



# Readiness of Trade Business and Border Trade Entrepreneurs to Green Economy: Thailand

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**Abstract:** The main purposes of this research were to study the readiness of the business to enter into a green economy. The research was carried out by surveying potentials of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) trade business and border trade in the Upper-Northeastern cluster of Thailand. And to study the needs of consumers on environmental friendliness. The research methodology was done by the mixed-method research and the convergent design from SMEs entrepreneurs and consumer groups of trade business and border trade. The instruments used for collecting data included the survey via personal interview and questionnaires. The research results revealed that most of the trade business and border trade had business potentials in management, logistics, finance, and marketing at a good level, and the consumers needed the eco-friendly products. Therefore, the research results as an overall image can be reflected that the trade business and border trade cluster are ready to enter into a green economy. Meanwhile, public relations in terms of letting the consumers realize the significance of eco-friendly products are crucial points that should be managed seriously and consistently by the business.

**Keywords:** *Border trade; entrepreneurs; green economy; eco-friendly product*

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## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has been considered at a global level since 1992 until now from the environmental and developmental conference organized by the United Nations, and the various crises which include the global financial crisis in 2007, food crisis between 2007 and 2008, approximately, and the earths atmosphere crisis ([Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2011](#)). From such crisis situation, it is considered as the starting point which makes the United Nations interested in sustainable problem-solving. This can be considered from the international conference called Rio+20 during the year of 2012 which focused on linking the idea between environmental development and economic development altogether that makes the result that various fields of scholars, international government authorities, experts, including Non-Government Organizations, and Thai government emphasize the view of green economy. The green economy consists of 3 pillars which include environmental aspect, social aspect, and human livelihood aspect. Green economy starts from the need of effective integration between environment and development, legal system management and framework, development of effectiveness by economic, marketing, and other instruments ([UN Division for Sustainable Development, 2012](#)).

SMEs business group is a crucial mechanism for the main economic development. It takes crucial roles to create innovations, business opportunity, and strong society to increase products to enter into the market, as well as to develop the marketing network ([Ayuningrat, Noermijati, & Hadiwidjojo, 2016](#); [Creech et al., 2014](#)). For Thailand, it is found that trade business and border trade are considered the most important for driving economy of the country

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which operates in terms of logistics, production, product and service development, marketing, and customers service. At the same time, there is a management which covers financial management, human resources management, and technological development (Brown, Sturgeon, & Lane, 2014).

However, the related research reveals that there is only a little research which has been studied about the readiness of the trade business and border trade group to enter into the green economy, which covers 5 upper Northeast provinces of Thailand. This will be really useful for both government and private sectors to set the plan in the long run for readiness preparation of the trade business and border trade to enter into the green economy form. Meanwhile, although the view on marketing mix reflects the marketing activity of the business, there is still a little research which has tried to understand the different components of green marketing mix (Bizon, 2016; Bustaman, 2015), especially in the upper-Northeastern provinces group of Thailand. Hence, the purposes of this research aim at studying the border trade and entrepreneurs potentials and the need of consumers towards the eco-friendly products to enter into green economy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Concept about Green Economy*

UNEP identifies the meaning of green economy that it means the operation of any business activities which increase humans life quality, the creation of social justice, and the reduction of potentially environmental risks (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2011). According to such meaning, it indicates that the business operation which will enter into green economy, should be focused on the relevant activities and the realization of negative effects towards environment to reduce the operation cost, create health eco-friendliness (Cock, 2014), and increase the humans life quality. This includes any business operation which protects employees considered as a part of value chain (Montmasson-Clair, 2012).

Regarding the first step for growing the green economy, the business should be focused on the investment for creating opportunities of employment and enhancing the need of eco-friendly products and services to the society. The steps are as follows: 1) improving the trade process and emphasizing the eco-friendly products and services, 2) producing and distributing products and services which reduce energy, 3) enhancing the innovative development, research and development, and transportation technology, and 4) supporting of entrepreneurs, education, and training focusing on environmental reservation, economic growth, and employment opportunity (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2011), including the financial activity of the business which has to consider the effects towards society and environment (Bustaman, 2015). However, driving business to green economy can be categorized into, such as, business group which will enter into growing green, and greening the brown (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2011). On the other hand, it can be divided into 3 groups which include almost business as usual, greening, and all change, which focus on the well-being of society, human, and environment (Bina, 2013). To operate the business for entering into green economy can build competitive advantages by creating new business opportunity, driving eco-friendly business at the early stage, being capable of cost and risk-management, and environmental treatment (Nulkar, 2014).

### *Eco-Friendly Marketing*

Eco-friendly marketing or green marketing means the process to create satisfaction to the customers by considering environmental effects regarded as a way for sustainable development. Concerning the eco-friendly marketing operation, the business can operate various aspects which include 1) determining strategies of products used from eco-friendly materials, acceptable standard, energy saving and reduction, as well as eco-friendly design of packages, 2) determining strategies of price by letting the business perceive and be able to describe the values of eco-friendly products in order that the consumers will understand and realize the necessity of purchase decision, and 3) making understanding with the society about eco-friendly products related to the business by communicating and making perception about the products consistently, and enhancing the eco-friendly cultures eventually (Xia & Zhang, 2017). This is in accordance with the research result of Solaiman, Osman, and Halim (2015) which indicates that green marketing should be composed of products symbolized and packaged through energy saving, reasonable price, public relations on marketing that focuses on environmental perception, and the distribution in accordance with logistics activity. This can be said that the study of eco-friendly marketing activity holds the basic concept from marketing mix.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out by mixed method research by using the form of convergent design focusing on the various ways of phenomenon on data collection for analysis (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013) which included the study of trade business and border trade and entrepreneurs' potentials, and the needs of consumers towards eco-friendly products. Then, the research results of each part were interpreted and analyzed the readiness to enter into green economy (Figure 1).

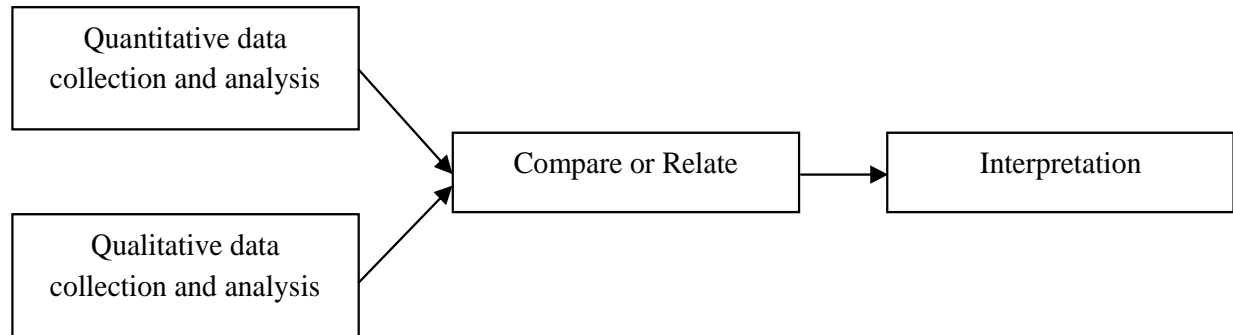


Figure 1 *The Convergent Design* (Source: Creswell (2013))

### **Population, Sample, and Sampling Methodology**

The population group of trade business and border trade included the trade business and border trade juristic persons in the 5 provinces of the Upper Northeastern Region 1, Thailand for 9,494 persons (Department of Business Development, Ministry of Commerce, 2017). The random sampling was done by stratified random sampling and simple random sampling. From the business lists, the researchers received the completed information back for 394 sets. For the sample group of eco-friendly consumers, there were 1,046 persons. The random sampling was convenience sampling. The time duration of data collection was between June and August 2017.

### **Instruments**

The instrument used for collecting data of trade and border trade entrepreneurs potentials was the survey via personal interview in terms of 3 levels of multiple choice which included 1) operational results which indicated being nothing or not being operational according to the question items, 2) operation results which indicated operation sometimes but with informal form or without being recorded in written or being recorded but not sufficient, and 3) operation results which indicated there was the operation and it was recorded in written or there was the operation sufficiently. All 4 indicators of questionnaires were composed of the set of questions developed from the concepts and relevant theories review which included management, logistics, finance, and marketing. Moreover, they were investigated for their content validity by 4 experts.

The instrument used for collecting data of the consumers' needs towards the eco-friendly products was the rating scale in 5 levels which included the most, much, moderate, a little, and the least. The content validity was investigated by 3 experts. Moreover, the reliability test was done by finding out the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the test results revealed that the value of alpha coefficient was between 0.74 and 0.91 which was more than 0.70. Hence, it can be concluded that the questionnaires had the reliability (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis of potentials on management can be categorized as the conclusion from the survey results into 3 stages as follows: 1) fair, 2) good, and 3) very good. The statistics used included Frequency and Percentage. The statistics used for data analysis of the consumers' needs towards the eco-friendly products included Mean, Standard Deviation, and Exploratory Factor Analysis. The general data analysis results of the trade business and border trade revealed that most of the businesses had the time duration of business operation between 5 and 10 years, the employees were less than 15 persons, most of the distributed eco-friendly products were groceries, and the entrepreneurs perceived news and information about eco-friendly products from the media through radio and television.

While the general data analysis results about the consumers' needs towards the eco-friendly products revealed that most of the consumers were between 20 and 30 years old, held the single status, had a bachelor's degree or lower level, and the monthly income was lower than 20,000 baht. Whereas the analysis result of the component factor by principal component analysis and varimax rotation had the loading of component factor between 0.50 and 0.82. The details were shown in the Table 3 below.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND RESEARCH DISCUSSION

### *Potentials of Trade Business and Border Trade*

The research result of potentials data in terms of trade business and border trade management was categorized into each aspect, which included management (consisted of planning, organizing, and man powering), logistics, finance, and marketing. The conclusion was presented as each province shown in the Table 1 and 2 as follows:

According to the research results of trade and border trade entrepreneurs' potentials in terms of management, it was found that for planning, organizing, and man powering aspects, most of the entrepreneurs of all provinces had their management at a good level, and for a fair level result, it was found that the entrepreneurs did not operate as planned, and the entrepreneurs did not determine the rules and regulations since business operation in terms of management was considered as a crucial factor which had to assign work or tasks to the employees in order that they could operate as assigned. From the research results relevant to the development for green economy, it was found that to achieve purposes according to both society and economy, it should have the plan to build realization in terms of environmental crisis by strategic planning of green business which had to have the statement through visions and missions. These had to be informed in order to become the correct operation way of employees work (Nulkar, 2014), including creating the business network and mutually training for concordant direction. Moreover, it should have the plan and follow-up through operation which would be developed to the green economy consistently (Creech et al., 2014).

Table 1 *POTENTIALS OF TRADE BUSINESS AND BORDER TRADE IN TERMS OF MANAGEMENT*

Provincial Cluster	Percentage of Management								
	Planning ( <i>N</i> = 4 items)			Organizing ( <i>N</i> = 3 items)			Man Powering ( <i>N</i> = 3 items)		
	Fair	Good	Very Good	Fair	Good	Very Good	Fair	Good	Very Good
Province A	-	100.00 (4)	-	-	100.00 (3)	-	33.34 (1)	66.66 (2)	-
Province B	-	50.00 (2)	50.00 (2)	- 100.00 (3)	-	-	66.66 (2)	33.34 (1)	-
Province C	-	100.00 (4)	-	-	100.00 (3)	-	-	100.00 (3)	-
Province D	-	75.00 (3)	25.00 (1)	-	100.00 (3)	-	33.3 (1)	66.66 (2)	-
Province E	25.00 (1)	75.00 (3)	-	33.34 (1)	66.66 (2)	-	33.34 (1)	66.66 (2)	-

According to the Table 2, potentials of trade business and border trade in terms of logistics, finance, and marketing as overall image were at a good and very good level, when considering each aspect, the research results can be concluded that in terms of logistics, most of the entrepreneurs had potentials at a good and very good level. However, potentials of logistics at a fair level included the warehouse management which did not have the form to organize products orderly. According to the concept of logistics, it was found that warehouse management was an activity of logistics which took a crucial role to respond customers' needs relevant to the selection of warehouse aspects, warehouse chart, warehouse equipment use, and products collecting design, which would enhance high effectiveness and low cost. Furthermore, the

concept on logistics involved with eco-friendly enhancing in terms of logistics goals was about the activities needed to reduce the business cost and increase the profit by evaluating the activities effects, energy reduction and potential loss (Seroka-Stolka, 2014). Also, the research result of Xia and Wang (2013) which concluded the components of green logistics to enter into green economy consisted of Green Transportation, 2) Green Warehouse, Green Packaging, 4) Green Logistics Data Collection and Management, and 5) Waste Management. This was about the business operation to remove the useless materials for further operation, such as delivery for new production, sorting the poison materials, etc., in order to reduce the cost of material storage in the warehouse and to make income for the business.

Regarding Finance, most of the entrepreneurs had the potentials at a good and very good level while their operational result was at a fair level. This was found that there were no rules and regulations determined for allocating the benefits to the partners, and financial data were not disclosed to them. According to the research result, it can be discussed that the trade and border trade entrepreneurs should determine policies and set the plan by emphasizing the financial management of the organization to reduce the financial cost and by organizing the accounting of the business systematically to reflect the results of business clearly, expressing the responsibility to the business partnership, as well as communicating such policies to let the employees acknowledge thoroughly. The most important is that to develop the business finance to enter into green economy has to focus on building the financial sustainability in order to be able to develop the financial sustainability eventually (United Nations Environment Programme, 2016).

Table 2 *POTENTIALS OF THE TRADE BUSINESS AND TRADE BORDER IN TERMS OF LOGISTICS, FINANCE, AND MARKETING*

Provincial Cluster	Percentage of Logistics ( <i>N</i> = 10 items)			Percentage of Finance ( <i>N</i> = 8 items)			Percentage of Marketing ( <i>N</i> = 7 items)		
	Fair	Good	Very Good	Fair	Good	Very Good	Fair	Good	Very Good
Province A	-	90.00 (9)	10.00 (1)	25.00 (2)	25.00 (2)	50.00 (4)	28.57 (2)	57.14 (4)	14.29 (1)
Province B	-	70.00 (7)	30.00 (3)	-	37.50 (3)	62.50 (5)	-	57.14 (4)	42.86 (3)
Province C	-	100.00 (10)	-	-	100.00 (8)	-	14.29 (1)	85.71 (6)	-
Province D	10.00 (1)	60.00 (6)	30.00 (3)	37.50 (3)	37.50 (3)	35.00 (2)	57.14 (4)	42.86 (3)	-
Province E	20.00 (2)	80.00 (8)	-	37.50 (3)	62.50 (5)	-	14.29 (1)	85.71 (6)	-

Concerning marketing, most of the entrepreneurs had the potential at a good level while the operational result was at a fair level in terms of without distribution channel/network, and there was no communication and public relations, determination of potential circulation, distribution channel/educational network about green making development to green economy. This was found that the way of marketing operation related to the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), namely the business, should be based on using resources to get utmost benefits, planning of sales to reduce the financial risk, and responding to the related customers' needs, especially distribution channel management, and emphasizing the public relations in terms of involvement between products and environment which can reflect the image of eco-friendly business well (Bustaman, 2015).

When considering the overall image of research result through the potentials of trade business and border trade, it was found that the potentials ready to enter into the green economy were based on the strong management, systematical logistics operation, disciplined and clear financial system, and responsible marketing to the society.

### **Consumers' Needs Towards Eco-Friendly Products**

According to the research result about the consumers needs towards the eco-friendly products can be presented in the Table 3 below.

From the research result, it is shown that the consumers focus on the eco-friendly products in terms of products themselves as the main point. This is in accordance with the research result of the trade business and border trade group in India that to enter into eco-green business, it had to get pressure from the consumers who needed different products and be able to reduce environmental effects (Nulkar, 2014). Moreover, the consumers needed the price of eco-friendly products to be reasonable and affordable.

Table 3 *CONSUMERS' NEEDS TOWARDS ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS*

Factor	Factor loading	$\alpha$	Need level	
			Mean	<i>SD</i>
Product	0.640.78	0.86	3.86	0.60
Price	0.500.73	0.80	3.66	0.75
Place/Distribution	0.600.82	0.74	3.55	0.81
Promotion	0.620.76	0.91	3.56	0.85

However, it is perceived that the eco-friendly products had the production cost and operation cost and this affected the price of products which had to be higher than general products, and the different capability of consumers' expenditure affected the alternatives evaluation for purchase decision-making (Solaiman et al., 2015). Regarding the distribution channel of the eco-friendly products needed at a final stage, this might be because the form of distribution through the eco-friendly products should be organized at the places which had atmosphere in accordance with the products themselves (Osman, Othman, Salahudin, & Abdullah, 2016). This is in accordance with the research result of Parhizgar and Vesal (2016) who found that the marketing promotion and distribution affected the purchase behaviors of eco-friendly products at the less level than the products themselves.

Although this research result indicated not in accordance with the attitudes survey of the consumers towards the eco-friendly products in India which realized and emphasized the eco-friendly products increasingly (Saxena & Khandelwal, 2010), the research results will confirm the significance of the measures which create the realization of eco-friendly products through the potential consumers very well.

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this research was to study the readiness of trade business and border business to enter into green economy. The sub-objectives were to study the perspectives from the viewpoints of entrepreneurs which were considered as supply to present the eco-friendly products and service to customers. The potentials of SMEs trade business and border trade and the customers demands to eco-friendly products were studied in this research. In addition, the researcher also studied the mixed marketing of eco-friendly products. The result of the study revealed that most of the trade business and border trade had business potentials in terms of management, logistics, finance, and marketing at a good level as well as the consumers needed the eco-friendly products and entrepreneurs were ready to adjust to eco-friendly market and green business. From the green economy concept, it was connected to doing business which less affected the environment, promoting good health and good well-being of people. Moreover, the research about customers needs revealed that customers needed more eco-friendly products which were in compatible with price, distribution and marketing channels. It was expected that every issue was related in the same way. The entrepreneurs who focused on green economy should also focus on the mixed market. From the study of the potentials of SMEs trade business and border trade and the customers demands of eco-friendly products, the researcher would like to summarize that the trade business and border business in the 5 provinces in the Upper -Northeastern cluster of Thailand were ready to enter into green economy and for green business management; meanwhile, the public relations in terms of letting the consumers realize the significance of eco-friendly products was the crucial point which should be managed seriously and consistently by the entrepreneurs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON MANAGEMENT

According to this research result, the researcher can propose the recommendations on management to enter into green economy as follows:

### *Potentials of Trade Business and Border Trade*

From the research results of management, the entrepreneurs should set the plan of business operation which focused on eco-friendly products and good life-quality of the employees as well as consumers. It should follow up the business results consistently to evaluate the situations and adapt the work plan to be in accordance with and suitable for the

situations. This is about the risk-management of investment. For business organization, it should issue the rules and regulations necessary for working. The form of such rules and regulations should be involved with the using of resources to be utmost effective, and consider the safety of work. Regarding the man powering, the involved organizations should research the needs of business development by designing the training curriculum to be in accordance with the entrepreneurs' needs for business operation and enhancing the perception as well as realizing the significance of eco-friendly operation and life quality on operation to be better.

Concerning logistics, the business should set the plan of products transportation; this is because it is a stage of delivering the products to the customers' hands which should save the expenses from transportation in each circle, and reduce to create environmental pollution caused by transportation too much often and unnecessary, determine the conditions to let the responsible employees towards the transportation follow-up and investigate the products delivery, design places and areas for placing the products, design the products arrangement which helps the employees understand the location of the products, reduce the time to find the products, and can manage the limited areas to save the areas use, as well as manage the wastes to be recycled. Regarding financial, the involved organizations and financial institutes should publicize the channels to let the entrepreneurs have the opportunity to access the sources of investment funds by supporting any fund sources, support the entrepreneurs to operate which emphasizes resource-saving, reduce the pollution which will affect the environment, and create the employees work life to be nice and safe. Moreover, the entrepreneurs should discuss with the partners and create the mutual agreement in terms of benefits allocation. For marketing, the involved organization should set the prediction training of circulation for the entrepreneurs in order to stimulate the business to determine its own potential circulation, and reduce the investment risk which will not give the income, support the existing entrepreneurs to be strong by setting the mutual activities continuously, enhance the business by creating the electronic distribution channels more in order to become the alternatives for the consumers to buy, and to save the fuel energy from travelling to buy the products.

### ***Consumers' Needs Towards Eco-Friendly Products***

According to the research result of consumers' needs towards the eco-friendly products, the research result indicates that the consumers still need eco-friendly products. The most important is that the involved organizations should operate the policies both at micro and macro levels. For macro level, it includes determining the national strategies, creating the mechanism to drive out the policies of every sector, especially government sector, private sector, and public sector, supporting the investment which focuses on the eco-friendly policies, and creating the life quality of operation. At micro level, the involved organizations should emphasize the public relations about the necessity to use the resources for utmost benefits continuously and consistently, realizing environments and effects toward life quality of the consumers more in terms of perception on various necessity and effects, enhance and drive out the creative behaviors towards the using of resources to be worthy, and create better life quality.

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