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Ricardo Alex Bruhn Otero



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Author: Ricardo Alex Bruhn Otero

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Summary

This article explores various economic sustainability strategies adopted by small businesses in the United States, highlighting the importance of innovation and adaptation in a business environment that values responsible environmental practices. Through a literature review and theoretical discussion, the study identifies and analyzes effective strategies, including energy efficiency, use of sustainable materials, waste reduction practices, digitization of processes, and business models based on the circular economy. It emphasizes implementing emerging technologies and collaboration as catalysts for achieving economic sustainability. The challenges and benefits associated with these practices are discussed, providing an overview of how small businesses can reduce environmental impacts and improve efficiency and competitiveness in the marketplace.

Keywords: Economic sustainability; Small businesses; Sustainable strategies; Innovation; United States.

Abstract

This paper explores various economic sustainability strategies adopted by small businesses in the United States, highlighting the importance of innovation and adaptation in a business environment that values responsible environmental practices. The study identifies and analyzes effective strategies through a literature review and theoretical discussion, including energy efficiency, sustainable material use, waste reduction practices, business process digitalization, and circular economy business models. Implementing emerging technologies and collaboration are emphasized as catalysts for achieving economic sustainability. The challenges and benefits of these practices are discussed, providing an overview of how small businesses can reduce environmental impacts and enhance efficiency and market competitiveness.

Keywords: Economic sustainability; Small businesses; Sustainable strategies; Innovation; United States.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of small businesses to the U.S. economy is undeniable. They represent about 99.9% of all businesses in the country and are crucial to innovation, employment, and economic growth (SBA, 2019). However, these businesses face unique challenges that impact their longevity and ability to compete in the global marketplace.

Economic sustainability has become a key concept for small companies, especially in an increasingly globalized and competitive business environment. Porter and Kramer (2011) argue that sustainability is not just an ethical response but a competitive advantage that can differentiate companies in the market.

However, many *small businesses* struggle to integrate sustainable practices due to a lack of resources and expertise (Jenkins, 2006), raising a critical question about what strategies can effectively help these companies survive and thrive sustainably.

Research shows that small businesses adopting economic sustainability practices experience significant benefits, including greater operational efficiency and improved brand reputation (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011); these advantages are essential for success in a competitive market like the US.

The justification for this study lies in the gap in the literature on specific economic sustainability practices adapted for small businesses in the US. Many studies focus on large corporations or contexts outside the United States, leaving a vacuum of information applicable to the American context (Hart & Milstein, 2003).

Therefore, this article's main objective is to identify and analyze economic sustainability strategies that are practical and accessible for small businesses in the United States. It also aims to contribute to the existing literature by providing new and applicable insights for entrepreneurs and researchers.

The article aims to contribute to developing a reference framework that can help small companies integrate sustainability practices effectively and efficiently, making an important contribution to strengthening the resilience and competitiveness of small companies in today's business environment.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Small businesses and economic sustainability

Small businesses are recognized as fundamental pillars of the American economy, contributing significantly to innovation, job creation, and economic dynamism. According to the Small Business Administration (SBA, 2019), small businesses represent almost all businesses in the US and employ almost half of the private sector workforce. Thus, this importance underscores the need to understand the dynamics influencing their operation and sustainability.

It should be noted that the definition of small businesses can vary. Still, it generally includes factors such as the number of employees and annual turnover, which are criteria used by the SBA to classify these entities. Regardless of the definition, small businesses face distinct challenges that differ significantly from those large corporations face (Audretsch, 2002).

Economic sustainability is one of these critical challenges, especially relevant in the modern business context. According to Dyllick and Hockerts (2002), economic sustainability involves operations that guarantee the company's survival and profit and manage its environmental and social impact.

Jenkins (2006) argues that small companies can often implement changes more quickly than large organizations due to their flexibility and proximity to customers.

Sustainability strategies can vary widely, but they generally include reducing the ecological footprint, improving energy efficiency, and promoting ethical working practices.

Porter and van der Linde (1995) suggest that such strategies reduce costs and create value by innovating in products and processes.

The literature on economic sustainability highlights the importance of considering external pressures and internal motivations. Hart (1995) introduces the "resource-based strategy" concept, which sees sustainability as an opportunity to leverage resources to benefit both the company and society.

In the American context, government regulations and policies are crucial in shaping companies' sustainability practices. Initiatives such as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 have encouraged investments in green technologies and sustainable practices among small businesses (Berman and Bui, 2011).

In addition to regulations, there is a growing consumer expectation for companies to adopt sustainable practices. A study by Nielsen (2015) revealed that 66% of global consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable products, a trend that is even more pronounced among younger consumers.

Small businesses that adopt sustainable practices often find competitive advantages. These include creating a strong brand, building customer loyalty, and opening new markets that value corporate responsibility (Servaes and Tamayo, 2013).

However, implementing sustainability strategies requires carefully analyzing the return on investment. Investments in sustainable practices must be planned to ensure that the long-term benefits justify the initial costs (Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011).

The success of these strategies also depends on the commitment and involvement of the company's leadership, which must endorse sustainable practices and integrate them into all organizational levels and operations (Winston, 2014).

2.2 Economic sustainability strategies for small businesses in the USA

Adopting economic sustainability strategies is crucial for small businesses seeking survival in the market and a sustainable competitive advantage.

This chapter explores several strategies that have proven effective in the real world and contribute to the sustainable growth of small businesses in the United States.

One of the first focus areas for small businesses when implementing sustainable practices is energy efficiency. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2020), energy efficiency initiatives can significantly reduce operating costs. LED lighting installations, more efficient heating and cooling systems, and better insulation can reduce energy expenses while contributing to environmental sustainability.

Waste reduction follows similar principles, where small businesses can adopt recycling and reuse practices by reducing waste, decreasing disposal costs, and improving the company's image with environmentally conscious consumers (Grant, 2012).

In addition, investing in renewable energy sources is another vital strategy for small businesses. Solar and wind power are increasingly accessible options, thanks to falling prices and the availability of federal and state tax incentives. Using renewable energy reduces dependence on fossil fuels and associates the company with environmental responsibility (Klein and Coffey, 2016).

It should also be noted that sustainable purchasing practices involve choosing suppliers that adopt environmentally responsible practices, including selecting products produced sustainably, often certified by recognized organizations. These practices guarantee the supply chain's sustainability and strengthen companies' market position by meeting consumer expectations (Hutchins and Sutherland, 2008).

In addition to sustainable operational practices, small businesses can stand out by developing sustainable products. These can include durable, repairable, or recycled materials (Chen, 2010). This approach attracts environmentally conscious consumers and creates products that can compete on quality and price while maintaining sustainability as an added value (Chen, 2010).

Engagement with the local community and transparency in operations can amplify small businesses' sustainability efforts.

Participating in community initiatives and maintaining transparent business practices strengthen consumer trust and can lead to robust community support, vital for long-term sustainability (Porter and Kramer, 2011).

Therefore, small businesses must keep up to date and comply with environmental regulations. Proactively adapting to changes in legislation can avoid penalties and take advantage of opportunities for government subsidies and support for sustainable practices (Reed, 2014).

2.3 Strategies for accessing capital for small businesses in the USA

In the current economic climate, access to capital is a fundamental pillar for the growth and sustainability of small businesses. In this sense, it is worth noting that the 2025 Budget of the President of the United States proposes a significant increase in financial support for these companies, with a special emphasis on expanding access to affordable loans and facilitating investments in venture capital. As outlined in the budget, more than 58 billion dollars in loans are planned, mainly targeting underprivileged communities and minority-led businesses (UNITED STATES, 2025).

In addition, a new 7(a) direct loan program is proposed, designed to fill gaps in access to smaller financing crucial to many startups and small businesses seeking to expand their operations. The 16% increase in the authorized loan limit for the *Small Business Investment Company* (SBIC) program to 7 billion dollars also reflects a robust effort to leverage venture capital financing, expanding the capacity of these companies to innovate and grow (UNITED STATES, 2025).

These measures are essential to creating an environment where small businesses survive and thrive, overcome economic challenges, and lay solid foundations for the future. By offering more accessible capital and targeted financial support, the government demonstrates its commitment to strengthening the economic fabric that small businesses represent in the United States.

2.4 Innovation and technology in promoting economic sustainability in the USA

In today's business landscape, innovation and technology have emerged as fundamental pillars for the economic sustainability of small businesses in the United States. Innovation allows these companies to develop new products and reinvent their processes and business models, adapting to market changes and sustainability requirements. Tidd and Bessant (2018) emphasize that the ability to innovate is directly linked to competitiveness and long-term survival in the global market.

Integrating emerging technologies, such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and blockchain, offers substantial opportunities to optimize operations. These technologies allow for better monitoring and management of resource use, which is crucial for sustainable practices. Kaplan and Haenlein (2020) point out that such technologies improve operational efficiency and promote transparency, a value consumers and business partners increasingly demand.

Digitization is another crucial vector for sustainability, enabling small businesses to reduce their natural resource consumption significantly. Processes such as digitizing documents and adopting online management systems minimize paper use and the costs of managing physical documents. As indicated by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), such practices contribute to environmental preservation and result in leaner and more economical operations.

According to Charter and Keiller (2014), *small businesses* in the US are innovating in product development, incorporating sustainability from the design phase. Using recycled materials, biodegradable materials, or designing products that consume less energy are examples of how innovation can align with demands for sustainability. The authors argue that sustainable products often capture the market's attention, attracting conscious consumers and opening up new business opportunities.

Lacy and Rutqvist (2016) explain that models based on the circular economy can transform waste into resources, a practice that is both economically and environmentally advantageous.

By adopting strategies that maximize the reuse and recycling of materials, companies not only mitigate their environmental impact but can also reduce operating costs.

According to Chesbrough (2017), small businesses can innovate by forming partnerships with research institutions, other companies, and technology startups. This allows them to access new technologies and knowledge that are inaccessible in isolation.

Government incentives play a significant role in supporting small businesses in implementing sustainable practices. The United States offers a range of tax incentives and subsidies that can help finance everything from adopting renewable energy to implementing more efficient processes. Nidumolu et al. (2009) point out that understanding and taking advantage of these incentives is essential to making sustainable innovation economically viable.

Finally, implementing these innovative technologies and practices effectively requires a cultural change within companies. Leadership must be committed not only to adopting technologies but also to promoting a culture that values sustainability. This commitment must be communicated through all layers of the organization.

Therefore, sustainability innovation is more than a necessity—it's a strategic opportunity. Small businesses recognizing and acting on this opportunity contribute to a healthier environment and lay a solid foundation for long-term growth and stability.

3 METHODOLOGY

The research follows a qualitative approach suited to exploring complex patterns and understanding phenomena within specific contexts. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of sustainability strategies and their applications in small businesses.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter analyzes and discusses the results in the literature mentioned in the theoretical framework, applying the theoretical insights to economic sustainability practices in small businesses in the United States. The findings of various authors provide a solid basis for understanding the effective strategies and challenges small businesses face.

Tidd and Bessant (2018) emphasize the importance of continuous innovation for small businesses' economic sustainability, arguing that the ability to adapt and evolve processes and products can determine long-term success. This concept has been evidenced in small businesses implementing new energy efficiency technologies, highlighting a positive trend in reducing operating costs and increasing market competitiveness.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2020), adopting emerging technologies such as IoT and AI can improve efficiency and increase operational transparency. Consumers increasingly value this transparency and prefer companies with ethical and open business practices. In *small businesses*, this can translate into greater customer loyalty and a better brand reputation.

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) discuss how digitalizing business processes can significantly contribute to sustainable practices, reducing the use of natural resources and minimizing waste. Small businesses that have implemented digital management systems have reported a notable improvement in operational efficiency, corroborating the theory that technology can be a crucial enabler of sustainability.

Charter and Keiller (2014) highlight the importance of developing sustainable products and note how products designed with environmental considerations can meet growing market demands for 'green' solutions. Small *businesses* that have adopted this strategy have seen increased sales and improved their competitive position in the market.

Lacy and Rutqvist (2016) explain how business models based on the circular economy are becoming essential for long-term sustainability. Small *businesses* implementing circular economy practices, such as return and recycling programs, have

demonstrated how these models can be both environmentally responsible and economically advantageous.

Chesbrough (2017) highlights the importance of collaborations and partnerships to accelerate sustainable innovation. Many *small businesses* in the US have formed strategic alliances to access new technologies and markets, which has been identified as a key factor in the successful implementation of sustainable practices.

Nidumolu *et al.* (2009) point out that government incentives are important for supporting small businesses in transitioning to more sustainable operations. The data indicates that access to these incentives has allowed many small businesses to invest in technologies and practices that were previously financially unviable.

The discussion also reveals that while sustainability strategies bring many benefits, the challenges, such as the initial cost and complexity of implementation, are still significant. The need for continuing education and support for small businesses in implementing these strategies is evident, suggesting an important intervention area for future policies.

Thus, despite the challenges, implementing economic sustainability strategies is possible and beneficial for small businesses in the United States. The long-term benefits, such as reduced costs, increased efficiency, and improved brand image, highlight the importance of investing in sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This article explored various economic sustainability strategies that small businesses in the United States can adopt to survive and thrive in a competitive and environmentally conscious market. Through a literature review and discussion of specific practices, effective approaches and the challenges associated with implementing sustainable practices were identified.

The importance of continuous innovation was a recurring theme throughout this study. The ability to innovate, adapt, and evolve is crucial to maintaining competitiveness and relevance in the market. For small businesses, this often means adopting new technologies and processes that promote efficiency and reduce environmental impact.

Energy efficiency has emerged as one of the most affordable and impactful strategies. Implementing systems that reduce energy consumption helps to cut costs and significantly reduces companies' carbon footprint, in line with consumer expectations and government regulations.

Adopting sustainable materials and waste reduction practices has also proved fundamental: companies that have opted for recyclable and biodegradable packaging or have implemented effective recycling programs have managed to improve their operational sustainability and strengthen their brand image as responsible and innovative.

The digitization of business processes has a transformative role in small businesses. Digitization contributes to more sustainable and efficient management by minimizing physical resources and optimizing operations, which is essential in an increasingly digital business environment.

Developing sustainable and innovative products offers a competitive advantage, attracting consumers who value environmental responsibility. This is particularly important as the demand for green products grows, offering small businesses opportunities to stand out in specific market niches.

Business models based on the circular economy have proved to be a promising strategy for sustaining competitiveness in the long term. Companies that have adopted

such models have benefited the environment and found new ways of creating economic value from resources that would have traditionally been discarded.

Collaboration and strategic partnerships have emerged as vital elements for the success of small businesses in implementing sustainable practices. These partnerships often provide access to resources, knowledge, and markets that would be difficult to reach independently, thus broadening the possibilities for sustainable innovation.

The results demonstrate that government incentives and regulatory support are also important. Access to these incentives can significantly facilitate the transition to more sustainable operations, reducing the financial barrier many small businesses face when implementing changes.

However, the challenges are not insignificant; the initial cost, implementation complexity, and the need for specialized knowledge remain significant barriers. These challenges highlight the importance of more robust support policies and education and training programs focused on sustainability.

This study also reinforces the need for a cultural change within *small businesses*: sustainability must be seen not as a cost but as an investment in the company's future. Cultivating a mindset that values sustainability at all levels of the organization is essential if strategies are to be effectively implemented and maintained.

The prospects for *small businesses* in the context of economic sustainability are promising. As more companies and consumers recognize the importance of sustainable practices, small businesses that adopt these practices will be better positioned to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

In conclusion, while *small businesses* face unique challenges in implementing economic sustainability strategies, the long-term benefits, such as reduced operating costs, increased customer loyalty, and improved brand positioning, are evident.

This study has contributed to a deeper understanding of these strategies and provides a basis for future action by both companies and policymakers.

Through this article, we hope to inspire more small businesses to embark on the journey of economic sustainability, not only for their benefit, but also for the benefit of communities and the planet.

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