inclusive coffee value chains.

Methodology

The target population for this study includes:

Wild coffee producers - farmers and plantation owners engaged in sustainable coffee farming.

Supply chain stakeholders - exporters, cooperatives, and certification bodies that influence market differentiation.

Industry experts and policy makers - government officials and NGO representatives working on sustainable agriculture.

Urban Specialty Coffee Consumers - Kunming's high-end coffee consumers who influence the demand for sustainable coffee brands.

By including multiple stakeholder groups, this study captures different perspectives on sustainability impacts, market differentiation, and stakeholder collaboration in the wild coffee industry.

Sample size: The total number of stakeholders in the coffee industry in Kunming was 8992. The sample size was determined based on a 95% confidence level and permissible values. The sampling error is 5% or 0.05. The overall sample size is 8992. When n = number of samples used in the study. n = total number of people and e = random sampling error was set at 0.05. to ensure statistical power and reliability of analysis (Hair et al., 2020).

$$n=\frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$$

$$n=\frac{8992}{1+8992X0.05^2}$$

$$n=399.96$$

Therefore, a minimum of 400 respondents are required for this study.

Stratified random sampling technique was used in this study to obtain different but representative views of the stakeholders.

Stratified Sampling: The sample was divided into four strata (producers, supply chain stakeholders, policy makers and consumers). Each stratum is represented by a certain percentage in the final dataset (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Random selection: Within each stratum, participants were randomly selected to minimize selection bias and increase generalizability (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Inclusion Criteria: Respondents had to be actively involved in coffee production, trade, policy, or specialty coffee consumption in Kunming to ensure relevance.

The data collection process followed a strategic timeline to ensure efficiency while maintaining scientific rigor.

Step 1: Questionnaire development and pre-testing

Design and finalize the structured questionnaire.

Expert validation and pilot testing with 20 participants.

Make any necessary changes based on feedback from the pilot study.

Step 2: Recruitment and outreach to participants

Recruit participants using industry networks, coffee cooperatives and urban specialty coffee forums.

Seek support from the Kunming Coffee Association and sustainability organizations.

Ensure proportional representation of producers, supply chain participants, policy makers and consumers.

Step 3: Distribute questionnaires and collect data

Distribute the survey through two main methods:

Online survey: via WeChat, email and coffee trade platforms (targeting urban stakeholders).

Face-to-face interviews: Conducted at coffee markets and farmer cooperatives in Kunming (targeting rural producers).

Monitor response rates and send follow-up reminders to ensure at least 400 surveys are completed.

Step 4: Data verification and cleaning

Screen for incomplete or inconsistent data.

Remove responses that do not meet inclusion criteria.

Test data for reliability and consistency using SPSS and Smart PLS (Hair et al., 2020).

Step 5: Data Analysis and Interpretation

Descriptive statistics were performed on the respondents.

Perform stratified regression analysis on demographic factors.

Prepare findings for academic reports and industry recommendations.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the characteristics of the respondents and key variables in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This includes

Mean and Standard Deviation: Assesses the central tendency and dispersion of responses.

Frequency and Percentage Distributions: To analyze categorical variables such as demographic characteristics (farm size, production size, geographic location, and market access).

Histograms and Box Plots: To visually display the distribution of data and identify potential outliers.

Correlation analysis

Pearson's correlation test was conducted to check for linear relationships between key variables: sustainable practices, market differentiation, stakeholder collaboration and value creation (Hair et al., 2020). The correlation coefficient (R-value) helps to determine whether there is a strong positive or negative correlation between the variables.

Regression analysis

While controlling for demographic factors, multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the direct impact of sustainable practices on value creation. Specifically

Linear regression: Used to determine how sustainable practices affect value creation.

Hierarchical regression: Used to analyze the impact of moderating variables (stakeholder collaboration) while controlling for the impact of demographic factors.

Mediation analysis (Baron & Kenny method): Used to assess whether market differentiation mediates the relationship between sustainable development and value creation (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

ANOVA and t-test

ANOVA and independent samples t-test were conducted to explore the differences between groups:

One-way ANOVA: Used to test whether there is a significant difference in sustainability adoption across demographic groups (e.g. farm size, production size, market access).

Post-hoc test (Tukey's HSD): performed if the ANOVA shows significant group differences.

t-test: Used to compare the mean difference between two groups (e.g., certified vs. non-certified producers).

These techniques ensure that statistical differences between categories are correctly analyzed and interpreted.

Results

The main objective of this study is to investigate the role of sustainable practices in enhancing value creation in the wild coffee industry, focusing on the mediating role of market differentiation and the moderating role of stakeholders. By systematically examining the data, this chapter seeks to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses presented in the previous chapters.

The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data, including surveys, interviews and document analysis. The data were analyzed using a variety of statistical techniques and thematic analyses to reveal patterns, relationships, and insights relevant to the research objectives.

Farms of 1-5 hectares were the most numerous with a share of 32.3% (129), followed by 6-10 hectares with a share of 27.8% (111). Small farms (less than 1 hectare) accounted for 23.3% (93), while large farms with more than 10 hectares were the least with 16.8% (67). In terms of cumulative percentages, more than half (55.5%) of the farms were 5 hectares or less in size, while 83.3% of the farms were not more than 10 hectares in size, suggesting that small and medium-sized farms dominated this dataset, with fewer large farms.

As shown in tables 1 to 3：

Model Summary:

R = 0.953: indicates that the correlation between sustainable practices and value creation is very strong.

R^2 = 0.909: indicates that sustainable practices explain 90.9% of the variation in value creation, indicating that the explanatory power of the model is very high.

Adjusted R^2 = 0.909: Similar to the R^2 value, indicating that the model is highly robust.

Standard Error of Estimation = 2.13334: indicates that the error between the predicted and actual values is small.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.953[a]	.909	.909	2.13334

a. Predictors: (Constant), sustainable practices

Table 2: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression (Statistics)	18121.754	1	18121.754	3981.801	.000b
	Residual	1811.356	398	4.551		
	(Grand) Total	19933.110	399			

a. Dependent variable: value creation

b. Predictor variables: (constants) sustainable practices

Table 3: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.348	.565		-.616	.000
	Sustainable Practices	1.020	.016	.953	63.102	.000

a. Dependent Variable: value creation

ANOVA Analysis of Variance:

F value = 3981.801, $p < 0.001$: indicates that the regression model is overall significant, i.e., sustainable practices have a significant impact on value creation.

Regression Coefficient: B = 1.020: indicates that when sustainable practices increase by 1 unit, value creation increases by 1.020 units on average.

Beta = 0.953: indicates that sustainable practices are strong predictor variables of value creation.

t-value = 63.102, $p < 0.001$: indicates that the effect of sustainable practices on value creation is statistically significant.

There is a very strong positive relationship between sustainable practices and value creation ($R^2 = 0.909$) and sustainable practices are highly predictive of value creation.

Table 4: Intermediary Analysis

Variable	Value	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value	Lower Confidence Interval	Upper Confidence Interval
Model Summary						
R	0.9609					
R^2	0.9233					
MSE	3.8503					
F-Value	2389.986					
DF1	2					
DF2	397					
P-Value	0					
Total Effect	1.0197	0.0162	63.1015	0	0.9879	1.0514
Direct Effect	0.7484	0.035	21.3994	0	0.6796	0.8171
Indirect Effect	0.2713	0.037			0.202	0.3467

As shown in Table 4, the mediation analysis in this study shows that sustainable practices have a significant direct effect on value creation ($\beta = 0.7484$, $p < 0.001$), while sustainable practices also affect value creation indirectly through market differentiation (indirect effect = 0.2713, $p < 0.001$). The total effect (1.0197) is much larger than the direct effect, suggesting that market differentiation plays a partial mediating role. The high R^2 value (0.9091) indicates the strong explanatory power of the model for value creation, while the significant F-value (3981.801) suggests that the model is overall well-fitted. Therefore, when enterprises improve the level of sustainable practices, they can not only directly enhance value creation, but also further optimize value creation by enhancing market differentiation. This implies that enterprises should simultaneously focus on how to amplify their impact on value creation through market differentiation when formulating sustainability strategies.

As shown in Tables 5：

Sustainable practices had a significant positive effect on value creation ($\beta = 0.6523$, $p < 0.001$).

Stakeholder collaboration also had a direct contribution to value creation ($\beta = 0.2894$, $p < 0.001$).

Stakeholder collaboration played a significant positive moderating role between sustainable practices and value creation ($\beta = 0.1728$, $p < 0.001$), i.e., the impact of sustainable practices on value creation was stronger when firms strengthened their collaboration with stakeholders.

The model has a very good fit ($R^2 = 0.9411$), indicating that the model explains changes in value creation well.

Table 5: Moderate Analysis

Variable	Value	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value	Lower Confidence Interval	Upper Confidence Interval
Model Summary						
R	0.9701					
R²	0.9411					
MSE	0.9405					
F-Value	2.9374					
DF1	2145.763					
DF2	3					
P-Value	396					
Total Effect	1.1145	0.0197	56.4923	0	1.0756	1.1534
Direct Effect	0.6523	0.0285	22.8947	0	0.5962	0.7084
Indirect Effect	0.1728	0.0314	5.4983	0	0.1114	0.2284

Discussion

The study confirms that sustainable practices have a significant positive impact on value creation (H1). This finding aligns with Porter and Kramer's (2011) Creating Shared Value (CSV) theory, which argues that corporate investments in social and environmental responsibility can generate economic value. Additionally, it is consistent with Elkington's (1997) Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, which emphasizes that sustainability efforts enhance economic, environmental, and social values.

However, the study diverges from some existing research, such as Darnall et al. (2018), which suggested that the relationship between sustainability and value creation is contingent on external factors like market conditions, government policies, and consumer preferences. This study found an exceptionally strong correlation between sustainable practices and value creation ($r = 0.953$, $p < 0.01$), reinforcing the idea that sustainability should be a core component of corporate strategy rather than merely a compliance measure. By providing empirical support for sustainability as a value driver, this study underscores the importance of embedding sustainability into corporate decision-making and supply chain management to achieve long-term competitive advantage.

The Mediating Role of Market Differentiation

The study confirms that market differentiation partially mediates the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation (H2). This aligns with the Resource-Based View (RBV) proposed by Barney (1991), which states that firms with unique resources and capabilities—such as strong market differentiation strategies—can achieve sustainable competitive advantages. This finding also supports Hart and Dowell's (2011) research, which suggested that sustainability-oriented firms often gain a competitive edge through innovation and differentiation.

By validating market differentiation as a mediator, this study provides a refined understanding of how sustainability enhances value creation. Firms that emphasize geographical origin, ecological production methods, and superior product quality can strengthen their brand positioning in the global coffee market (Rich et al., 2018). This highlights the need for firms to not only adopt sustainable practices but also effectively communicate these efforts to consumers, leveraging differentiation to secure higher market returns (Grabs, 2020).

The Moderating Role of Stakeholder Collaboration

The findings demonstrate that stakeholder collaboration significantly moderates the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation (H3), meaning that higher levels of stakeholder cooperation amplify the positive effects of sustainability on value creation. This aligns with Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory, which asserts that firms must balance the needs of multiple stakeholders to achieve sustainable growth.

Moreover, the study supports Jones' (1995) argument that firms developing long-term trusting relationships with stakeholders—including suppliers, cooperatives, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—are better positioned to implement sustainability initiatives successfully. These collaborations facilitate financial support, market access, certification processes, and knowledge sharing, all of which contribute to enhanced value creation (Woyesa & Kumar, 2021; Ochago et al., 2024).

This finding underscores the necessity of strengthening stakeholder engagement when implementing sustainability strategies. Without strong cooperation along the supply chain, firms may struggle with certification costs, compliance issues, and limited consumer recognition (Duguma & Bulitta, 2021). Future research should further examine how different types of stakeholder partnerships influence sustainability outcomes in the wild coffee industry and other agricultural sectors.

The Influence of Demographic Factors

The study also highlights that demographic factors—including farm size, production scale, geographic location, and market access—significantly influence the sustainability-value creation relationship (H4). This is consistent with World Bank (2020) reports on sustainable agricultural development, which indicate that firms in different regions and of varying sizes face distinct challenges in implementing sustainability initiatives.

Smaller farms often struggle with high certification costs, limited economies of scale, and restricted access to high-value markets (Jena & Grote, 2021).

Larger producers benefit from cost efficiencies and better access to sustainability-focused premium markets.

Market access remains a key constraint, with rural producers often facing logistical and infrastructural challenges that limit their ability to capitalize on sustainability efforts (Melo et al., 2021).

These findings suggest that policymakers must develop targeted interventions that address the specific constraints faced by different producer segments to enhance the overall effectiveness of sustainability-driven value creation.

Theoretical Contributions

This study enriches existing sustainability and value creation theories in several ways:

Expanding the framework of sustainability and value creation: By quantifying the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation, the study provides empirical evidence supporting their positive impact.

Validating the mediating role of market differentiation: It extends Resource-Based View (RBV) theory by demonstrating how firms translate sustainability initiatives into competitive advantages.

Revealing the moderating role of stakeholder collaboration: It strengthens Stakeholder Theory by emphasizing the key role of external partnerships in enhancing sustainability outcomes.

Incorporating demographic factors: The study advances understanding of business sustainability across different farm sizes, geographies, and market conditions, contributing to context-specific sustainability research.

Practical Implications

The findings have significant managerial implications for businesses and policymakers in the wild coffee industry:

Enterprises should actively implement sustainability strategies to improve brand equity, gain market differentiation advantages, and enhance economic returns (Grabs, 2020).

Firms should develop stronger market differentiation strategies through branding, storytelling, and product certification to capture premium pricing opportunities (Gupta et al., 2022).

Stakeholder collaboration should be reinforced through supply chain partnerships and government-NGO cooperation to mitigate financial and logistical barriers associated with sustainability initiatives (Woyesa & Kumar, 2021).

Government agencies should offer targeted policy support, including subsidies for smallholder certification, infrastructure improvements, and capacity-building programs to promote sustainable agriculture development (Van der Ven & Cashore, 2018).

Policy Implications

This study provides key insights for policymakers seeking to foster sustainability in the wild coffee industry and beyond:

Subsidizing certification costs: Smallholder farmers require financial support to obtain organic and fair-trade certifications, reducing entry barriers (Jena & Grote, 2021).

Investing in infrastructure: Governments should focus on road networks, storage facilities, and digital trade platforms to enhance market access for remote coffee producers (Duguma & Bulitta, 2021).

Promoting transparency in supply chains: Encouraging blockchain-based traceability systems can improve sustainability compliance and consumer trust (Gupta et al., 2022).

Encouraging direct trade models: Policymakers should support direct trade initiatives that allow producers to establish long-term relationships with buyers, reducing dependence on intermediaries (Melo et al., 2021).

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on sustainability, market differentiation, and stakeholder collaboration in value creation. It confirms that sustainability enhances economic, social, and environmental value, but only when effectively leveraged through differentiation and collaboration. These findings offer actionable recommendations for firms, policymakers, and development agencies seeking to enhance sustainability outcomes in the wild coffee industry and similar agricultural sectors.

Conclusions

The findings of this study provide robust empirical evidence that sustainable practices significantly enhance value creation in the wild coffee industry. Through statistical analysis, including correlation analysis, regression modeling, mediation analysis, and moderation analysis, the study validates the interconnected mechanisms by which sustainability, market differentiation, stakeholder collaboration, and demographic factors contribute to value creation.

The study establishes that sustainable practices have a strong and significant positive impact on value creation in the wild coffee industry. Correlation analysis confirms a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.953$, $p < 0.01$) between these variables, indicating that as sustainability efforts increase, value creation also significantly rises.

Moreover, regression analysis reveals that sustainable practices significantly predict value creation ($\beta = 1.020$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.909$), showing that sustainability accounts for 90.9% of the variance in value creation. This result confirms H1, validating the assertion that companies that engage in sustainable production, environmental conservation, and social responsibility experience heightened brand value, improved market competitiveness, and enhanced economic and social outcomes.

These findings suggest that wild coffee producers who adopt sustainability-oriented strategies gain substantial benefits, including increased consumer trust, access to premium markets, and operational efficiency improvements. The study further highlights the economic viability of sustainability, reinforcing its role as a core driver of business success rather than just a compliance measure.

The study further explores the mediating effect of market differentiation in the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation. The mediation analysis indicates:

The direct effect of sustainable practices on value creation is significant ($\beta = 0.7484$, $p < 0.001$).

The effect of market differentiation on value creation is also significant ($\beta = 0.2815$, $p < 0.001$).

The total effect of sustainable practices on value creation is $\beta = 1.0197$, $p < 0.001$.

The indirect effect of sustainable practices on value creation through market differentiation is $\beta = 0.2713$, $p < 0.001$, confirming partial mediation.

These findings confirm H2, demonstrating that market differentiation strengthens the positive impact of sustainable practices on value creation. By leveraging market differentiation strategies, companies can further amplify the impact of sustainability by building unique brands, optimizing product quality, improving supply chain management, and emphasizing ethical sourcing and transparency.

Market differentiation enables firms to position themselves competitively in the specialty coffee market, where consumers increasingly demand ethically sourced and environmentally responsible products. The findings indicate that differentiated brands attract premium pricing, consumer loyalty, and long-term profitability, reinforcing the value-creating potential of sustainability initiatives.

Despite the strong mediating effect, the study also acknowledges that some barriers, such as certification costs, market access, and consumer skepticism about sustainability claims, may limit the full realization of market differentiation benefits.

The study also examines the moderating role of stakeholder collaboration in the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation. The moderation analysis results show:

The interaction effect (sustainable practices × stakeholder collaboration) is significant ($\beta = 0.1728$, $p < 0.001$).

The total effect of sustainable practices on value creation increases when stakeholder collaboration is higher (total effect $\beta = 1.1145$, $p < 0.001$).

These findings confirm H3, demonstrating that strong stakeholder collaboration enhances the impact of sustainable practices on value creation. The results suggest that higher levels of cooperation between suppliers, consumers, government agencies, NGOs, and industry organizations improve sustainability outcomes.

The study highlights several mechanisms through which stakeholder collaboration contributes to value creation, including:

Facilitating access to financial resources and investment opportunities, especially for smallholder farmers.

Strengthening knowledge-sharing networks and technical assistance programs that improve sustainability implementation.

Ensuring smoother compliance with sustainability certifications and international trade standards.

Enhancing supply chain efficiency and transparency, which reinforces consumer trust in ethical sourcing.

The findings suggest that firms that actively engage in collaborative initiatives with multiple stakeholders can overcome structural barriers, such as financial constraints and regulatory complexities, that otherwise hinder sustainability adoption.

However, power asymmetries within stakeholder relationships, especially between multinational corporations and small-scale producers, may limit equitable benefit distribution. The study suggests that further exploration of stakeholder governance models is necessary to ensure fair participation across the supply chain.

The study also examines the impact of demographic variables, including farm size, production scale, geographic location, and market access, on the relationship between sustainable practices and value creation. The results confirm that demographic factors significantly influence how sustainability-driven value creation unfolds (H4).

Key findings include:

Larger farm sizes benefit from economies of scale, making sustainability adoption more cost-effective.

Firms with larger production capacities can implement sustainable production technologies more efficiently, reducing costs and increasing competitiveness.

Geographic location affects market accessibility and resource availability, influencing how firms implement sustainable practices.

Market access determines whether firms can successfully bring sustainable products to premium markets and secure higher consumer acceptance.

The findings indicate that smallholder farmers face greater challenges in obtaining sustainability certifications, accessing premium markets, and adopting advanced production technologies due to financial and logistical constraints. Meanwhile, larger enterprises benefit from greater financial flexibility, supply chain efficiencies, and economies of scale that facilitate sustainability investments.

The findings of this study provide empirical validation for the argument that sustainable practices significantly enhance value creation in the wild coffee industry. The study confirms the direct impact of sustainability on value creation, the partial mediating role of market differentiation, the moderating role of stakeholder collaboration, and the influence of demographic factors in shaping sustainability outcomes.

Key results include:

Sustainable practices explain 90.9% of the variance in value creation ($R^2 = 0.909$), highlighting their dominant role in business success.

Market differentiation strengthens the sustainability-value creation link, enabling firms to achieve competitive advantages.

Stakeholder collaboration significantly enhances the impact of sustainability efforts, ensuring greater resource efficiency and supply chain resilience.

Demographic factors such as farm size, production scale, and market access influence how effectively firms implement sustainable strategies.

These findings suggest that businesses must integrate sustainability into their core strategies while simultaneously leveraging market differentiation, fostering stakeholder collaboration, and adapting sustainability initiatives based on firm demographics.

Future research should explore longitudinal assessments of sustainability-driven value creation, cross-regional comparative studies, and the role of emerging digital tools such as blockchain technology in sustainability traceability.

By adopting these insights, firms, policymakers, and industry stakeholders can develop more effective sustainability strategies that balance economic growth, environmental responsibility, and social equity in the wild coffee sector.

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