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Original Research Article

## Navigating Supply Chain Complexity: Empirical Insights from the Developing Country Readymade Garments Industry

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**Abstract: Purpose-** The study aims to develop an efficient model to handle challenges of supply chain management in readymade garments industry. This paper illustrates the systematic literature reviews and experimental evidence-based study of readymade garments companies of a developing Asian country. The present study also finds the pattern for the healthy and sustained development of clothing enterprises.

**Design/methodology/approach-** This paper illustrates the systematic literature reviews and experimental evidence-based study of readymade garments companies of a developing Asian country. The existing qualitative and quantitative studies were reviewed to find out the challenges in supply chain and the recommendable solutions are provided. The studies undertaken in Asian developing countries were only considered in this study.

**Findings-** The innovation on supply chain management for readymade garments company in developing country will help enterprise to setup legal guidelines for smooth production process. The new innovative supply chain management has two characteristics, a balance of high efficiency and cost saving. Dual-source supply chain management, manufacturing outsourcing, and multi-supplier management are three elements of it. The ICT information management platform is a critical component in ensuring the supply chain flexibility of the clothing industry.

**Implications-** Through the research of application and analysis of the innovative supply chain systems of readymade garment industry of Asian developing countries. It helps to setup guideline, and direction for the practical operation way of modern enterprise with innovative supply chain system knowledge and practice.

**Originality/value-** All this relies on its unique and efficient supply chain management, this paper explains and analyzed innovative supply chain management. This paper also contributes by providing solution to overcome from the challenges of supply chain management in readymade garments industry.

**Paper Type-** Research paper

**Keywords:** Supply Chain Management (SCM), Readymade Garments, Innovation, Asian Developing Countries.

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### 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the global economy and market, the application of information technology in business management has become unlimited. The market competition and the legal system of competition among enterprises have increased. The traditional management system has several bottlenecks to meet the new competitive business environment requirements. The traditional production economic concept is based on a customer-centric business that can fulfill the customer's need with the lowest cost and shorten the time<sup>[1,2]</sup>.

Currently, most companies understand that production and independent sales are no longer adapted to the rapid development of the market environment, and cannot meet the needs of customers<sup>[3]</sup>. If your company wishes to build a long-term competitive advantage, you must have a specific corporate business association that focuses on the main business of a company. Therefore, a non-key business enterprise can be transferred into a

key business enterprise. Such as the development form of a supplier to manufacturer, then to distributors and retailer, finally through the supply chain which is shown in figure1. Through the supply chain in the enterprises by giving full play to the complementary advantages of the enterprises, the enterprises can finally obtain a certain superior situation for the entire industry<sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, supply chain management concepts and methods have increasingly become the focus of the theoretical circle and various industries. On the other hand, supply chain route management not only reflects the overall strategic management, but also reflects the rapid response to market demand, high flexibility, and low risk<sup>[5]</sup>.

The clothing supply chain is the main operation of the supply chain generated in the readymade garments industry. The traditional clothing manufacturing companies to meet the needs of households, material suppliers, clothing distributors, and retailers are dynamically most profitable<sup>[6]</sup>. Under the operation conditions of a customer-centric supply chain, even in the same season or off-season, the manufacturing companies' large orders from customers will also experience relatively large fluctuation and takes short time to produce the products sent to the distributor. In many cases, a company may also face a huge number of returns and exchanges. This will increase the number of different risks such as inventory management and production sales of the clothing supply chain and even to load the supply chain become more chaotic<sup>[7]</sup>. For this reason, the company cannot respond to market demand and making it difficult to accurately develop production and demand plans based on the capabilities of their goal. And the company will inevitably lead to overcapacity. Excessive or insufficient inventory is very detrimental to the transportation cost of the entire supply chain. And will also lead to changes in low customer satisfaction. Based on the main problem faced by apparel products and the Bangladeshi industry a comprehensive analysis of the concept of supply chain management and the current situation of the clothing supply chain will discuss in this research <sup>[8]</sup>.

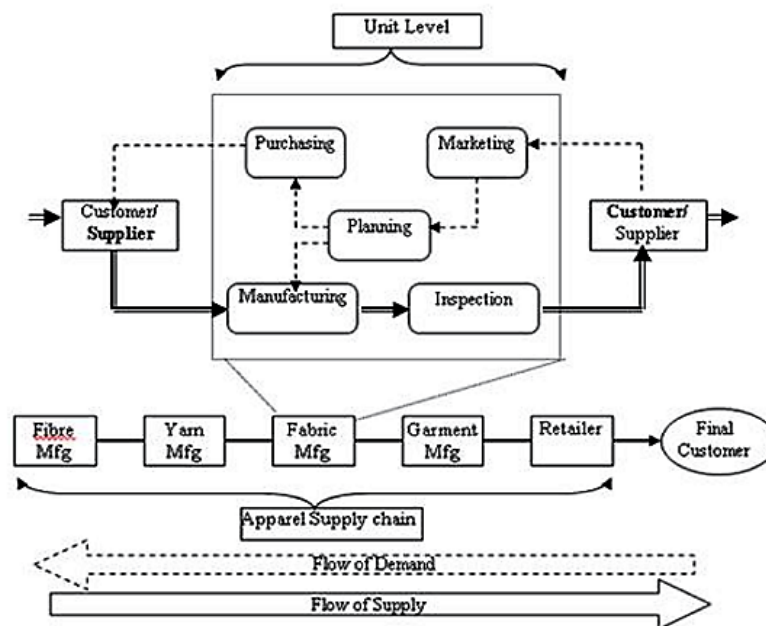
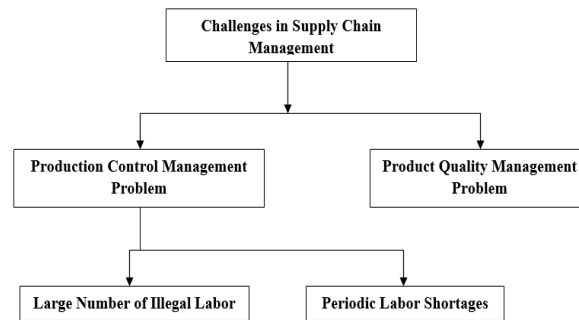


Figure 1 Traditional Supply Chain Management Process.

## 2. Challenges in Supply Chain Management for Garments Company

Based on the reviewed papers we found some challenges in supply chain management for the garments industry. They are i) Production Control Management Problem, ii) Product Quality Management Problem. Under Production Control Management Problem, we found additional two auxiliary problems like Large Number of Illegal Labor, Periodic Labor Shortages which are shown in figure2. These challenges of supply chain management are very crucial for smooth production in the RMG industry. Innovative technological adjustment is needed to reduce the above problems.



**Figure 2** Challenges in Supply Chain Management for garments Company.

## 2.1 Production Control Management Problem

### 2.1.1 Large Number of Illegal Labor

The economic policies and legal systems of Asian developing countries are not yet stable and perfect. Many unethical business owners hire some illegal labor to invest in their company to reduce labor costs and obtain profits<sup>[9]</sup>. These kinds of illegal labors infringe on human rights and impact product quality. In Europe and the United States, if it is proven that a product is produced by illegal labor, no matter how well-known the brand is and how good the quality is, no one will buy those brand products<sup>[10]</sup>. In developed countries, buying products made by illegal workers is a direct violation of human rights and is cruel and immoral. The forms of hiring illegal labor include the following:

The first situation is the employment of child labor. Children's rights are protected and influenced by legislation in all nations throughout the world as a globally accepted standard. In most nations, there are also age limitations for employees<sup>[11]</sup>. Despite this, many businesses in Asia's emerging countries continue to hire children under the age of 16. Many young individuals under the age of 16 are forced to work early in order to support their families and minimize the family's burden. Many unethical businesses take advantage of this to enable minors to labour for lengthy periods of time at a price that is lower than the market average pay, squeezing the surplus value of minors' employment<sup>[12]</sup>. These juvenile laborers frequently live in deplorable conditions and work in deplorable conditions. Minors' physical and mental health is significantly harmed by working under these conditions, and many youngsters suffer physical and psychological trauma as a result. It can be said that the employment of child labor is a source of darkness in the labor market. According to internal statistics of several clothing brands, the problem of child labor in Asia, India, Bangladesh, and Cambodia is very serious. In factories opened in certain areas of these countries, the production lines have many immature-looking faces. Although the ages registered on the factory employee registration forms are all over the legal age many people have only falsely reported or concealed their age. According to statistics from authoritative departments, the youngest child labor is only about 11 to 12 years old<sup>[13]</sup>.

The second issue is that Asian suppliers would subcontract manufacturing of orders to non-compliant businesses. Some suppliers outsource manufacturing jobs to a number of tiny companies, some of which aren't even factories but rather small workshops; others transfer production chores to prisoners through bribery or even cooperation. Prisoners have autonomy, which allows them to operate on the assembly line<sup>[14]</sup>. In Asia's emerging countries, outsourcing scenarios are quite prevalent. Many small workshops and small factories have received orders from large suppliers, and the prices that suppliers pay to these small factories and small workshops are lower than brand purchases<sup>[15]</sup>. The price is decided. In North China, India, Bangladesh and Cambodia, many suppliers will order prisons for production, and many prisons are garment factories. Of course, the order price for prison production is lower than the normal production level. They are culpable for the brand's products, whether they make orders for tiny factories or workshops or outsource manufacturing duties to prisoners, resulting in a loss of product quality and safety repercussions and impacts. social media shaming.<sup>[14]</sup>

In addition, illegal use of labor also includes behaviors such as arrears of wages to workers, overtime work

that exceeds the legal working hours, non-reasonable overtime pays, and failure to provide workers with safe living conditions.

### 2.1.2 Periodic Labor Shortages

In addition to the use of illicit labour, several regions of Asia are experiencing labour shortages. With global inflation on the rise, Asian nations such as China and India are under enormous pressure to raise worker salaries. Due to poor salaries, several factories were unable to employ workers and had to lay off staff<sup>[16]</sup>. Garment factory employees' salaries are already relatively low because they operate in a conventional manufacturing and processing business. With rising prices, these employees' lives are becoming increasingly precarious. To deal with growing costs and living expenditures, many people are forced to shift occupations regularly in order to get higher-paying positions or to transfer to different industries.<sup>[17]</sup>

## 2.2 Product Quality Management Problem

Several employees of major Bangladeshi companies mentioned that it is not easy for clothing companies to lower clothing prices. The deadline is very short and it is an overwhelming task to comply with all the quality control requirements of the garment companies<sup>[9]</sup>. After investigation, the clothing quality inspection takes 35 business days. If the quality is not good, the re-inspection will take 710 business days. But for a readymade garments company, a day's delay may bring irreparable losses, and it's a difficult task to put products on the shelves. Therefore, a quality controller required pre-production, inline, and final inspection. According to one reputed garment company information, they maintain a partnership with more than 700 garments companies in a different country in the world. There are about 150 quality inspectors throughout the company, and they conduct far more than 500,000 quality inspections each year.<sup>[18]</sup>

There is a massive gap between the number of 150 quality inspectors and more than 700 garments companies. Garments company stated that readymade garments company is a large-scale international company that spans regions and countries with very standardized work processes and a very formal management system. Garments companies in China, India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and others developing countries in Asia must strictly implement company unified management standard<sup>[19]</sup>.

However, the statement that “foundries strictly follow company standards for production management” can still be a question mark. An executive from a local Bangladeshi clothing company in Dhaka mentioned that most garment companies order products one by one during the production process. Therefore, there are situations where many manufacturers are required to complete an ordering task. After top-tier foundry companies accept order tasks, they often outsource some complex embroidery, washing, packaging, card loss, and other processes to some small companies according to the division of labor. The owner of the clothing industry in Xiaoshan, Hangzhou, China said: It is common in the industry to take orders and subcontract them to other manufacturers<sup>[20]</sup>.

According to statistics, garments company provides a certain percentage of brands products sample for quality inspection. Each quality inspector is responsible for an average of 4 to 5 garments companies plus other factories that subcontract tasks most of the country in the world. Each quality inspector can be responsible for several factories in different regions at the same time throughout the year. In addition to the heavy lifting of quality, the controller affects the security of the supply chain<sup>[21]</sup>.

To make products smoothly pass the quality inspection and pass the custom delivery is the main purpose of the quality control department in the garments company<sup>[22]</sup>. Most garments factories in a developing country have shortages of human capital equipment and chaotic internal system management. And this is the crucial fact with the quality and order rejection. In many cases, most garments companies do not use “process control” methods but use “after the fact response” methods when problems arise. They will impose restrictions and sanctions on suppliers, either reduce the order task or cancel the cooperation halfway. As a result, this will inevitably cause problems<sup>[23]</sup>. The fabric manufacturer directly sends the qualified fabrics to the factory and then enters the production process. For this incoming material process, most apparel companies do not have a

follow-up program. The key to the quality problem is not being able to compare whether the specific operational process of quality inspection is well controlled. The following are the required inspection indicators: fiber content, decomposable aromatic amine dyes, water fastness, rubbing resistance Color-fastness, color-fastness to perspiration, pH value, and product identification. According to the relevant survey, the company will conduct related tests on these indicators<sup>[24]</sup>. The problem is that different quality inspection orders will cause quality risks. In many cases, fast fashion brands pursue too much “fast” and “fashion”, but do not pay much attention to quality. In Europe, most people are used to the elimination of clothes after the season. But in developing countries in Asia, people will not treat fast fashion clothing with a few hundred yuan as an elimination. Therefore, they value quality more than Europeans. Under this situation, garments companies in developing country culture and philosophies have a gap with the psychological needs of nations customers. However, the quality problem does not seem to have a significant negative impact on the company. With Beckham's image endorsement and cross-border cooperation with Marmi, H&M's sales are still increasing steadily<sup>[25]</sup>.

### **3. Solutions to Main Problems of Supply Chain**

#### **3.1 Solutions to Supply Chain Production Control Management Problems**

##### **3.1.1 Expansion of Production Base Outside Asia**

The ever-increasing demand for textiles has been fueled by the global economy's continued rise and the world's population's fast expansion. The amount and quality of labour in Asia has altered as the population structure has aged, and it has been unable to satisfy the rising demands of businesses. Businesses should continue to look for new markets and extend industrial output from Asia to Africa. As a result, following Asia, Sub-Saharan African countries have become another international manufacturer. These African nations were chosen as product processing bases because, on the one hand, the region has plenty of inexpensive labour, and on the other hand, the region has had significant economic expansion in recent years. Its tariff policy has also encouraged a large number of investors to locate industries in the country. African countries have achieved significant success in textile exports in recent years, and textile exports have received worldwide acclaim. Ethiopia's development speed is considerable when compared to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Between 2006 and 2011, its textile exports more than quadrupled. Textile exports to Europe have risen by 500 percent as a result of this era of expansion. This incredible figure is mostly attributable to investments in consumer goods and apparel behemoths like Primark and Tesco. H&M, a fast-moving consumer products company, may also relocate its manufacturing base from Asia to Africa, where production capacity is limited. There are not just lower labour and favorable prices, but there is also adequate labour. However, the investment climate in key sectors, such as infrastructure, is not yet perfect, and the industrial chain is weak and urgently has to be changed. Furthermore, there is no strong link between regional industries. There is still considerable space for development in the technical and humanistic characteristics of the personnel, in addition to the poor working climate and business environment. With the expansion of the middle class in East African countries, it is reasonable to predict that these countries' purchasing power and level of consumption will improve significantly. East African nations will develop more swiftly in the future if the regional population's economic status and employee knowledge levels both increase at the same time. It should be emphasized that the local government places a high priority on industrial growth, boosts capital expenditure, and seeks to enhance staff quality, all of which has resulted in higher factory productivity.

##### **3.1.2 Strictly Control the Use of Illegal Labor**

In order to control and prevent this illegal employment, the company must set up a COC (Code of Conduct) department to conduct random investigations and visits to the supplier's factory to observe whether the supplier's confirmation is indeed in compliance with the factory and legal code of conduct. moral standard. The COC investigation's channel and time are chosen at random and are kept absolutely private. The findings of the COC department's inquiry were directly submitted to the vice president in charge of production, who then determined

whether to issue a straight warning or stop collaboration with the supplier.

The COC department sends monthly performance records of the global supplier code of conduct. This investigation and evaluation are independent and impartial, and is not restricted by any department. But even with such an independent and transparent monitoring agency, many providers continue to use illegal labor every year. Cost price pressure and the frantic pursuit of profits make these providers take risks to conceal the use of illegal labor in various ways. In this case, it is recommended that apparel companies further improve the COC department system. Punishment systems should be established for companies and production companies that have been detained for working in violation of laws and regulations. Suppliers in poor condition or without improvements should immediately discontinue cooperation. Zero tolerance for labor can prevent this from happening. Clothing businesses in India, Bangladesh, and Cambodia should take the lead in carrying out social welfare initiatives and shouldering societal obligations.

### **3.2 Solutions to Supply Chain Product Quality Control Management Problems**

#### **3.2.1 Inspection Submitted by a Third-Party Testing Agency**

Most clothing companies that need to test clothing are external labs or local factory labs. After obtaining the right to conduct experimental tests, the factory laboratory has the right to conduct independent tests and approvals. For each clothing company, the company will conduct a series of standardized tests before sale, such as idle, warping, shrinkage, pilling, etc. Judging by the product safety laws enacted by global apparel companies, the company has enacted the strictest laws. However, there must be a certain gap in this supply chain quality control process. To some extent, the manufacturer's review and approval are based on the conscience and conscience of the manufacturer. Clothing businesses have quality assurance staff who evaluate the manufacturer's reports, but there are still gaps that may be exploited if the manufacturer does not do an on-site assessment. Furthermore, the China Administration for Industry and Commerce has said unequivocally that the manufacturer's test report is not acceptable. Even if the manufacturer's test report satisfies the manufacturer's quality requirements, it cannot be assumed that it fulfils national quality standards. After analyzing the detailed rules for quality supervision and law enforcement, it was found that the administrative department of the garment industry and trade did not recognize the inspection report issued by the manufacturing company or the report of independent inspection of the manufacturing company. After the department of industry and commerce has tested the product, it can only recognize the report issued by a qualified external testing agency and use it as the basis for making a judgment. Therefore, apparel companies are expected to improve and refine the supply chain control process. The manufacturer's laboratory not only issues a qualified test report, but also a third-party at the place of sales, such as ITS, SGS, and a report issued by a state-required third-party testing agency to determine the batch of products. If you are qualified and meet local quality standards.

#### **3.2.2 Customized the Market Requirement**

Based on the testing requirements of similar products in the world, the analysis found that China has very strict standards for textile testing, and there are many standards. For example, in the "National Textile Basic Safety Technical Specification", the composition of the fabric is specified, such as odor, color-fastness, formaldehyde content, decomposable carcinogenic aromatic amine fuel, PH value range, etc. The difference of reference indicators can be divided into three levels: A, B, and C. Industry experts said that this standard should be enforced, whether it is the production and processing process of the production enterprise or the sales link of the sales enterprise, it must be strictly implemented. However, as a fashion brand, H&M adheres to the principle of keeping up with fashion trends, parity, and rapid production of new products, and the number of items is small, the styles are diverse, and the development and production cycle is short. Generally, the clothing production and sales cycle will be compressed, resulting in unstable quality. This type of clothing is generally not expensive, because the company pays special attention to processing costs, so it chooses the foundry by bidding, and the bidding among the foundries is to lower prices. Fabric suppliers change more frequently. However, the quality

of fabrics will be sacrificed to achieve the company's predetermined profit target. Foreign consumers are accustomed to this and may only wear it for one or two seasons before not wearing it again. After all, the selling price is very low. Now, fast fashion clothing has become closer to fast-moving consumer goods. But for Chinese consumers, the Indian, Bangladeshi, and Cambodian markets have not developed into a similar Western European or North American market after all. Chinese consumers and Chinese quality supervision have higher quality demands for apparel fabrics. After analysis, garments companies can pay more attention to close cooperation with Chinese supervisory agencies and must have a thorough understanding of textile laws and regulations, and select fabric suppliers with better quality and stability for the developing market according to corresponding requirements. And third-party testing agencies. The resulting cost increase can be added to the retail price or internally digested. After all, the quality requirements of the Chinese market are much higher than those of the Western market. The scale of the Chinese market has gradually increased to become the world's largest retail market. It is believed that the improvement of company quality can win more consumers and market shares.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This article combines the theory of supply chain management and analyzes the developing country (India, Bangladesh, Cambodia) readymade garments company supply chain. It must be recognised that cost plays an important part in retailer supply chain management. The retail market is quite competitive. The major approach for a huge firm to generate a lot of money and beat the competition is to decrease expenses. The retail business will focus on cost control or supply chain management efficiency competitiveness in the future. This is mainly due to the obvious gap between the supply chain management capabilities of domestic companies and international giants. According to the discussion in the article, I hereby make comments:

(1) First of all, the innovation of management, retailers, and suppliers should strengthen exchanges and cooperation, not just squeeze. For example, for the production outsourcing measures formulated, the cooperation between the retail industry and suppliers is inseparable for the smooth operation of the measures, to reduce transaction costs as much as possible.

(2) Secondly, analyze consumer demand. As a commodity distribution terminal, retailers must use keen senses to detect changes in consumer demand.

(3) Third, Strengthening the construction of the supply chain management platform is inseparable from the support of information technology. Reduce operating costs more effectively and strengthen management.

(4) Finally, strict management and control of logistics costs. The physical management in the retailer supply chain management is more critical because a large part of the retailer's cost expenditure is spent on logistics management.

#### **5. Limitation**

Finally, after an in-depth study of the supply chain of garment companies in developing countries, due to the complexity and vastness of the global supply chain, the issues raised in this article still need to be resolved. It is impossible to completely solve all problems with my strength. I believe that whether it is a multinational clothing company or a domestic clothing company, small and medium-sized enterprises or large enterprises will always encounter similar problems. In addition to my limited research level, this article still has many flaws, which are put forward here as the goal of the follow-up research of the thesis.

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