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Green Innovation and Sustainable Management: A Systematic Review of Global Trends

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Abstract

Green innovation has become an essential strategic approach in addressing increasing global environmental challenges and strengthening sustainable management practices across organizations. Despite the rapid growth of research in this field, existing studies remain fragmented and lack an integrated understanding of global trends, particularly in linking theoretical developments with empirical evidence across sectors and regions. This study aims to systematically review and synthesize global literature on green innovation and sustainable management to identify key thematic patterns, trends, and research directions. The study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach using the PRISMA framework. Relevant articles were collected from major academic databases and selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles published within the last decade. The findings reveal four dominant themes: green product innovation, green process innovation, sustainable business models, and organizational sustainability capabilities. The results also indicate increasing global integration of sustainability into corporate strategy, with strong contributions from manufacturing, technology, and service sectors across both developed and emerging economies. Theoretically, this study contributes to the integration of fragmented perspectives on green innovation by linking organizational capabilities, institutional pressures, and sustainability outcomes. Practically, it provides insights for managers and policymakers to strengthen sustainability-oriented innovation strategies. Future research is encouraged to explore cross-country comparisons, sector-specific dynamics, and longitudinal studies to better understand the evolution of green innovation in diverse contexts.

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Introduction

Global environmental challenges have increasingly become one of the most critical issues facing contemporary organizations, governments, and societies. Climate change, resource depletion, and ecological degradation have intensified the urgency for businesses and institutions to adopt more sustainable and responsible practices. In this context, innovation has evolved beyond traditional economic and technological orientations to incorporate environmental considerations as a central component of strategic development. One of the most significant responses to these challenges is the emergence of green innovation, which integrates environmental sustainability principles into product development, process improvement, and organizational transformation.

Green innovation is widely recognized as a fundamental mechanism for achieving sustainable development objectives while maintaining organizational competitiveness. It represents a shift from conventional innovation paradigms by embedding environmental responsibility into the core of innovation activities. Dangelico (2015) emphasizes that green product innovation has become increasingly important as organizations seek to minimize environmental impact while maintaining market relevance and competitiveness. This evolution reflects a broader transformation in how firms conceptualize value creation, moving beyond financial performance to include environmental and social dimensions.

The increasing relevance of sustainability in corporate strategy has also contributed to the integration of green innovation into sustainable management practices. Sustainable management refers to the systematic incorporation of environmental, social, and economic considerations into organizational decision-making processes. It emphasizes long-term value creation while ensuring ecological balance and stakeholder well-being. Lozano (2018) highlights that organizational sustainability requires continuous adaptation and

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transformation of management systems to align with evolving environmental expectations and regulatory frameworks. As a result, green innovation is no longer viewed as an optional initiative but as a strategic imperative for organizations operating in increasingly complex and environmentally conscious markets.

Despite the growing recognition of green innovation as a key driver of sustainability, the existing literature remains fragmented across multiple disciplines, sectors, and geographical regions. Research on green innovation has been conducted from various perspectives, including environmental management, strategic innovation, organizational behavior, and industrial engineering. However, these studies often focus on specific dimensions or contexts, resulting in a lack of integrated understanding of global trends and patterns. This fragmentation limits the ability of scholars and practitioners to develop a comprehensive framework that explains how green innovation evolves and contributes to sustainable management on a global scale.

Previous studies have contributed significantly to the understanding of green innovation drivers, mechanisms, and outcomes. For instance, Tariq et al. (2017) identify key drivers and consequences of green product and process innovation, highlighting the importance of regulatory pressure, market demand, and organizational commitment. Similarly, Xie et al. (2019) examine the relationship between green innovation and corporate financial performance, demonstrating that environmental innovation can also generate economic benefits. Chen and Chang (2017) further emphasize the role of green dynamic capabilities, transformational leadership, and creativity in determining green product development performance. These studies collectively underscore the multidimensional nature of green innovation and its relevance to both environmental and economic outcomes.

In addition to firm-level factors, organizational capabilities and learning mechanisms also play a critical role in facilitating green innovation. Albort-Morant et al. (2018) argue that absorptive capacity, both potential and realized, serves as a key driver of green innovation performance. Firms with higher absorptive capacity are better able to acquire, assimilate, and apply external knowledge related to sustainability. This capability enables organizations to respond more effectively to environmental challenges and innovate in ways that align with sustainability objectives. Furthermore, Hojnik and Ruzzier (2017) highlight the role of institutional mechanisms such as environmental certification (e.g., ISO 14001) in encouraging firms to adopt eco-innovation practices.

From a broader perspective, sustainable management has also evolved to incorporate new business models and organizational frameworks. Bocken et al. (2014) propose sustainable business model archetypes that guide organizations in aligning innovation strategies with sustainability goals. These archetypes emphasize value creation that extends beyond economic profit to include environmental preservation and social well-being. Such frameworks illustrate how organizations can systematically redesign their operations to support long-term sustainability outcomes.

Furthermore, the integration of sustainability into organizational strategy is closely linked to leadership and human resource practices. Singh et al. (2020) demonstrate that green transformational leadership and green human resource management significantly influence environmental performance and innovation outcomes. Leadership commitment plays a crucial role in shaping organizational culture and motivating employees to engage in sustainability-oriented behaviors. This highlights the importance of internal organizational dynamics in driving green innovation success.

Although substantial progress has been made in understanding various aspects of green innovation and sustainable management, there is still a lack of comprehensive synthesis that integrates these findings into a unified global perspective. Existing studies tend to focus on isolated variables, specific industries, or regional contexts, which limits their generalizability. Adams et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of systematic literature reviews in addressing such fragmentation by consolidating dispersed knowledge and identifying overarching patterns in sustainability-oriented innovation research.

In this context, the present study aims to address this gap by conducting a systematic literature review of green innovation and sustainable management research. The objective is to identify global trends, thematic structures, and emerging directions in the literature. By synthesizing existing studies, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how green innovation has evolved over time and how it contributes to sustainable management practices across different contexts.

Specifically, this study is guided by three research questions: (1) How has research on green innovation evolved globally over the past decade? (2) What are the dominant thematic clusters in the literature on sustainable management and green innovation? and (3) What are the emerging trends and future research opportunities in this field? These questions are designed to provide a structured and systematic understanding of the literature, enabling the identification of both theoretical and practical implications.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both academic research and managerial practice. From an academic perspective, this study provides an integrative synthesis of fragmented literature, contributing to the development of a more coherent theoretical understanding of green innovation and sustainable management. From a practical perspective, the findings offer insights for managers, policymakers, and practitioners on how to design and implement effective sustainability strategies.

Thus, green innovation has emerged as a central concept in addressing global environmental challenges and advancing sustainable management practices. However, the fragmented nature of existing research necessitates a systematic review to consolidate knowledge and identify global trends. By addressing this gap, this study provides a comprehensive foundation for future research and contributes to the advancement of sustainability-oriented innovation literature

Materials and Methods

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to comprehensively synthesize and analyze existing research on green innovation and sustainable management. The use of SLR is considered appropriate due to the fragmented and multidisciplinary nature of the topic, which spans environmental management, organizational studies, innovation systems, and sustainability science. A systematic approach enables a transparent, replicable, and structured process for identifying, selecting, and analyzing relevant literature, thereby reducing bias and enhancing the reliability of the findings (Adams et al., 2016).

The review process in this study follows established systematic review principles by focusing on rigorous article identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion criteria. The objective is to ensure that only high-quality and relevant peer-reviewed studies are included in the final synthesis. This approach is consistent with previous systematic review studies on green innovation, which emphasize the importance of structured methodologies in consolidating fragmented research streams (Qin et al., 2025; Saxena et al., 2024).

The literature search was conducted using major academic databases, including Scopus-indexed journals and other reputable international sources. The search strategy employed a combination of keywords related to the core concepts of the study, such as “green innovation,” “sustainable management,” “eco-innovation,” “environmental innovation,” and “sustainable business models.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine the search results and ensure relevance to the research objectives.

The selection of databases is grounded in their extensive coverage of high-impact journals in sustainability and innovation research. Previous studies emphasize that using multiple databases improves the comprehensiveness and robustness of systematic reviews (Fernando et al., 2019). In addition, supplementary sources were used to capture interdisciplinary perspectives on sustainable management and innovation systems.

To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected literature, several inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The inclusion criteria consist of: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2014 and 2025, (2) studies written in English, (3) articles focusing on green innovation, sustainable management, or related sustainability concepts, and (4) empirical, conceptual, or review-based studies.

Exclusion criteria include: (1) non-peer-reviewed publications such as conference abstracts and editorial notes, (2) studies not directly related to sustainability-oriented innovation, and (3) duplicate articles across databases. This rigorous filtering process is essential to ensure methodological validity and reduce redundancy in the dataset.

After the selection process, relevant articles were systematically reviewed and coded based on predefined categories. The extracted data included author information, publication year, research context, methodological approach, theoretical framework, and key findings. This structured coding approach enables thematic synthesis and comparative analysis across studies.

The coding process is particularly important in identifying patterns and trends in green innovation research. As highlighted by Albort-Morant et al. (2018), systematic categorization of literature allows researchers to better understand how organizational capabilities and absorptive capacity influence innovation outcomes. Similarly, Chen and Chang (2017) emphasize the importance of identifying underlying determinants such as leadership and organizational creativity in green innovation studies.

The analyzed data were synthesized using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the literature. Thematic analysis is widely used in systematic reviews due to its flexibility and ability to capture both explicit and implicit meanings in qualitative data. The themes were grouped into broader conceptual categories such as green product innovation, green process innovation, sustainable business models, and organizational sustainability capabilities.

Furthermore, the synthesis also considered theoretical frameworks such as resource-based view, stakeholder theory, and dynamic capabilities to interpret the findings. This aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of integrating multiple theoretical perspectives in understanding sustainability-driven innovation (Singh et al., 2020; Hojnik & Ruzzier, 2017).

Results and Discussions

This section presents the synthesized findings derived from the systematic literature review on green innovation and sustainable management. The analysis integrates insights from selected peer-reviewed studies to identify global research patterns, thematic clusters, and key determinants shaping the development of green innovation over the past decade.

Evolution and Growth of Green Innovation Research

The reviewed literature indicates a significant and consistent increase in scholarly attention toward green innovation and sustainable management, particularly after 2016. This trend reflects growing global concern over environmental degradation, climate change, and the need for sustainable economic transformation. Adams et al. (2016) highlight that sustainability-oriented innovation has evolved into a multidisciplinary research domain that integrates management science, environmental studies, and technological innovation.

The evolution of research also demonstrates a shift from conceptual discussions toward more empirical and theory-driven investigations. Early studies predominantly focused on defining green innovation and exploring its conceptual boundaries, whereas more recent studies emphasize its measurable impacts on organizational performance, environmental outcomes, and competitive advantage. This progression reflects the maturation of the field and its increasing relevance in both academic and managerial contexts.

Thematic Clusters in Green Innovation Research

The thematic analysis identified four dominant clusters that structure the global literature on green innovation and sustainable management:

(a) Green Product Innovation

Green product innovation represents one of the most extensively studied areas within the field. It focuses on the development of environmentally friendly products that reduce negative environmental impacts throughout their life cycle. Dangelico (2015) emphasizes that green product innovation has become a strategic priority for firms aiming to align market competitiveness with sustainability goals. Studies within this cluster highlight the importance of eco-design, material efficiency, and product lifecycle management.

(b) Green Process Innovation

Green process innovation refers to the improvement of production and operational processes to enhance resource efficiency and reduce emissions. Xie et al. (2019) demonstrate that firms implementing green process innovation tend to achieve improved environmental and financial performance simultaneously. This cluster underscores the role of technological upgrading, energy efficiency, and waste reduction in achieving sustainability objectives.

(c) Sustainable Business Models

Another prominent theme is the transformation of business models toward sustainability-oriented frameworks. Bocken et al. (2014) propose archetypes of sustainable business models that guide organizations in integrating environmental and social value creation into their core operations. This cluster highlights the shift from traditional profit-centric models to more holistic approaches that balance economic, environmental, and social outcomes.

(d) Organizational Capabilities and Leadership

The fourth cluster focuses on internal organizational factors that enable green innovation. Chen and Chang (2017) emphasize the role of green dynamic capabilities, transformational leadership, and organizational creativity in driving green product development performance. Similarly, Singh et al. (2020) highlight the importance of green transformational leadership and human resource management in fostering environmentally responsible organizational behavior.

Determinants of Green Innovation Adoption

The review identifies several key determinants that influence the adoption and implementation of green innovation across organizations. One of the most significant factors is absorptive capacity, which refers to a firm's ability to recognize, assimilate, and apply external knowledge. Albort-Morant et al. (2018) argue that both potential and realized absorptive capacity play complementary roles in enhancing green innovation performance.

In addition, institutional and regulatory pressures are identified as critical external drivers. Firms operating in highly regulated environments are more likely to adopt green innovation practices to comply with

environmental standards. Hojnik and Ruzzier (2017) further demonstrate that environmental certifications such as ISO 14001 can serve as institutional mechanisms that encourage eco-innovation adoption.

Leadership and organizational culture also emerge as important internal determinants. Transformational leadership fosters a culture of sustainability and motivates employees to engage in environmentally responsible innovation activities (Chen & Chang, 2017; Singh et al., 2020).

Consequences of Green Innovation

The findings indicate that green innovation generates both environmental and economic benefits. From an environmental perspective, firms that adopt green innovation practices experience significant improvements in resource efficiency, waste reduction, and emission control. From an economic perspective, green innovation contributes to enhanced financial performance and long-term competitiveness.

Xie et al. (2019) confirm that both green product and process innovation positively influence corporate financial outcomes. Similarly, Hojnik and Ruzzier (2017) argue that eco-innovation provides competitive advantages through cost savings, improved reputation, and market differentiation.

Sectoral Applications and Emerging Contexts

The application of green innovation spans multiple sectors, including manufacturing, technology, and tourism. In the manufacturing sector, green innovation is primarily associated with process optimization and production efficiency. In contrast, the tourism sector increasingly integrates sustainability principles to enhance resilience and post-crisis recovery strategies (Sharma et al., 2021).

This sectoral diversity indicates that green innovation is not confined to a specific industry but is instead a cross-sectoral phenomenon with broad applicability. The adaptability of green innovation practices across industries further reinforces its importance as a global sustainability strategy.

Overall, the synthesis of findings reveals three major global trends in green innovation and sustainable management:

1. Integration of sustainability into core business strategy, where environmental considerations are embedded in organizational decision-making processes.
2. Increasing importance of organizational capabilities and leadership, particularly in enabling innovation-driven sustainability transitions.
3. Growing convergence between economic performance and environmental sustainability, indicating that green innovation is no longer perceived as a cost burden but as a source of competitive advantage.

These trends collectively demonstrate the evolving nature of green innovation as a strategic imperative in modern business environments.

The findings of this systematic literature review provide important insights into the evolving relationship between green innovation and sustainable management within the global academic discourse. The synthesis of selected studies reveals that green innovation has developed into a multidimensional construct that integrates environmental, economic, and organizational perspectives. This section interprets the key findings in relation to existing theoretical frameworks, identifies their implications, and highlights emerging global trends in the field.

One of the central insights from this review is that green innovation cannot be fully understood through a single theoretical lens. Instead, it requires an integration of multiple perspectives, including the resource-based view, absorptive capacity theory, stakeholder theory, and dynamic capabilities framework. Chen and Chang (2017) emphasize that green dynamic capabilities, transformational leadership, and organizational creativity significantly influence green product development performance. This supports the resource-based view, which argues that unique internal capabilities are essential for achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

Similarly, Albort-Morant et al. (2018) highlight the importance of absorptive capacity in enhancing green innovation performance. Firms with strong absorptive capacity are better able to acquire and apply external knowledge, which is crucial in responding to rapidly changing environmental demands. This finding reinforces the dynamic capabilities perspective, which emphasizes continuous organizational adaptation in dynamic environments.

From a broader institutional perspective, Hojnik and Ruzzier (2017) demonstrate that regulatory frameworks and environmental certifications, such as ISO 14001, significantly influence the adoption of eco-innovation practices. This aligns with stakeholder theory, which suggests that organizations respond to external pressures from regulators, customers, and society in shaping their sustainability strategies.

The findings also indicate that green innovation has shifted from being a peripheral environmental initiative to a core strategic capability. Organizations increasingly integrate sustainability into their innovation

processes to enhance competitiveness and long-term value creation. Dangelico (2015) argues that green product innovation is not only an environmental responsibility but also a strategic tool for market differentiation and competitive positioning.

Moreover, Singh et al. (2020) emphasize the role of green transformational leadership and green human resource management in fostering organizational commitment toward sustainability. This suggests that internal leadership structures and human capital development are critical enablers of green innovation. Organizations that embed sustainability values into their culture are more likely to achieve consistent environmental and economic performance improvements.

Another key implication emerging from the review is the transformation of traditional business models toward sustainability-oriented frameworks. Bocken et al. (2014) propose that sustainable business model innovation is essential for aligning organizational strategies with environmental objectives. The findings of this review confirm that firms are increasingly adopting circular economy principles, resource efficiency strategies, and value creation models that extend beyond profit maximization.

This transformation reflects a broader paradigm shift in management thinking, where sustainability is no longer treated as an external constraint but as an internal driver of innovation. Lozano (2018) further supports this perspective by emphasizing that organizational sustainability requires continuous adaptation and integration of environmental considerations into all levels of decision-making.

A significant finding of this study is the convergence between environmental and economic performance outcomes. Contrary to earlier assumptions that sustainability practices may increase operational costs, recent evidence suggests that green innovation can simultaneously enhance both environmental and financial performance. Xie et al. (2019) demonstrate that green product and process innovations positively influence corporate financial outcomes, highlighting the economic viability of sustainability-oriented strategies.

Similarly, Hojnik and Ruzzier (2017) argue that eco-innovation leads to competitive advantages through cost reduction, improved brand reputation, and enhanced market access. This convergence indicates that sustainability and profitability are not mutually exclusive but are increasingly interdependent in modern organizational contexts.

The synthesis of literature also reveals several emerging global trends. First, there is a growing integration of sustainability into core business strategies, where environmental considerations are embedded in corporate governance and decision-making structures. Second, technological advancements and digital transformation are increasingly being leveraged to support green innovation initiatives.

Third, there is a noticeable expansion of sustainability practices across multiple sectors, including manufacturing, technology, and tourism. Sharma et al. (2021) highlight that even the tourism industry is adopting sustainability-driven recovery strategies, particularly in response to post-pandemic challenges. This demonstrates the cross-sectoral applicability of green innovation as a global phenomenon.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by integrating fragmented findings into a cohesive framework that links organizational capabilities, institutional pressures, and innovation outcomes. It reinforces the importance of combining multiple theoretical perspectives to fully understand sustainability-driven innovation.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organizations should invest in developing internal capabilities, particularly leadership, absorptive capacity, and human resource practices, to support green innovation. Policymakers should also strengthen institutional frameworks that encourage eco-innovation adoption through incentives and regulatory mechanisms.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review provides a comprehensive synthesis of global research trends in green innovation and sustainable management. The study highlights that green innovation has evolved into a central strategic construct within organizational and sustainability studies, reflecting its increasing importance in addressing environmental challenges while simultaneously enhancing organizational performance. Across the reviewed literature, green innovation is consistently positioned as a multidimensional concept encompassing product innovation, process innovation, organizational capabilities, and sustainable business model transformation.

The findings indicate that green innovation is no longer perceived as a peripheral or compliance-driven activity, but rather as a strategic capability embedded within core organizational processes. This transformation is driven by the growing integration of environmental considerations into business strategy, supported by advancements in technology, regulatory pressures, and increasing stakeholder expectations. Organizations that successfully adopt green innovation practices tend to demonstrate improved

environmental outcomes alongside enhanced economic performance, indicating a convergence between sustainability and competitiveness.

The review also identifies four dominant thematic areas that structure the global literature: green product innovation, green process innovation, sustainable business models, and organizational sustainability capabilities. These themes collectively demonstrate that green innovation operates across multiple levels of analysis, ranging from operational efficiency improvements to strategic organizational transformation. In particular, the role of internal organizational factors such as leadership commitment, human resource practices, and absorptive capacity emerges as a critical determinant of successful green innovation implementation.

In addition, the study reveals several emerging global trends. First, there is a clear shift toward the integration of sustainability into core business strategies rather than treating it as a supplementary function. Second, technological advancement and digital transformation are increasingly enabling more efficient and scalable green innovation practices. Third, green innovation is expanding across various sectors, including manufacturing, tourism, and service industries, demonstrating its universal relevance in contemporary economic systems.

Despite these important insights, the study also acknowledges certain limitations. As a systematic literature review, the findings are dependent on the scope of selected databases and inclusion criteria, which may limit the comprehensiveness of the analysis. Additionally, variations in methodological approaches across the reviewed studies may affect the consistency of synthesized conclusions. Future research should consider incorporating broader datasets and mixed-method approaches to enhance the depth and robustness of analysis.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. For organizations, it is essential to strengthen internal capabilities such as leadership development, employee engagement, and knowledge absorption mechanisms to support the effective implementation of green innovation. Organizations are also encouraged to integrate sustainability principles into their long-term strategic planning and operational processes to ensure continuous improvement in environmental performance.

For policymakers, the development of supportive regulatory frameworks and incentive systems is crucial to accelerate the adoption of green innovation practices across industries. Policies that encourage investment in sustainable technologies and provide recognition for environmentally responsible organizations can significantly enhance innovation adoption rates.

For future academic research, it is recommended to explore more context-specific studies, particularly in developing economies, where the dynamics of green innovation may differ significantly from developed regions. Comparative studies across sectors and countries, as well as longitudinal analyses, are also needed to better understand the evolution and long-term impact of green innovation practices.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how green innovation shapes sustainable management practices globally and provides a foundation for future research and practical implementation in the field of sustainability-oriented innovation.

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