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BUYER TO SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS AND FIRM PERFORMANCE OF RETAIL SMEs IN JOHANNESBURG

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Management in the field of Strategic Marketing.

JOHANNESBURG, 2022

DECLARATION

I, Kapungwe Chishala, declare that this dissertation is a true presentation of my original research work as a student for a Master of Management at the University of the Witwatersrand. To the best of my knowledge, all sources that have been used have been provided in the study. This dissertation is my work and has not been previously submitted at any other recognized educational institution.

…….

Kapungwe Chishala

……

Date: 15/02/2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my gratitude to God, Almighty, for all the blessings received and demonstrated in my life throughout this journey. I was blessed with good health and the strength to complete the research successfully.

I also would like to express my gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr Fanny Saruchera, for his professional guidance throughout this research; what a great privilege and honour to work and study under his direction on the research work. I am so grateful for his patience and constant feedback, which he offered me. I would also like to thank him for his friendship, empathy, and great sense of humour.

I want to thank my mom Hildah and dad Jerry Chishala for their support and encouragement. Unfortunately, my mom passed away shortly after I got accepted for my master's program and never got to see me complete my studies; however, she is a pillar of my strength. I would also like to express my gratitude to my husband and my children David and Benjamin for their love and support during my studies until the completion of my program.

ABSTRACT

In recent times, buyer and supplier relationships have become essential sources of sustainable competitive advantage for small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) globally, and Johannesburg's retail industry has not been spared. However, the factors influencing these buyer-to-supplier relationships' success and firm performance have not been given enough attention in the supply chain literature. This study thus sought to examine the factors influencing buyer-to-supplier relationships, supplier selection, buyer-to-supplier trust, buyer-to-supplier engagement, and supplier success, and their effect on the SMEs firm performances in Johannesburg. A quantitative research survey was conducted among 259 SME owners/managers and sales representatives. SPSS-26 and AMOS version 26 were utilized to assess the relationship and hypotheses to interpret the data obtained. Structural equation and path modelling was adopted to assess the model and hypotheses. The study found out that supplier success positively correlated to firm performance. Hence, the study concluded that factors that influence the relationship between buyer-to-supplier trust, engagement, and supplier selection are linked to supplier success and business performance. The relationship between supplier success and SME performance was confirmed, implying supplier success is an essential driver of firm performance. This finding also implies that the well-managed buyer-supplier relationship in SMEs can apply the factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationships to improve business practices within SMEs in the retail industry. This research study adds to the body of knowledge by providing a research framework and recommendations based on the research findings for SMEs. The study suggests collaboration between buyers and suppliers to meet each other's needs more effectively. The study also recommends that firms inculcate the culture of selecting suitable suppliers; firms must adequately follow the supplier appraisal checklist in decision-making. In addition, it emerged that implementing the culture of selecting suitable suppliers is the most effective tool for enhancing procurement management. Further research is needed on the nine provinces in South Africa, and researchers could use a larger sample size to get in-depth representative views. Future studies could try other methods such as the mixed-methods approach and focus on constructs that have not been discussed in this research.

KEY WORDS: *Buyer-supplier relationship; collaboration; performance; SMEs, Johannesburg*

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Retail is defined as the practice of selling items directly to the customer. Marketers are to direct the marketing efforts towards satisfying the needs of a final consumer, a key concept within the supply chain (Nakka, 2018). The retail industry is an important element of the country's trade and industry. The transformation of retail processes to digital operations has benefited the buyers and suppliers through operational efficiency, increased sales, customer loyalty, and trust (Hosseini, Roglinger & Schmied, 2017). Therefore, due to high competition in the retail business, the industry has gone through drastic changes, leading to the closure of poorly performing brick-and-mortar retail stores, and exiting the retail industry permanently (Badrinarayanan & Becerra, 2019)

The SMEs' contribution to the South African economy and Africa at large can never be over-emphasized. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship is urgently needed. Most small businesses struggle to survive or maintain long term buyer to supplier relationships due to several reasons such as lack of trust, lack of buyer to supplier activities, inadequate demand, the inability to understand the target market, lack of knowledge on business practices, and lack of understanding the ethos of customer-centricity, lack of market research on products and services and lack of networking (Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2017). Other factors that compromise firm performance fall under supplier relationship management, such as commitment, value creation, collaboration with key suppliers, and supplier selection (Ngouapegne & Chinomona, 2019).

In South Africa, the performance of SMEs affects the country's economic growth. However, many small businesses experience difficulties operating their small businesses during the first year. The Small Enterprise Development Agency report (2018) reported a drop of about 1.4% in 2018. The number of small businesses declined from 2.48m to 2.44m, respectively. Heron (2020) described that about 70% of SMEs failed within the first year of operation. Therefore, Sitharam and Hoque (2016) indicated that the drop in small businesses could have been due to external forces such as inflation or interest rates. Economic conditions have also stressed the large retailers to access markets previously owned by some retailers resulting in high competition for the SMEs and leaving them with no choice for success but to depend on the suppliers they select to create competitive advantages (Lindblom, Lindblom & Wechtler, 2020). Therefore, the goal is to explore and exploit innovative strategies to improve the buyer-

to-supplier relationship and firm performance to achieve future growth and sustainability (Meyer et al., 2019). Shahzad et al. (2016) stated that for buyers and suppliers to build a solid and stable relationship, they must develop strategies for collaboration and development to enhance and appreciate their relationship.

Therefore, deducing from the elucidations above, there seems to have been limited information on the buyer-to-supplier relationships and firm performance in retail SMEs. Furthermore, the existing research focused on large corporations and retailers (Suraraksa & Shin, 2019). Therefore, it is essential to note a lacuna in the literature investigating the buyer-to-supplier relationships and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

1.2 Context of the study

1.2.1 Johannesburg as the study area

South Africa's retail industry has grown exponentially, and much of the growth has been in Johannesburg. In 2016, Johannesburg was one of the top ten largest municipalities in South Africa, with about 4,949,347 (Statista, 2020). Johannesburg is a well-developed city in Africa due to its developed infrastructure, socio-economic development and spatial intelligence (Bwalya, 2019). However, by nature, the city of Johannesburg is much divided; the demographics are very diverse due to people's migration from different provinces in South Africa and outside of the country (Statista, 2021). Although the city of Johannesburg is the first choice of business destination as it is the largest and generally perceived as “the economic hub of Southern Africa”, it is also the first choice for job seekers from other provinces in the country (Maseko, 2018). Clarno (2019) stated that even though migration has somewhat benefited the city of Johannesburg, the results of the people's movement have indicated significant gaps in the standards of living between the wealthy and very poor residents. Figure 2.1 shows the map of Johannesburg and the main towns. The largest township in Johannesburg is Soweto. Soweto has a population of over 1.2 million and is famous for its apartheid history and tourist attractions (Letuka & Lebambo, 2021). It is also renowned for its lifestyle and small businesses known as Spaza shops which are classified under the SMMEs (Wiid & Cant, 2021). However, Spaza shops are in short proximity to consumers' homes. Unfortunately, most Spaza shops are losing customers and closing down because of the introduction of shopping malls and large retailers into their trading spaces (Dos Santos & Duffett, 2022).

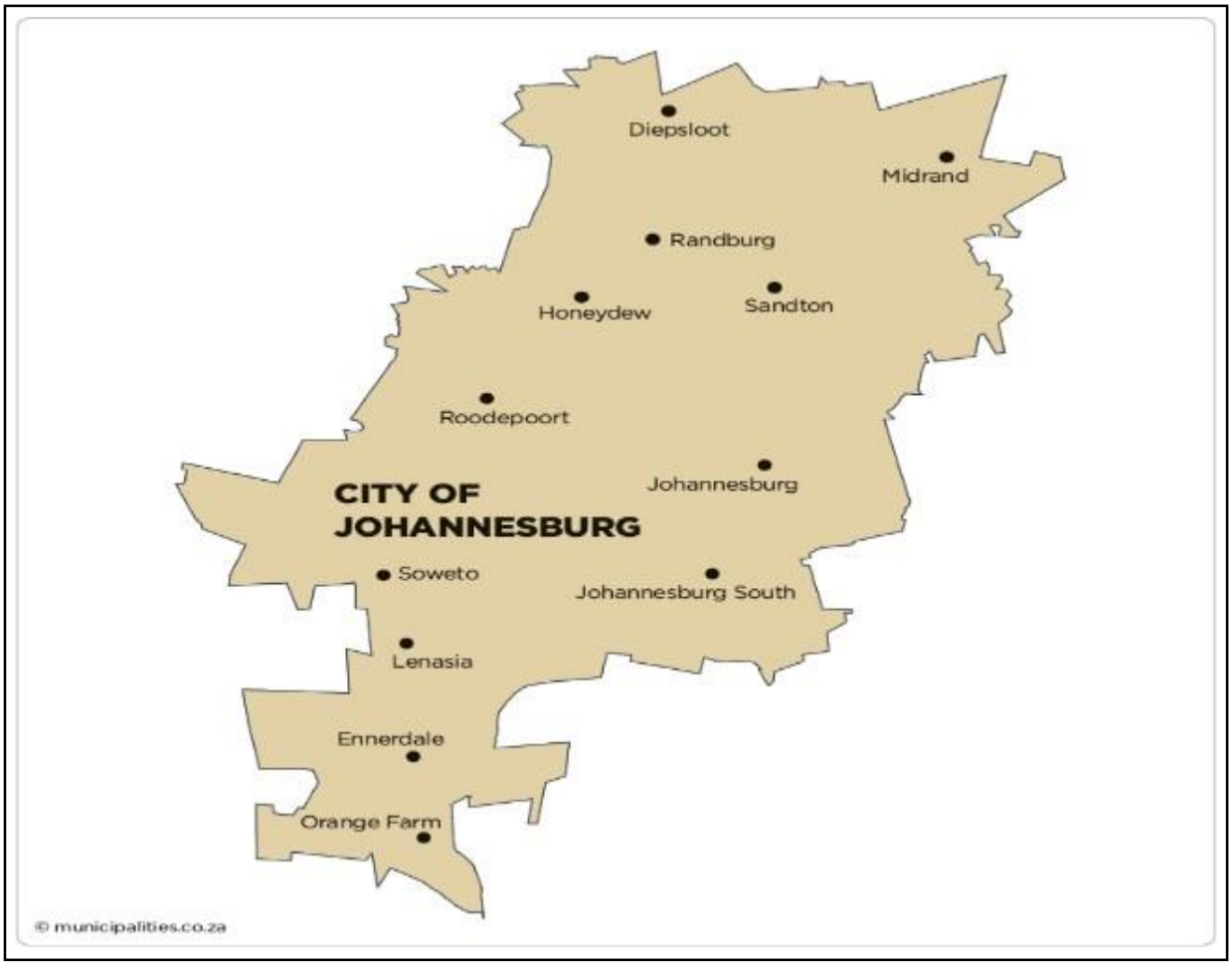


Figure 1.1: Map of the city of Johannesburg (municipalities.co.za)

1.3 Problem Statement

SMEs are essential to the development of the economy; hence their competitiveness is critical in the retail sector. Unfortunately, competition is very high due to large retailers' market penetration targeting consumers that small retailers serve. Large retailers such as Shoprite, Pick n Pay, and SPAR provides products and services at competitive prices (Masojada, 2019, pp. 87-88). Consumers' mindset has shifted, posing challenges to small retailers. Therefore, failure to follow a customer-centric strategy in business relationships has resulted in a decline in sales and loss of customers (Matriano & Khan, 2019). Therefore, firm performance of small retailers has been highly affected. As a result, small retailers have been forced to move out or close down. Research findings state that to acquire a competitive advantage and improve firm performance, buyer-supplier relationships and supplier selection are essential elements in procurement (Ghadge et al., 2019). Can buyer-to-supplier relationships enhance firm performance in the retail small business enterprises in Johannesburg? Little is known about the study of the buyer-to-supplier relationships and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the buyer-to-supplier relationships and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg. The variables under the study were as follows; factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship, buyer-supplier engagement, supplier selection, buyer-supplier trust, and supplier success.

1.4.1 Research Objectives

In line with the primary purpose of the study, the following research objectives (RO) were formulated:

- RO1: To determine the impact of factors influencing the buyer-to-supplier relationship and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.
- RO2: To evaluate the effect of supplier selection on the success of the buyer-supplier relationship and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.
- RO3: To determine the impact of buyer-to-supplier trust on the relationship and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.
- RO4: To determine the impact of buyer-to-supplier engagement on supplier success and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.
- RO5: To establish the impact of supplier success on firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

1.4.2 Research Questions

- RQ1: To what extent does buyer-to-supplier engagement positively and significantly impact supplier success?
- RQ2: Can supplier selection positively and significantly impact supplier success?
- RQ3: Does buyer-to-supplier trust positively and significantly impact supplier success?
- RQ4: To what extent do factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship positively and significantly impact supplier success?
- RQ5: Can supplier success positively and significantly impact firm performance?

1.5 Significance of the study

The buyer-to-supplier relationship and the firm performance of Johannesburg retail SME businesses were assessed. Hence, the significance of the research study was projected to be drawn from both theoretical and practical values.

1.5.1 Theoretical value

The research extends the knowledge base in retail SMEs, buyer-to-supplier relationships, competitive advantage, and SMEs firm performance. However, some gaps were detected in the literature and provide directions for further investigation. The research aimed to fill the gap buyers and suppliers experience in relationship building in retail SMEs in Johannesburg. Research shows the studies on large corporations' buyer-to-supplier relationship and firm performance. However, there was no clear indication on what factors SMEs should focus on in developing solid relationships.

The researchers and academics could use this study as a benchmark for future studies, i.e. the study's results could be used as future reference material. The study's limitations could be used as a yardstick for future researchers to improve the areas that the researcher did not cover.

1.5.2 Potential practical value

This study also provides practical implications. This study is significant to retail SME owners and managers since they aim to enhance customer satisfaction, improve business operations and maximize profits. The SMEs owners and marketing managers will benefit from this study as it will provide suggestions for improving their supplier relationships and other business practices.

1.5.3 Potential policy value

The results of this study could be useful in guiding policy-makers to generate new policies and revise existing ones. In addition, the study could be beneficial for effective policy formulation by various entities such as the Government of South Africa, which is charged with ensuring organizations like retail SMEs follow the set regulations in carrying out their businesses. Furthermore, bodies like the National Business Initiative (NBI), South African SME Finance Association (SASFA), and Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) could also use this research for effective policy formulation on retail SMEs management issues.

1.6 Delimitations

The delimitations are that the study is limited to retail SMEs in Johannesburg metropolitan area. The study seeks to explore factors contributing to SMEs' business performance. Since this study is limited to SMEs in Johannesburg, it will measure the factors influencing the buyer-to-supplier relationship and firm performance on retail SMEs such as supplier engagements, buyer-to-supplier trust and supplier selection. However, the study will not measure large corporations' buyer-to-supplier relationship and firm performance. Therefore, further studies can explore this study nationally on the issues affecting business relationships and performance in large corporations. Moreover, a further delimitation is that the research has only included closed-ended Likert scale responses in the survey.

1.7 Definition of terms

Table 1.1 shows the definitions of some key terms used in the study for the presented model to be understood clearly. Figure 1.2 illustrates the conceptual framework adopted for the study. Details of the development of the framework are provided in Chapter 2.

Table 1.1 Definitions of Variables and Concepts

Variable/ Concept	Definition	Source
Relationship Marketing	Relationship Marketing, "is the process of creating, developing and improving relationships with customers and other actors involved in the relationship known as stakeholders".	Cano, Castro and Vicente-Ramos (2021), p. 3.
Supply chain	Supply chain is defined as, "the entire network involved in the creation and sale of a product, including the delivery to the end user".	Radanliev et al. (2021), p. 3.
Supplier selection	Supplier selection refers to " how firms identify, evaluate, and contract with suppliers".	Resende, Gereldes and Junior (2021), p. 2.
Trust	"Trust is the degree to which businesses believe thatsupply chain partners will fulfil their responsibility to each other in good faith".	Ngouapegne and Chinomona (2019), p. 45.
Firm performance	"Firm performance refers to the firm's valuable resultsin terms of efficiency of investment, market share, growth and returns produced by taking a complex series of actions that integrate skills and knowledge".	Sitharam and Hoque (2016), p. 276.

Source: Compiled by the researcher (drawn from various sources)

1.8 Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Statements

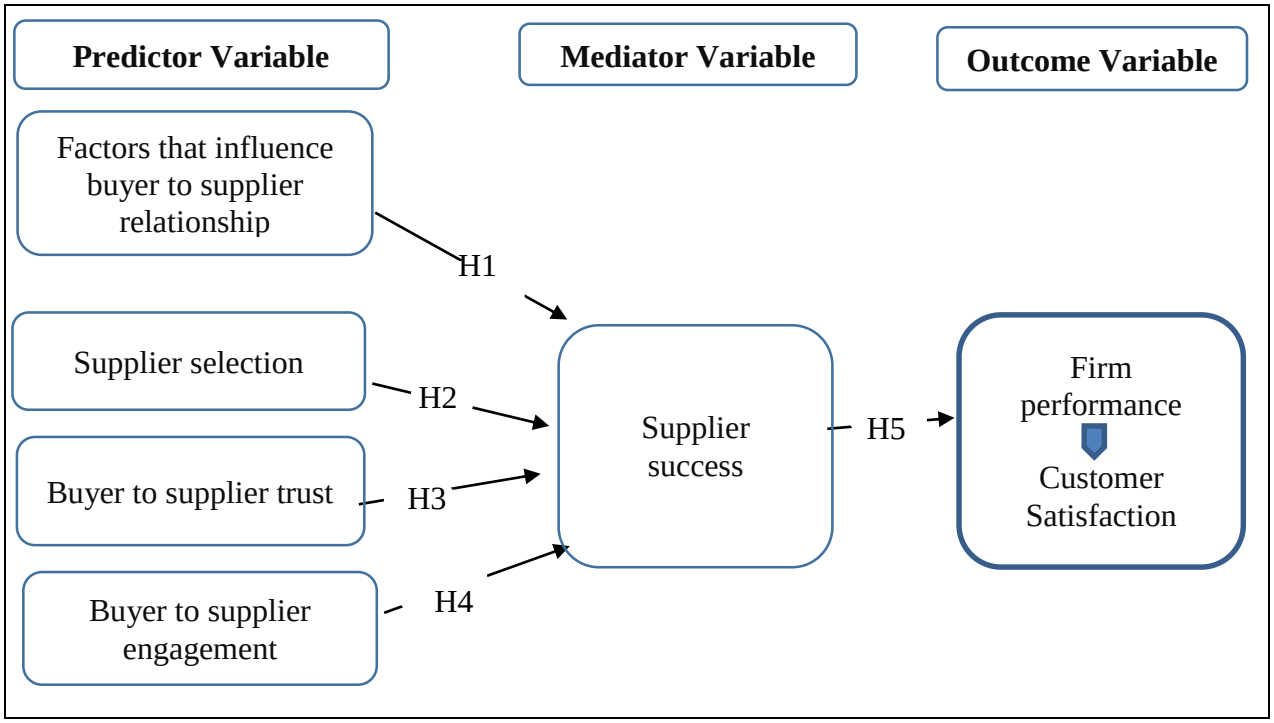


Figure 1:2 Conceptual framework of the study
Source: Researcher's own work

1.8.1 Hypotheses Statements

Below are the hypotheses statements based on the above conceptual framework:

H1: *Factors that influence the buyer to supplier relationship significantly positively impact supplier success.*

H2: *Supplier selection has a positive and significant impact on supplier success.*

H3: *Buyer to supplier trust has a significant positive impact on the supplier success.*

H4: *Buyer to supplier engagement has a positive and significant impact on the supplier success.*

H5: *Supplier success has a significant positive influence on the firm performance*

1.9 Assumptions

The following assumptions were made for this study:

- Participants were not required to provide their personal details as they were deemed anonymous.
- It was assumed that the participants would respond to the questionnaire with integrity and honesty.

- The sample was assumed to represent the true population in the study.
- It was assumed that the participants were to create time to respond to the questionnaire.
- It was assumed that the participants could read English.

1.10 Chapter Summary

The chapter discussed the study's background and research context. It also discussed problems faced by small businesses, the purpose of the research, the aims, and the formulated empirical objectives of the research, and a discussion on both the theoretical and practical goals of the research study. Next, the delimitations of the research were explored. Then, the chapter also flagged the conceptual framework and hypotheses, whose details are provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 outlined the dissertation's purpose, and this current chapter outlines the research context, theoretical framework, and empirical literature. This chapter discusses the literature on the concept of retailing, SMEs from a worldwide perspective, classification of retail and lastly, the role of retail SMEs, mostly from a South African perspective, challenges faced by retail SMEs and relationship marketing in retail SMEs.

Secondly, this chapter presents a detailed theoretical framework. This study's theoretical literature is anchored in the framework of the relationship marketing model. The theory was used to serve as underpinning to ground the study. This is the pivotal theory in this research because it explains the research's fundamental concepts and provides a central point of reference for arguments generated in the study.

Moreover, this chapter also presented the empirical literature of the research, and it observed all the pertinent collected works found on the topic of the study. Finally, this chapter also covers a literature review on the variables under investigation. The factors influencing the buyer-to-supplier relationship include supplier selection, buyer-supplier trust, buyer-to-supplier engagements, supplier success, and firm performance.

2.2 Research Context

2.2.1 The Concept of Retailing

"Retailing is the sale of products and services in small volumes to the final customer" (Dawson, Findlay & Sparks, 2020 p. 25). Vaja (2015) described retailing as selling household goods, personal products, and family items ranging from cars, apparel, and meals to the final consumer. In recent times, retailing has been described as legal small business ventures that operate for profit by offering a service (Guansi, 2022). Over the past few years, retailing has grown so much in importance and significance at several levels, for example, the growth and expansion of malls in the region (Pandey & Kaur, 2018). The growth in retailing has played a significant role in providing employment and economic activity (Nalla & Varalaxmi, 2018). Retail employment growth is the primary source of employment in South Africa and other countries (McKenzie, Burt & Dukeov, 2018). In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, some retail

businesses were forced to position themselves differently to meet and satisfy the consumer needs (Grewal et al., 2021). Therefore, researchers have examined that supermarket online retailing has significantly influenced people's satisfaction levels and the general quality of life (Pinochet et al., 2022). Hence, Grzeskowiak et al. (2016) stated that satisfaction levels occur as retailers recognize consumer needs and provide products and services that solve problems.

2.2.2 An overview of South Africa's retail sector

A general overview of South Africa's retail business is that the sector has grown and has brought significant changes to the way customers shop. Many consumers now leave micro-enterprises in small areas and shop in large shopping centres. Therefore, Djerassi, Godefroit-Winkel and Diallo (2018) examined that the retail industry in South Africa is so heavily dependent on traditional shopping centres such as walk-in shops. Recently, Makhitha and Soke, (2021) observed that the location for small shops are within reach and have a variety of products that appeal to consumers at lower costs. Hence, Mathu (2019, pp. 85-87) quantified that customer's preference of shopping from large shopping centres has caused the small retailers to become weak in the area of protectiveness.

In the last decade, the growth of the retail business has improved. Most of the retail growth has been in supermarkets, clothing, food and beverages, hardware, cosmetics, households, and other retailers. The many shops involved in Johannesburg's retail business have been the Malls. The malls are filled with many retail shops, and they have continued to grow and expand in all rural areas of the country. The supermarkets have found their way to rural areas where lower-income earners live. These supermarkets are in areas where they never existed; they have moved close to consumer homes (Das Nair, 2018, pp. 1-6). Hence, Deepika and Kannan (2022) concluded that the moves and operations by supermarkets will still continue even after the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2.3 Describing SMEs: A Worldwide Perspective

World Bank (2020) records that a worldwide perspective of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) is that SMEs represent about 90% of business in the world, they contribute to 40% of national income (GDP) in emerging markets. Moreover, they are great contributors to job creation, accounting for more than 50% of employment worldwide (Mishra, 2019).

In the Johannesburg area, the retail sector contributes much to the economic standards of South Africa. For example, in South Africa, companies that started as small businesses have grown

to become multinational companies or have partnered with MNCs such as Nestle, Massmart, Hisense and Nissan.

Rahman (2018) believes that SMEs' definitions vary from country to country as they differ in employee numbers. Al-Herwi (2019) supports this notion and weighs, noting the lack of a universal SMEs definition due to determinant factor variations from country to country. Serumanamga-Zake and Van der Poll (2021) stated that SMEs in South Africa are small business ventures with up to 250 employees.

In the past decade, SMEs have had substantial growth and played a significant role in job creation, contributing to the GDP. Koutsopoulos (2021) stated that SMEs are more than large corporations and reports show that SMEs represent about 90% of all businesses worldwide**.** Similarly, Hossain, Akhter and Sultana (2022) reported that despite the impact caused by COVID-19 pandemic, SMEs still represent 90% of the firms worldwide. In addition, Naradda-Gamage et al. (2020) indicated that there is a need for SMEs to develop survival strategies in order to endure from the global challenges. SMEs cannot go unnoticed because they boost innovation and move the socio-economic development in developing economies. Despite small businesses' challenges, they are still the job creators hence lessening unemployment in developing countries (Wang, 2016). Likewise, Pu (2021) stated that SMEs are essential for job creation and new business developments.

2.2.4 Description and classification of retail SMEs in South Africa

Muriiti (2017) emphasizes that SME businesses are particularly the vehicles that move the trade and industry and cover 90% of the retail industry in job creation. In South Africa, SEFA has been the primary basis for providing SMEs funds. However, it has not been easy for small businesses to obtain the funds even though they represent and contribute highly to their economic development (Rahman, 2018). In the same line, Ncube and Zondo (2018) elucidated that SMEs are a fundamental part of the economy that leads to a high economic growth rate, contributing to economic and social development. Additionally, SMEs are quick to respond to consumer needs and quick to adapt to changes because of the size of the business (Zaridis, Vlachos & Bourlakis, 2021). Small businesses reduce unemployment by creating jobs and gradually alleviating poverty. Poverty alleviation is the primary goal of African countries whose task is to create sustainable economic growth by increasing productivity and acknowledging 'SMEs as the generator for employment, income distribution and drivers of the economy (Abisuga-Oyekunle, Patra & Muchie, 2019).

Specifically, in South Africa, SMEs contribute positively to the GDP. In addition, research shows that SMEs are in economic development through job creation and poverty eradication. According to the statistics, the volume of active businesses in South Africa is about 736,198 formal SMMEs (SEDA, 2019). The growth of SMEs is also linked to poverty alleviation as this is the primary goal of African countries whose task is to create sustainable economic growth by increasing productivity and acknowledging 'SMEs as the generator for employment, income distribution and drivers of the economy (Abisuga-Oyekunle, Patra & Muchie, 2019)

2.2.5 The role of retail SMEs and the South African economy

In South Africa, SMEs contribute to the economy by employing about 47% of the workforce (SEDA, 2019). Therefore, Sibanda, Hove-Sibanda and Shava (2018) argued that small businesses account for 57% of gross domestic product (GDP).

According to a World Bank report, SMEs represent about 90% of businesses, 50% of employment, and 40% contribution to GDP (World Bank, 2020). The composition of the SMEs statistics shows that the service sector contributes about 70-75% of the country's economic activity (SEDA, 2019). The breakdown and grouping of economic activities in the SMEs are as follows; internal trade 40%, private sector 40%, Manufacturing and retail sector 15%, social services 14%, and business services 12% (SEDA, 2019).

Deducing from the elucidations mentioned above regarding the failures of SMEs. It should be noted that there is not enough literature on studies investigating the dynamics of the buyer to supplier relationships and their influence on the retail SMEs' growth in Johannesburg.

The study examined the dynamics that influence retail SMEs' retention, acquisition, and customer satisfaction influence buyer-supplier relationships and firm performance.

2.2.6 Small business challenges

Despite being the productive drivers of the economy in job creation and the overall simulation of economic development, SMEs do face numerous challenges. For instance, Nkwabi and Mboya’s (2019) study confirmed that SMEs lack managerial skills and business acumen to run their businesses.

The lack of managerial skills and business acumen have led SMEs business owners to face greater challenges in building sustainable businesses. Some of the challenges are discussed below.

2.2.6.1 Lack of communication

SMEs' main challenge is a lack of communication and management commitment in business

partnerships (Yadav et al., 2019). There is also a lack of total commitment by the government to help the developing sector (Abugu & Abuja, 2020). In South Africa, the organization for small businesses (SEDA) reported a drop in the number of SMEs that fail to sustain themselves due to lack of commitment and funds to drop from 2.48m to 2.44m which equates to about 1.4% (SEDA, 2018). Extant literature in marketing further argues that the drop in the number of small businesses was caused by a lack of communication, commitment, and access to funds (Rasheed et al., 2019).

2.2.6.2 Lack of trust

Wilson and Makau (2018) quantified that lack of trust in buyer to supplier relationship can cause issues in a relationship and can impact the growth of the business. Therefore, Petrakis and Kostis (2015) stated that the lack of trust in small business relationships could determine the failure of viable network outcomes. In addition, Healy, Mavromaras and Sloane (2015) stated that SMEs tend to hide information between the key players in the business and avoid managerial issues within partnerships due to lack of trust. The research argues that the major tool in successful business growth and relationships is trust (Hakanen, Kossou & Takala 2016).

2.2.6.3 Lack of strategic planning

Strategic planning is defined as "a process of envisioning a desired future for the small business, thus making strategic decisions on its mission and objectives and on allocating resources to pursue its chosen strategy" (van Scheers & Makhitha, 2016, p. 243).
Chowdhury and Shumon (2020) explained that SMEs in South Africa struggle to grow due to internal and external factors such as lack of knowledge, skills and awareness. For instance, SMEs are not equipped with technological knowledge (Meyer, Molefe & De Jongh 2018). Hence, when comparing South Africa's SME's rate of failure to other countries like Malaysia, it was stated that 75.7% of small businesses lost their businesses in the first year, and 60% failed each consecutive year (Haron, 2020).

2.3 Relationship marketing in retail SMEs

Hutten et al. (2018) described relationship marketing as an essential process dimension in the business world that includes understanding customer expectations, satisfaction, and loyalty. In addition, Makhita (2019) explained that relationship marketing should be implemented in retail SMEs to survive through customer acquisition, maintaining, and retaining customers. Therefore, attracting and returning customers is a good strategy to gain competitive advantage

in retail SMEs (Mizani et al., 2018). Ngoma and Ntale (2019) emphasised that a business that manages a good business relationship through collaboration with consumers can achieve customer loyalty. Hence, Handriana (2016) stated that relationship marketing could be viewed as the same as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) since it is a theory in management designed to maintain relationships with customers. Debnath, Datta and Mukhopadhyay's (2016) findings on CRM explained that CRM is an all-inclusive approach of attaining customers, process improvement, and technology to appreciate a company's customers. CRM was categorized as an approach to managing buyer-to-supplier relationships and relationship development with the buyer-supplier objectives in mind to identify, maintain, and develop relationships with customers to gain a profit (Sugandini & Wendry, 2017). In addition, Zang et al. (2015) mentioned that SMEs that implement CRM engagements in business relationships could appreciate their business partners by applying various relationship marketing strategies. Therefore, Makhitha (2019) elucidated that relationship marketing could benefit small retail businesses through collaborative relationships to generate certain benefits, such as creating a profitable product market. Kumar et al. (2016) affirmed that a joint association happens when business partners work as a team to achieve their goals and objectives. Accordingly, Soosay and Hyland (2015) define collaboration as the cooperation of two or more business partners to create a sustainable competitive advantage and higher profits. Kusumadewi and Karyono (2019) explained that competitive advantage consists of differentiation in the quality of a service or product offering. The reason for differentiation is that suppliers sell similar products with similar prices and quantities. Hence, using a differentiation strategy creates a competitive advantage over its competitors.

2.4 Empirical Literature

In this section, literature on the variables of the study is discussed.

2.4.1 Factors influencing the buyer-to-supplier relationship

Past studies have fairly acknowledged the issues that influence business relationships. Therefore, buyers and suppliers need to identify the important factors influencing the relationship. The ensuing sections will review the literature on the elements that impact the business relationship that should be implemented to develop a successful relationship. Concerning this, Pahurkar (2020) explained that the sturdy and trusting buyer-to-supplier relationship is vital for small businesses to survive as it involves purchases and negotiated contract agreements. Hence, trust stimulates the level of relationship of both buyers and

suppliers and loss of trust can damage the relationship (Janani, Wiles & Mishra, 2022).

Brito and Miguel (2017) elucidated that the association between buyer and supplier can depend on engagements, whereas the supplier's opportunity cost can depend on expectations based on previous experience with the buyer and supplier connections in the market. For that reason, Zunk (2015) stated that suppliers must dedicate their time and effort to understanding consumers' needs and finding out what encourages their consumers to team up in long-term relationships. Furthermore, the supplier must be willing to meet the buyer's requirements at the beginning of the negotiations. The supplier must also be willing to satisfy the buyer and meet the demands required in subsequent engagements. In addition to that, Karungani (2019) also points out that other factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship are trust, engagement, communication, supply chain integration, reputation, and supplier selection. These factors can influence how the buyer and supplier develop and maintain their relationship.

Therefore, inferring from the above explanations, it can be stated that the factors fundamental to developing a successful buyer-to-supplier relationship are; proper selection of suppliers, trust, engagement, and supplier's success. These factors can determine the direction of future business growth. The factors that influence the buyer to supplier relationship, supplier selection, trust, engagements and supplier success are discussed in the next sections.

2.4.1.1 Supplier Selection

The process of selecting the suppliers and locating a pool of suppliers that will meet the organizational needs is called supplier selection (Taherdoost & Brard, 2019). Therefore, it should be noted that organizations should inculcate the culture of selecting suitable suppliers to enhance business practices (Chan et al., 2008). In addition, Kaur and Sigh (2021) demonstrated that finding a suitable supplier is one of the crucial actions in the management that ensures the selected suppliers can support the organizations against risks. Other essential aspects of supplier selection include the valuations on supplier price, reliability, and delivery performance (Makhitha, 2017). Therefore, SMEs should initiate the effective supplier selection process and develop selection criteria based on suppliers' responsiveness (Su & Gargeya, 2016).

Supplier selection criteria are used during the supplier prequalification stage. Supplier prequalification is necessary for the procurement process since it helps the company identify the potential supplier to provide goods and services for the organization (Mbuchi & Kwasira, 2016). In addition, prequalification of suppliers will generally be used as a strategy for risk management to avoid failures in service delivery, litigation costs, and resource capabilities.

(Limo, Iravo & Lagat, 2017). Johnathan (2020) explained that supplier selection criteria are essential for avoiding poor performance. Therefore, Van der Wethuizen and Ntshingila (2020) asserted that selecting the best supplier is a fundamental component of ensuring the best quality. Hence, the prequalification stage provides a better understanding of supplier's processes in line with product quality, cost and delivery, financial stability, firm performance, and the ability to work well with the organization (Madzimure, 2019, pp.2-6). The assessments of suppliers on supplier goods, cost, on-time delivery, and dependability are considered essential aspects of the buyer to supplier relationship (Makhitha, 2017). Su and Gargeya (2016) accentuated that SMEs should instil the selection criteria on product quality and supplier's timely response. The strategic review ultimately impacts firm performance's comprehensive customer service level and overall customer satisfaction. Furthermore, when vetting suppliers, the most important aspect is to ensure that the selection process involves choosing the best suppliers to meet the organization's aims and objectives (Badi & Pamucar, 2020).

2.4.1.2 Buyer-Supplier Trust

Buyer-suppliers' relationships have become strategic; they bridge the gap to produce mutual benefits based on trust as a leading actor in the relationship. Therefore, trust is usually when the buyer and supplier are generally convinced that they are entirely devoted to each other's aims and objectives. Hence, Chalid (2016) stated that trust in business transactions is essential as it puts the partners at ease. In addition, Leninkumer (2017) stated that trust between partner's increases commitment and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, trust was viewed as one of the factors that led to successful organizations grounded on reputation, honesty, and commitments in building sustainable relationships (Chaudhary et al., 2021). In recent studies, Butt (2019) found that as buyers and suppliers collaborate more often, they can produce impressive results where they both benefit, making their relationship strategic. Therefore, trust becomes the leading factor in managing the buyer-supplier relationship at this relationship stage. Ngouapegne and Chinomona (2018, 2019) stated that for supplier relationship management to last, there must be trust and commitment to act as key drivers for relationships to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Moreover, more recently, Curado and Vieira (2019) reinforced that when buyers and suppliers create a level of trust, there is a reduction in conflict resolution and the degree of complexity during negotiations, allowing both parties to focus on essential issues for mutual benefits. Likewise, Blackburn, Carey, and Tanewski (2018) emphasize that for long-term relationships

to be developed, both buyer and supplier should be willing to work together, connect, and share relevant and essential information. Hence Pooe, Mafini, and Loury-Okoumba (2015) acknowledge that buyer and supplier trust is quickly established when a good relationship exists and allows the suppliers to operate cooperatively. In particular, when trust is present in the business relationship, timelines also accelerate, and transactions are quick and mutually beneficial.

2.4.1.3 Buyer to Supplier Engagements

Buyer to supplier engagements are activities in which both parties make the relationship work. Even though small businesses have long absorbed the implications of the business associations. There is little knowledge of seller engagements and how that affects the supplier's success. This section will address the impact of the buyer to supplier engagement in the mediating role of supplier success in retail SMEs. Therefore, it should be noted that the buyer-to-supplier engagements are beneficial when both buyers and suppliers have a strong and confident belief that they understand each other's objectives and needs in developing strategic alliances (Loury-Okoumba & Mafini, 2018). Furthermore, strategic marketing generates product awareness and guides the business culture to ensure an enduring customer engagement (van Scheers & Makhitha, 2016). In addition, Prentice and Nguyen (2020) stated that buyer-to-supplier engagements encourage positive consumer feedback and boost purchases, performance and customer loyalty. The conclusions indicate that data sharing between the buyer and supplier during product initiation and development helps improve the production process and effectively supplies goods between business partners (Yang, Zhang & Xie, 2017). Buyer and supplier engagements and data sharing are encouraged during product initiation stages and have proven to be very effective throughout the project (Peng et al., 2022).

The relationships significantly impact the supplier's performance and allow the supplier company to validate its dedication and commitment (Chinomona, 2016). Moreover, Dwivedi et al. (2019) acknowledged that buyer-to-supplier engagement is critical in ensuring customer satisfaction. Hence, Yan and Nair (2016) add that buyers and suppliers in small businesses rely heavily on each other to produce quality products. Therefore, suppliers' involvement is crucial early in the new product development process.

For this reason, buyers must work with suppliers to build strong relationships. The relationships support the buyer in the administrative process when needs arise. As a result, the relationships turn out to be beneficial for both the buyer and the supplier as they achieve value for money through various engagements.

2.4.2 Supplier Success

In the retail industry, managing the supplier relationship is core in achieving a successful supply chain (Morsy, 2019). Research indicates that trust in a business connection reduces if there is no proper relationship between the firms in the supply chain (Butt, 2019, 2020). Additionally, Ramakrishnan, Haron, and Goh (2015) stated that lack of supplier relationship leads to non-sharing of critical business ideas, lack of mentors, failure to deal with problems, and absence of meetings. Therefore, supplier success is crucial to the business as it affects the firm performance (Yang, Jiang & Xie, 2019). Hence, trust and information exchange between the supplier and buyer provides the buyer more time to review its products or services and respond to unforeseen demands (Yang et al., 2019). In addition, Vanpoucke, Vereecke, and Dalvi and Kant (2018) argued that both buyer and supplier have a role to play in developing activities that can have an influence on a successful relationship. As a result, both parties become very selective about whom they engage in the relationship.

Accordingly, Graca, Barry and Done (2015) advised that it is important to remember that buyers and suppliers are very independent; even if one has high power resources over the other, competitiveness can still exist in a strategic relationship. Hence, Sasaki (2021) stressed that the success factors for supplier growth embrace buyers who identify their suppliers as business partners.

Jack and Powers (2015) indicated that for the buyer-supplier relationships to be tactical, it is very important for organizations to undertake a proper supplier selection, share objectives and goals with the partnering organization and establish sustainable business relationships along the supply chain. Porter (2019) heightens that supplier success in line with supply chain management supports the mutual benefits between buyers and suppliers, which develop into shared growth and prosperity. In addition, Forkmann et al. (2016) argued that supply chain management has some essential aspects necessary to managing supplier relationships in line with organizational processes and procedures needed at the development stage of the relationship with the supplier.

Makori and Kibet (2016) defined a supply chain as "the connected series of activities concerned with planning, co-coordinating and controlling material, parts and finished goods from suppliers to the customer." Additionally, Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) involves communication and coordination between organizations and their suppliers.

2.4.3 Firm Performance

Taouab and Issor (2019), defined firm performance as the results produced by the management and marketing teams in competitiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness. To expand on that definition, (Masocha, 2018) stated that firm performance consists of both financial and non-financial factors such as price, quality, and logistics. Competitiveness and operational performance are measured in businesses as they reflect on sales and market share of overall company performance. Therefore, Khayer (2020) declared that every company should run its business on performance conditions. Firm performance is necessary for the economic sector or social and political environment.

Eniola and Entebang (2015) described the firm performance as organizational effectiveness, defined, and measured using complete or comparative changes in sales volumes, productivity levels, return on assets, and profit margins. Furthermore, the authors define performance as the company's capability to generate satisfactory results and actions that can be implemented to assist small businesses (Haseeb et al., 2019). In the retail business, firm performance has a broad perception on multiple operations. SME's need to source and acquire knowledge in various business fields and implement in their business processes (Chaithanapat et al., 2022). Therefore, relationships between buyer and supplier must be fostered around the business concepts to improve business performance. The figure below shows levels of performance in an organization.



Figure 2.1. Performance Pyramid

Source: Tangen (2004)

Small businesses are encouraged to implement quality management standards to ensure that they can supply products that meet customer needs. In business, the management's role is to ensure that these standards enhance the value of products and services that contribute to performance.

Quality products or services are essential to the success of small businesses (Bianchi & Ferraz, 2020); hence it is the very fact that boosts customer retention and recommendations. When customers are pleased with the products, they become loyal and refer others to buy the products and services as they are perceived as better value for money (Nugroho, Kempa & Panjaitan, 2020). Likewise, the disappointed clients will spread the word to more people about their experiences with the product and are likely to take the business away. Quality products are fundamental to the development and growth of the company. Otherwise, the company will incur high costs of repairing the damage caused by poor or faulty products (Allan, 2016). The damage may lead to product recall from shops, and it may also damage the company's reputation and create a negative perception of a company. Quality products and services are

the organization's hallmark and should satisfy all its stakeholders (Thaichon & Quach, 2015). Quality services such as delivery performance are also measured and considered critical in buyer-to-supplier relationships. Customer satisfaction is an antecedent of the firm's financial performance (How & Lee, 2021). Hence, delivery performance should meet customer expectations and not inconvenience them due to late deliveries.

2.4.3.1 Measures of Firm Performance: An Overview

This study adopts Vij and Bedi's (2016, pp. 603) definition of firm performance, i.e. "the overall index of the ability of the firm to satisfy its stakeholders, measured in terms of financial as well as operational indicators, using primary data to measure subjective business performance, secondary data to measure objective business performance," or both." Researchers (Bahta et al., 2021) have used subjective and objective measures to measure firm performance. Precisely (Anwar & Li, 2021) argued that both subjective and objective methods can be used to assess the performance of a small company. Objective measures of firm performance are that of business profits or company liquidity.

Ideally, Islamoglu, Apan, and Oztel (2015) explained that it is important for companies to access the monetary performance due to increased competition which puts the businesses at risk of maintaining the market share. Hence, Khan, Khalique, and Nor (2014) emphasized that the focus should focus on quantifiable company profits and assess non-financial measures that gauge a company's performance based on customer satisfaction and innovation. However, Jahedi and Méndez (2014) point out that subjective performance measures are more commonly used in empirical studies, especially in corruption, happiness, or customer satisfaction. Below Table 2.1 compares subjective against objective performance measures.

Table 2.1. Subjective Versus Objective Performance Measures

Differentiation Aspect	Subjective Performance	Objective Performance
1. Performance Indicators	• The focus is on the overall organisational performance.	Focuses on the "actual financial indicators."
2. Measurement standards	• Performance is rated relative to perceived competitors or industry performance.	Based on "absolute financial data."
3. Measurement Scale	• Scales range from "very poor" to "verygood", or "much lower" to "much higher", or "worst in the industry" to "best in the industry", etc.	No scales are applied.

Source: Adapted from Maziriri (2018)

2.4.3.2 Subjective Measures of Firm Performance

Small business managers are more likely to provide customer satisfaction data than financial statements in the retail industry. Maziriri (2018, 2020), in support of Brownhilder (2016), discussed that the use of independent procedures of firm performance in assessing SMEs' business performance is connected to how many business managers are reluctant to disclose their monetary information. In addition, Dawes (1999) stated that the subjective measure is generally associated with a company's performance rating using a scale with "very poor" and "very good" items when comparing opponents and objectivity measurement as the definite value for growth or profitability.

Therefore, theoretically, it can be supposed that increasing customer satisfaction can have positive outcomes for innovative firms (Finoti et al., 2017). Okeke and Asekhame (2021) stated that low customer satisfaction rarely contributes to the firm's long-term growth.

Hence, Aksoy (2017) mentioned that innovativeness is very important to business operations and marketers since they define the future of customer buying behaviour, customer retention, and customer loyalty. Hence, firm performance was measured using customer satisfaction as subjective.

2.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This section is grounded on the stakeholder concept and relationship marketing theory. The detailed philosophies are discussed in the ensuing section.

2.5.1 Stakeholder Theory

The Stakeholder Theory demonstrates several ways that marketing leaders can generate ethical business practices and processes that work (Jones & Wicks, 1999). Processes are implemented to maintain and care for relationships and networks of stakeholders (Freeman, 2016). Stakeholders have a strong influence over small businesses. The stakeholders' activities are very beneficial to small businesses as they assist them in achieving their vision, mission, and goals and aid them in data collection and analysis (Slaba, 2016). Therefore, Vuori, Vesalainen, Helander (2018) stated that stakeholders have made synthesizing views on the involvement of different stakeholders regarding interactions and exchange of information, providing support, funds, and resources. Hence stakeholders need to be supportive and keep everyone involved.

Slaba (2016) stated that it is crucial to observe the firm's key stakeholders that hold essential roles. For example, the firm's primary stakeholders such as suppliers have influence on firm operations and certain actions cannot be done without their input (Hultman & Elg, 2018).

Considering that, Lechlier et al. (2019) indicated that supplier groups have the power to influence the outcomes as they incorporate eco-friendly and community queries and provide support to consumers efficiently. In addition, it is vital to note that suppliers are valuable partners as they strive to build their reputations on the quality of goods they provide and customer service.

Below is the stakeholder map, including the main stakeholders of a small and medium-sized enterprise: owners, customers, competitors, employees, suppliers, and unions.

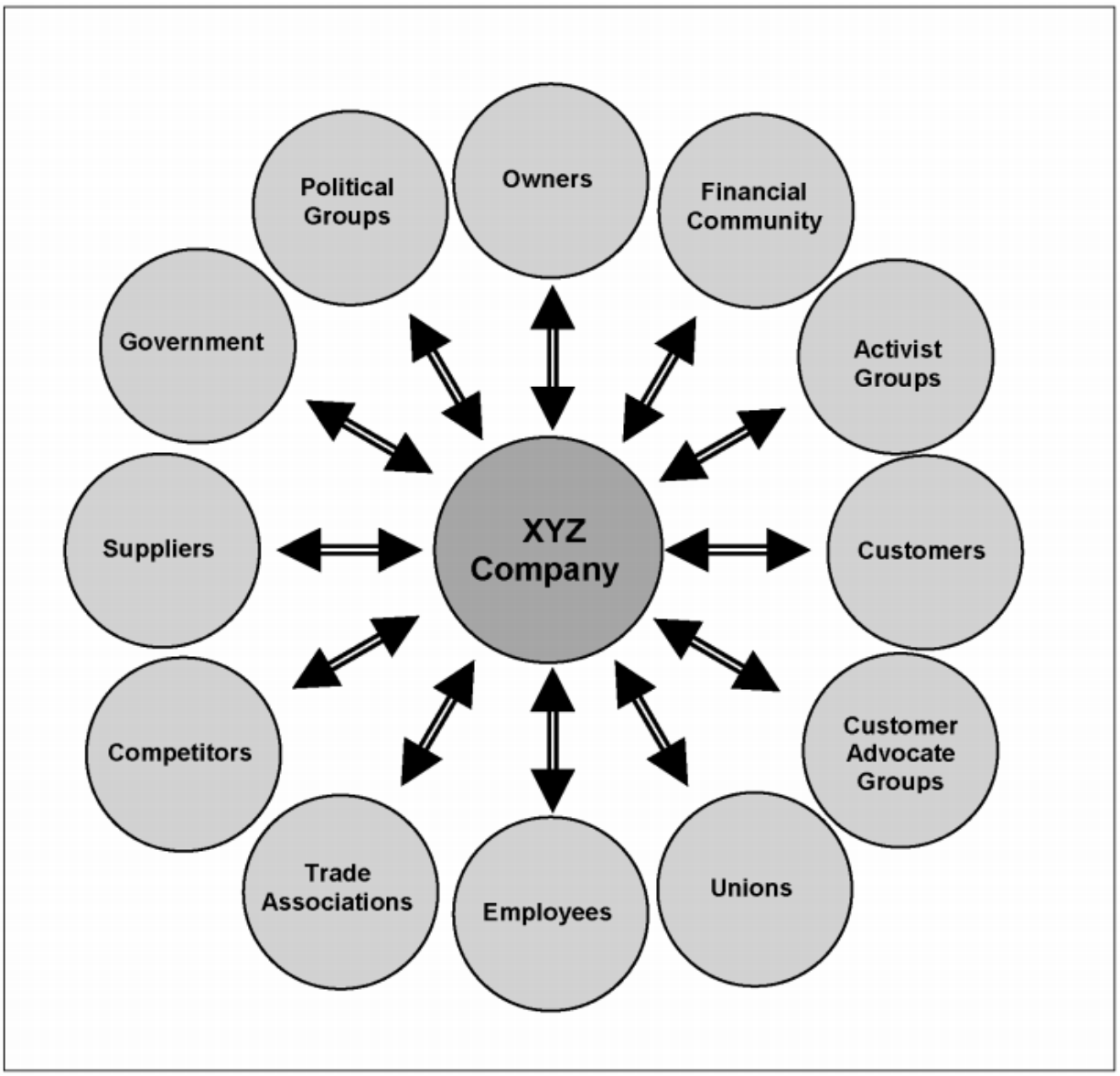


Figure 2.2. Stakeholder Map
Source: Freeman (1984)

2.5.2 Relationship Marketing Theory (RM)

This theory was introduced by Berry (1983) and Jackson (1985). Bejou (1997) asserted that if suppliers developed good associations with their clients under the principle of relationship marketing, the organizations would acquire and maintain a competitive edge. Thus, Debnath, Datta and Mukhopadhyay (2016) emphasizes the relationship marketing means to create, communicate, retain customers, and preserve the business association to achieve its marketing objectives. Therefore, Cano, Castro and Vicente-Ramos (2021) supported that for relationship marketing to be successful there is a need to be in close contact with the customer to know real expectations and preferences. Manishimwe, Raimi and Azubuike (2022) supported that a business that effectively implements a customer-centric strategy, value creation and innovativeness increases the likelihood of enduring growth. Therefore, customer-centric marketing allows for operational variations, superior consumer loyalty, and improved company productivity (Palacios-Marques, Guijarro & Carrilero, 2016).

Relationship marketing theory will attempt to fill the gap and explain the effect of customer centricity through the buyer-to-supplier relationships and explain the impact on firm performance, i.e., buyer-to-supplier engagements, trust, communication, and supplier success. However, little is known on the factors influencing business associations and firm performance in retail SMEs in Johannesburg. Hence, this study will attempt to fill the research gap by examining this gap.

Relationship marketing practices are formulated to provide engagements, communication, and long-term buyer-to-supplier trust. For example, Steinhoff & Palmatier (2021) indicated that the relationship marketing is the engine that drives customer relationships and can produce positive results for the company. Likewise, Saputra and Mahaputra (2022) favour the process that the buyer goes through before making a purchase. The seller wants to stay in contact to sustain a long- term mutually-satisfying relationship with clients in the long term. Hence, customer-centricity is the concept businesses need to adapt and focus on satisfying customers through products and services.

The benefits of building long-term relationships are that it is easy to recognize, preserve and create a system with different customers through customized collaboration with contacts over a long period (Sheth, Parvatiyar & Sinha, 2015). Therefore, relationship marketing is designed to develop strong connections between buyer and supplier to foster customer retention and customer loyalty (Malik, Ali & Ibraheem, 2017). Alafi (2018) argue that relationship marketing means of attracting, acquiring, maintaining and retaining the best customers for the company.

Djajanto, Afiatin, and Haris (2019) asserted that the rewards of a collaborative relationship between buyers and suppliers seek to form business associations within the organization that will improve customer value, affection, and customer loyalty. Therefore, relationship marketing serves to create satisfying long-term, profitable relations with key associates to preserve their business (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The buyer-to-supplier relationship is important because it helps the buyer and supplier build relationships based on trust, commitment, and willingness to share information that could gain a competitive advantage (Makhitha, 2019).

Figure 2.3 below shows the relationship marketing model. It illustrates some of the strategies that small businesses implement to develop successful business relationships.

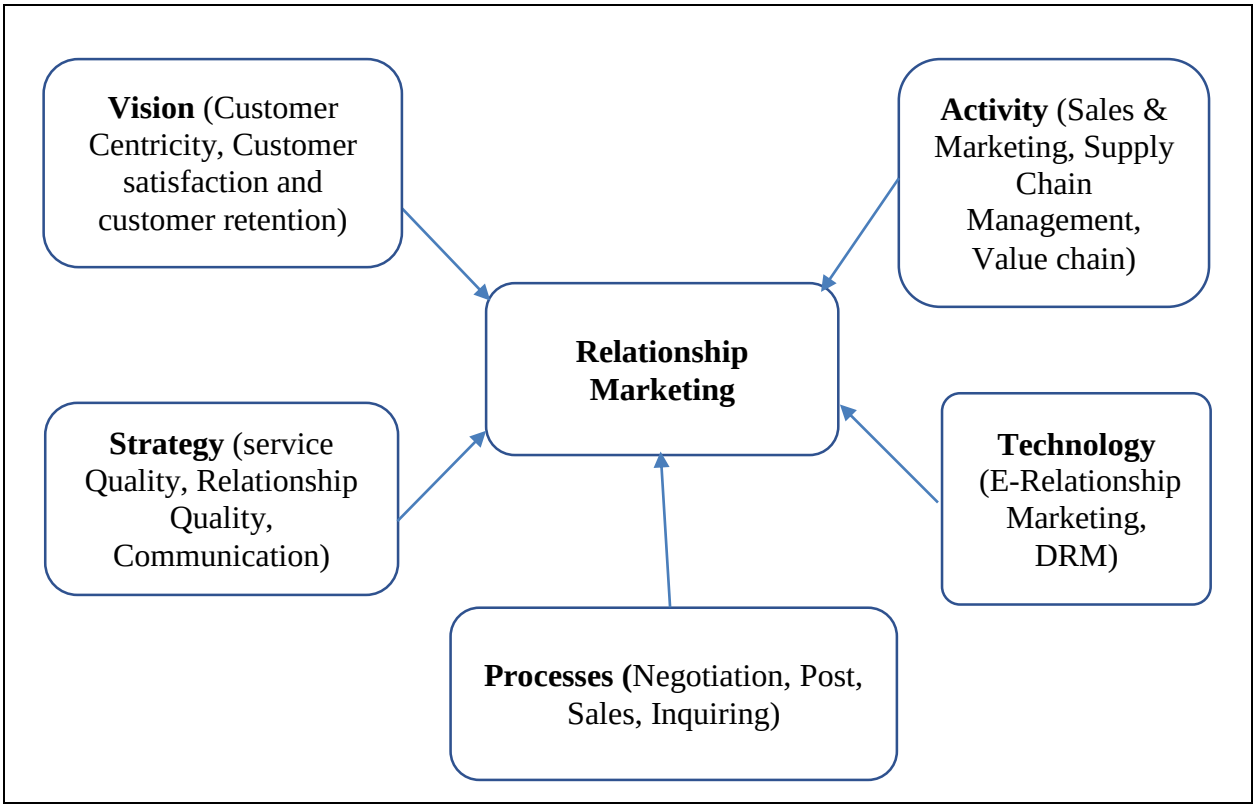


Figure 2.3 Relationship Marketing Model

Source: Yada & Singh (2014)

2.5.2.1 Vision (Customer Centricity, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Retention)

Every business should have a vision of being customer-centric. The business goals should be centred on customer-centric principles. These concepts fall under relationship marketing, including customer acquisition, retention, and loyalty. The main aim of the vision is to provide

a road map to the future of the business. Das and Mishra (2019) noted the need to ensure that the company's vision incorporates customer-centricity. In support of this view, Fader (2020) elucidated the importance of customer-centricity policies and the need to align such policies with corporate strategy as the most appropriate approach to maximising the firm's financial value. Expressly, Rashid (2012) agreed that businesses should ensure that employees are trained about customers and market trends and how to respond to such appropriately to be customer-centric. Companies that implement and align with customer-centrism gain more profit, maintain happy customers and have never-ending customer retention than those that do not.

2.5.*2.2* *Activity in relationship marketing*

All companies have activities that fall under the value chain process. A value chain is a set of activities and means that the business arranges to attain the desired outcomes of its shareholders. Therefore, small businesses must manage their value chain to create customer satisfaction, and they must have a system centred on the customer journey. Makkonen and Sundqvist-Andberg (2017) argued that the company must have the ability to create customer value during customer orientation to have long-term business success. Several authors have explained that companies should have value chain processes in place and demonstrate their contribution in building competitive capabilities in delivering value to customers (Prajogo, Oke & Olhager, 2016; Rezaei, Ortt & Trott, 2015). Porter (1985) defined a value chain as an organized way of investigating all the events a business and their coordination in observing the sources of competitive advantage.

2.5.2.3 Strategy (Service quality, relationship quality & communication)

The strategies or concepts in relationship marketing include service quality, communication, and relationship quality. Therefore, Tiroli and Lemos (2019) claimed an association between quality and business improvements Aka, Kehinde, and Ogunnaike (2016) identified that factors (such as commitment, trust, communication and service quality) in relationship marketing that impact customer satisfaction could lead to customer loyalty. Utami (2015) had previously noted that trust is the furthermost powerful element in achieving consumer loyalty. Hence, trust is vital to creating a good relationship between buyer and supplier. Qian, Seuring and Wagner (2020) argued that a good buyer-supplier relationship develops overtime to reach a win-win situation. To develop a solid and close relationship, suppliers must interact more with

customers and commit to discovering different search options and identifying opportunities to improve performance. Sikombe and Phiri (2019) affirmed that buyers and suppliers collaborate to share information and innovative ways to improve the supply chain operations. Hence, customer trust in relationships contributes to the growth of the business. Research findings show that customer trust, commitment, cooperation, and sales effectiveness are elements that influence business relationships (Isaeva, Gruenewald & Saunders, 2020). Therefore, companies must win customer trust to generate customer retention and loyalty.

2.5.2.4 Technology (E-relationship and CRM) in relationship marketing and Processes

Technology and processes are essential in relationship marketing. In essence, the main reason for implementing customer relationship management (CRM) is to maintain and retain clients. CRM comprises individuals, procedures, processes and systems to get to know a company's customers. In particular, e-relationship marketing is a very effective technique in customer retention in that it allows managers to re-evaluate how, when, and why they interact with their customers (Farhan, Abed & Abd, 2018). Similarly, Almohaimmeed (2019) stressed that CRM is a tool used to communication with customers to increase customer retention. In addition, Payne (2017) stated that when information technology is used consistently to collect customer feedback, it will provide customer feedback that can improve the relationship marketing programs. Finally, Gupta (2018) highlighted that the importance of CRM is that it helps businesses promote and improve relationships with customers.

2.5.3 Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

This section briefly contains arguments on the hypotheses development and the relationship between the variables. The conceptual model has four predictor variables: factors influencing the buyer-to-supplier relationship, supplier selection, buyer-supplier trust, buyer-to-supplier engagements, supplier success (mediator variable), and firm performance (outcome).

2.5.4 Conceptual Model

Figure 2.4 illustrates the conceptual model or framework of the study. By definition, a conceptual model represents the constructs and their relationships with one another (Thalheim, 2011). Therefore, Abdi (2010) stated that this estimate is attained by removing a set of orthogonal features called latent variables with the best predictive power from the predictors.

In figure 2.4 below are factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship, buyer-supplier trust, buyer-to-supplier engagement, supplier selection, and the mediator variable is supplier

success, and the outcome variable is firm performance.

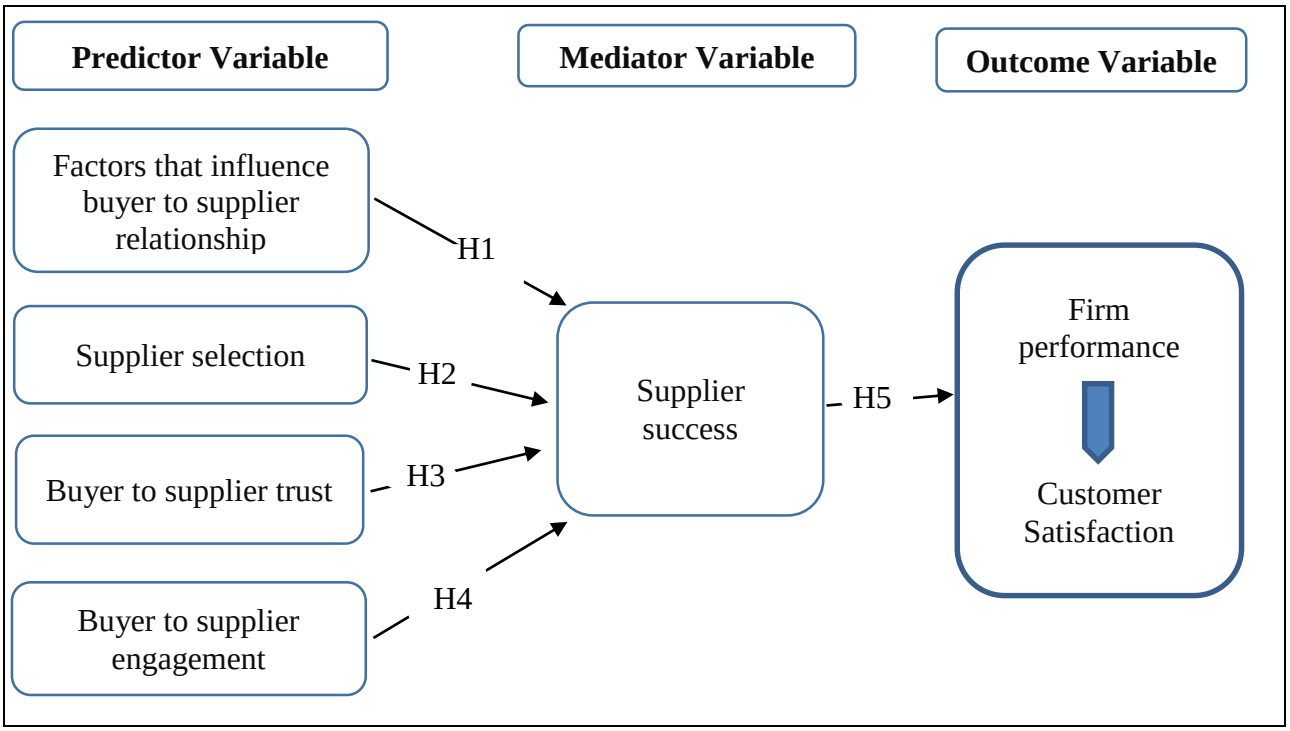


Figure 2.4. Conceptual model of the study

Source: Author's construct

2.5.5 Hypotheses Development

They are five hypotheses statements that were formulated, guided by literature on the various variables of the framework.

2.5.5.1 Factors influencing buyer-to-supplier relationships

Factors influencing buyer to supplier relationship are trust, commitment and loyalty. Mofokeng and Chinomona (2019) confirmed that trust and commitment play a critical role in the buyer to supplier relationships and business development. Additionally, Rostini et al. (2021) indicated that buyer and supplier trust and commitment are essential for the company to achieve good performance. Likewise, Tolmay and Antwerpen (2021) also stated that suppliers must implement activities that can enhance the buyer's commitment and contribution to firm performance and growth. Hence, factors such as buyer to supplier engagements and trust in retail SMEs can impact the way relationships are managed and affect firm performance (Pahurkar, 2020). Therefore, concluding from the statements as mentioned above, it can be hypothesized that:

H1: *Factors that influence the buyer to supplier relationship significantly positively impact supplier success.*

2.5.5.2 Supplier Selection

Orji and Wei (2015) discuss that a well-designed supplier selection model is essential for success in the value chain. In addition, supplier selection is identifying and locating a pool of suppliers that meet the organization's needs (Schramm & Cabral, 2020). Therefore, Nair, Jayaram, and Das (2015) stated that selecting the right supplier and monitoring their performance can increase production efficiency and add value. Hence, Taherdoost and Brard (2019) discussed that supplier selection refers to assessing and identifying risks before contracting with supplier to reduce the risk during the purchasing process. Therefore, buyers must have the best criteria to select suitable suppliers that can provide them with best services to reduce unnecessary operational costs in the supply chain process (Islam et al., 2018). Hence, De Felice et al. (2015) stated that the supplier's performance is critical for the business's success since the supplier selection model can help the business elevate cost and quality functions. Though selecting the right supplier is challenging it is the critical for sustainable supply chain management (Hendiani et al, 2020). Based on the findings, supplier selection process is complex due to other processes in procurement (Hendiani et al, 2020). The supply chain /procurement team can progressively develop a list of important goals and objectives the organisation would like to achieve. The list of goals will stand as a guide in the decision making process of supplier selection. Therefore, drawing from the clarifications mentioned above, it can be hypothesized that:

H2: *Supplier selection has a positive and significant impact on supplier success.*

2.5.5.3 Buyer-to-supplier trust

According to Shamsollahi (2020), buyer-to-supplier trust is essential for the relationship's growth, and trust will impact the long-term and stable relationship. Jermsittiparsert and Rungsrisawat (2019) discussed that buyer and supplier trust encourages the exchange of information during product development. Wang (2018) asserted that trust becomes vital in developing common values between buyer and supplier as it enables the willingness to integrate between firms and suppliers. In the same way, Han et al. (2022) stated that suitable suppliers communicate with openness and respect their partners' needs and aspirations.

The present literature is limited on this specific subject on buyer-to-supplier trust and supplier success. Hence, it can thus be hypothesized that:

H3: *Buyer to supplier trust has a significant positive impact on the supplier success.*

2.5.5.4 Buyer to supplier engagement

Researchers (Yepeng et al., 2022) argued that companies that adopt and practice the principle of buyer and supplier engagements reap the benefits of not only quality but value creation, innovativeness and improved processes. Accordingly, Saunders (2015) stated buyer-to-supplier engagement is essential at the beginning of product initiation or improvement since there is an exchange of data between the parties. Amoako-Gyampah et al. (2019) argued that collaboration between buyer and supplier is important for supply chain to meet demand and customer needs. Furthermore, the best buyer-to-supplier relationship creates the framework for collaboration and trust between firms. Sourcing comprises of building relationships with suppliers and negotiating for the best possible price (Wagner, Gross-Ruyken & Erhun, 2018). Awan, Sroufe and Kraslawski (2019) opined that buyer-supplier engagements appear to be attractive to businesses as engaged supplier perform very well in business operations. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that:

H4: *Buyer to supplier engagement has a positive and significant impact on the supplier success.*

2.5.5.5 Supplier Success

Mitrega et al. (2017) suggested that supplier relationships are the essential drivers of firm performance because they affect customer satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, all factors that influence buyer-to-supplier relationships impact supplier success. Furthermore, (Chai & Ngai, 2020) stated that the supplier selection process must be implemented to successfully select suitable suppliers through the process of screening before contracting with them. Supplier selection has received so much attention in the business world because of the benefits that contribute to supplier success. Thus, it can be hypothesized that:

H5: *Supplier success has a significant positive influence on the firm performance of retail SMEs.*

Below Table 2.2 illustrates the hypotheses for the study.

Tables 2.2 Summary of Hypothesis

Hyp. #	Hypothesis Statement	Hypothesis Relationship
H1	Factors that influence the buyer to supplier relationship significantly positively impact supplier success.	FIBSR ⟹ SSU(+)
H2	Supplier selection positively and significantly impact supplier success.	SSE ⟹ SSU (+)
H3	Buyer to supplier trust positively and significantly influence supplier success.	BST ⟹ SSU (+)
H4	Buyer to supplier engagement positively and significantly influence supplier success.	SSE ⟹ SSU (+)
H5	Supplier success positively and significantly impact firm performance of retail SMEs.	SSU ⟹ FP(+)

Key: FIBSR – Factors that influence the buyer to supplier relationship, BSE-Buyer to supplier engagement,BST-Buyer to supplier trust, SSE– Supplier selection, SSU-Supplier success.

2.6 The Research Gap

So much research has been done on buyer and supplier relationships in multinational companies. The studies have discussed the benefits of a successful buyer and supplier relationship and how that has benefited the organizational performance in financial and non-financial areas. However, little has been studied on the factors that lead to supplier success and firm performance in small businesses in the retail industry. There seems to be a lack of literature on the factors influencing the buyer-to-supplier relationship in the retail industry in Johannesburg. Butt (2019), agree that buyer and supplier partnerships that are strong and productive are essential for effective outsourcing. However, there remains a gap in the critical factors for a successful relationship between buyer and supplier. This research sought to fill this critical gap in the buyer-to-supplier relationship literature.

2.7 Chapter Summary

The research context has been discussed in this chapter. The chapter also covered the evaluation of the stakeholder theory and relationship marketing theory. It is significant to note that the empirical literature helped elucidate the theory used in the grounding of the study. Next was the discussion on the theoretical literature underlying the study's theoretical constructs, such as factors that influence buyer-to-supplier relationship, supplier selection, trust, buyer-to-supplier engagements, supplier success, and firm performance. The conceptual model for the study was

provided and identified the five predictor variables, one mediator variable, and one outcome variable for the buyer-to-supplier relationship and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg. Next, the chapter summarised the hypotheses centred on the conceptual model and discussed the research gap.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

A research method that was applied to conduct the study is clearly defined in this chapter. In addition, the chapter justifies why the methods and approaches applied were selected to address the research objectives and how data was collected, presented, and analysed. A discussion of the study's research methodology is in Section 3.2 and then in 3.3 is the study's research design. Section 3.4 and 3.5 clarify the quantitative research and sampling design, respectively. Section 3.6 then describes the procedure for the data collection technique, and section 3.7 discusses the questionnaire design and layout. Finally, section 3.8 is the measurement model.

3.2 Research methodology /paradigm

Research methodology is a specific procedure in research that researchers use to evaluate information about their research topic (Ngozwana, 2018). This study applied a quantitative research design coupled with a structured questionnaire. This was deemed suitable for finding the data concerning supplier selection, buyer-supplier engagements, buyer-to-supplier trust, and factors influencing the relationship. Furthermore, the method allowed us to examine the fundamental relationship with the variables utilized in the analysis.

3.3 Research Design

This is defined as a planned framework, strategy or blueprint for the research (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2013). It, therefore, specifies the research techniques, i.e. the methods and procedures for carrying out a particular study. According to Berri (2007), research designs can be categorised into experimental studies, exploratory, illustrative and casual research. This study was exploratory as it sought to investigate the buyer-to-supplier relationships and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg. In executing this design, the study was guided by Edgar and Manz (2017), who stated that exploratory studies are reasoned to understand data; they include data gathering and compilation, exploring, and analysing observations about known strategies and procedures.

3.3.1 Descriptive Research

A descriptive study is a procedure that describes different situations, while comparative studies try to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between study variables (Malhorta & Birks, 2007). It is the gathering of quantitative information among the participant groups. The research method that was applied to this analysis was quantitative. This method is employed when the hypothesis is used to assess the conformity or disconformity of that hypothesis (Newman, Benz & Ridenour, 1998).

3.3.2 Quantitative Research

The study utilized a quantitative research technique as it was deemed suitable for the investigation. Sukamolson (2007) stated that quantitative research measures social reality and employs questions to explore quantities to demonstrate research numerically. Firestone (1987) stated that apart from people's beliefs, quantitative research is grounded on a positivist belief, which says recognises “social facts with objective reality” (Newman et al., 1998 p. 45). In addition to that, Newman et al. (1998) remarked that quantitative research could be numerically evaluated to question the social aspect and measure the causal relationships between the constructs. Therefore, quantitative research is an approach that highlights the importance of calculating and analysing data. Furthermore, it is the method that could be used to test numerical data or convert the evaluated evidence into statistical data.

3.3.3 Sampling Design

A sample design is a framework that tells of the researcher's procedures to select items for the sample. The decision on a sample plan includes the targeted population, sampling frame, sampling size, and sample method to use. The selection procedure is observed through sampling size and population sample.

3.3.4 Population

The targeted population for the research consisted of retail SMEs in Johannesburg metropolitan area, whose actual number was difficult to estimate. The population for the study was thus indeterminable. The sample consisted of the SME owners, managers, sales and procurement personnel within the retail SMEs.

3.3.5 Sample Selection

The non-probability sampling incorporates the true and exact outcomes, such as it was supposed to provide the accurate results for the study under investigation (Beins, 2017). A convenient sampling technique was used in the study, given the challenges in establishing the population for the study.

3.3.6 Sample Size

The sample size used for the study was large enough to produce accurate outcomes for mean values and large enough to pinpoint outliers (Manly, 1992). Therefore, a random sample of 259 small business owners, managers, and sales representatives aged 18 and above was used to obtain the research study's information.

Table 3.1 outlines the work of previous scholars who have investigated retail SMEs and the size of their sample sizes.

Table 3.1. Sample Size determination using the historical evidence method

Author(s)	Title	Sample size
Maziriri and Chinomona (2016)	"Modelling the influence of relationship marketing, green marketing and innovative marketing on the business performance of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMES)".	231
Rungsithong and Meyer (2020)	"Trust and knowledge sharing in context: A study of international buyer-supplier relationships in Thailand".	256
Dubihlela (2013)	"Determinants of market orientation adoption among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa".	350
Olawale and Garwe (2015)	"Obstacles to the growth of new SMEs in South Africa: A principal component analysis approach".	200
Adam et al. (2020)	"The role of digital marketing platforms on supply chain management for customer satisfaction and loyalty in small and medium enterprises (SMEs)".	229
Mafini and Loury-Okoumba, (2016)	"Buyer-supplier commitment, trust and cooperation as influencing factors to business performance in the fast-moving consumer goods industry".	244

The previous research findings on the sample size approach were used to determine the sample size as shown above (Babin & Zikmund, 2016). The total number of respondents was 259, which was acceptable as it agreed with historical evidence that has examined the retail area.

3.4 Data Collection

Sharma (2017) stated that it is essential to consider several features when choosing the data collection method, such as data accuracy, anticipated budget, timelines for completion, and survey length. In the same tone, it is essential to consider specific issues like selecting the best method for collecting data, the type and quality of information required, and the style of questions to ask (Lethbridge et al., 2005). A pre-defined questionnaire was used for this study. The self-administered questionnaire was distributed and managed using Qualtrics, an online platform for data collection.

3.4.1 The Research Instrument

The measurement instrument was formulated by extracting from previous research. Relative to the research constructs being examined, the prevailing was modified from previous researchers for this study. All the constructs in this proposal were affixed to a *1 to 5* item scale, *where* 1 represented *strongly disagree* and 5 represented *strongly agree* on the item scale.

The item scales were adapted from past surveys and were modified to fit the setting of this study.

- Factors that influence the buyer to supplier relationship were evaluated using a 12-item scale adapted from Zunk (2016).
- Buyer to supplier trust support was evaluated on a 3-item scale modified from Gualandris and Kalchschmidt (2016).
- Supplier selection was evaluated on a 14-item scale modified from Kannan and Tan (2006).
- Buyer to supplier engagement was evaluated using a 7-item scale modified from Kannan and Tan (2007).
- Supplier success was evaluated using a 4-item scale modified from Kannan and Tan (2006).
- Firm performance was evaluated using a 5-item scale modified from Kannan and Tan (2006).

3.4.2 Data analysis and interpretation

The data analysis processes and measures utilized inthe study are discussed in this section. Research information was collected and downloaded into the Excel worksheets for clean-up and as an easy way to input data into the analysing system for further investigation. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 26 (SPSS 26) software package was used to assess the descriptive statistics of the retail SMEs sales representatives, owners and managers. The information was gathered and analysed by the researcher. The data was organized and recorded on the worksheets and was analysed. The SPSS 26 and the AMOS version 26 packages were utilized to infer the data obtained to assess and evaluate the relationships between hypothesized parameters.

3.5 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire comprised Sections A to G. Section A focused on demographic data. Section B comprised questions on factors influencing the buyer-to-supplier relationship (FIBSR). The measurement instruments ranged from (FIBSR1 to FIBSR12) adapted from (Zunk, 2016). Section C comprised questions on buyer-to-supplier trust (BST). The measurement instruments ranged from BST1 to BST3 and were adapted from (Gualandris & Kalchschmidt, 2016). Section D focused on supplier selection (SSE), and the measurement instruments ranged from SSE1 to SSE14 and were adapted from (Kannan & Tan, 2006). Section E focused on buyer-to-supplier engagement (BSE), and the measurement instrument ranged from BSE1 to BSE7 adapted from (Kannan & Tan, 2007). Section F, comprised of supplier success (SSU), the measurement instruments ranged from SSU1 to SSU4 and were adapted from (Kannan & Tan, 2006). Finally, section G was Firm performance (FP) and assessed on a 5-item scale modified from Kannan and Tan (2006); the measurement instruments ranged from FP1 to FP5.

3.5.1 Measurement Scales

The measurement scale has a 5-point Likert scale, and the anchors for the scale were:
1= Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree

3.5.1.1 Predictor Variables

The study used the following predictor variables; factors that influence buyer-to-supplier relationship, buyer-to-supplier trust, supplier selection, and buyer-to-supplier engagement.

(a) Factors that Influence Buyer to Supplier Relationship

A 5-point Likert scale and the dimensions were adapted to suit the context of the study. Respondents were required to rate their level of agreement on a scale as mentioned above.

The following items were used to measure factors that influence the buyer to supplier relationship, as shown in Table 3.2

Table 3.2 Factors that influence the buyer to supplier Relationship

FIBSR1	*The consistency in contacting the supplier.*
FIBSR2	*The high incentives to generate momentum.*
FIBSR3	*The high degree of performance and ability to solve problems with suppliers.*
FIBSR4	*The technical and operational support needs.*
FIBSR5	*The flexibility and freedom in relationships that the supplier provides.*
FIBSR6	*Supplier protection is provided for any erroneous actions.*
FIBSR7	*The high incentives to generate momentum.*
FIBSR8	*The respect and social engagements with the traders provide a good relationship, regardless of goods purchased.*
FIBSR9	*High brand status leads to suppliers feeling superior.*
FIBSR10	*Feeling of gratefulness due to supplier's providing support in economically hard times.*
FIBSR11	*Buyer to supplier collaborations on common organizational goals.*
FIBSR12	*Supplier's willingness to adjust to business values of the customer.*

(b) Buyer to Supplier Trust

The buyer to supplier trust utilized a 5-point Likert scale, and the study's respondents were requested to rate indicate the level of agreement on the given scale. Below items were used to assess supplier selection, as shown in Table 3.3

Table 3.3. Buyer to Supplier Trust

BST1	*Our Vendors take into consideration how their actions anddecisions will affect us.*
BST2	*Our suppliers consider our future goals and objectives.*
BST3	*Our suppliers take into consideration our best interest.*

(c) Supplier Selection

The dimensions were adapted in line with the study, and a 5-point Likert scale was used. Respondents were required to choose the answer they agreed with. Below are items that were used to assess supplier selection, as shown in Table 3.4

Table 3.4. Supplier Selection

SSE1	*The size of the company*
SSE2	*Company ethical standards*
SSE3	*Company's testing capability*
SSE4	*Scope of resources for the company*
SSE5	*Supplier's technical expertise*
SSE6	*Supplier's commitment to quality*
SSE7	*Firm's capability to deliver on time*
SSE8	*Cost goods, resources and supplies*
SSE9	*Quality of goods and services*
SSE10	*Closeness of location*
SSE11	*Exchange of data with the vendor*
SSE12	*The size of the contract with the selected vendor*
SSE13	*Suppliers' dedication to process improvementin products or services*
SSE14	*Suppliers' willingness to attend to unpredicted requests or calls.*

(d) Buyer to Supplier Engagement

Buyer to supplier engagement sections used a 5-point Likert scale, and the items were modified to align with the context of the study. The study's respondents had to choose the answer they agreed with on the above scale. The following items were used to measure buyer to supplier engagement

Table 3.5 Buyer to Supplier Engagement

BSE1	*Engaging in sourcing decisions of your suppliers*
BSE2	*Using general data exchanged suppliers and customers*
BSE3	*Using accurate data exchange with customers*
BSE4	*Refining the engagement of events with suppliers*
BSE5	*Informing suppliers about the future goals*
BSE6	*Building high levels of trust among your firm's supplychain members*
BSE7	*Integrating friendly communication tools or informationsystems with your suppliers and customers*

3.5.1.2 Mediator Variable

The mediator variable that was used in the study was supplier success.

(e) Supplier Success

The supplier Success section used a 5-point Likert scale, and the items were revised to be in line with the context of the study. Respondents were required to choose the answer they agreed with on the above scale. The following items were used to assess supplier success.

Table 3.6 Supplier Success

SSU1	*Improving and increasing product quality*
SSU2	*Reducing the product cost*
SSU3	*Speeding up the new product development time*
SSU4	*Constantly improving the buyer-suppliercommunication*

3.5.1.3 Outcome Variable

The outcome variable that was used in the study was firm performance.

(f) Firm Performance

A 5-point Likert scale and the dimensions were adapted to suit the context of the study. Respondents were required to rate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale were 1 – 'Strongly Disagree,' 2 – 'Disagree,' 3 – 'Neutral, 4 – 'Agree,' and 5 – 'Strongly Agree.' The following items were used to measure factors that influence the buyer to supplier relationship

Table 3.7 Firm Performance

FP1	*Overall high-level customer satisfaction*
FP2	*High-quality standards of product or service*
FP3	*Employee empowerment in their respective roles in theorganization*
FP4	*Good customer service levels*
FP5	*Offers the best price in the market*

3.5.2 Pre-testing (Piloting) the Instrument

To check the adequacy of the research, an experimental study was distributed online to 10 participants. The participants were required to assess the questionnaire and state any problems they thought existed. After running the pilot study, no modifications were made to the survey.

3.5.3 Descriptive Statistics

George and Mallery (2016) explained that descriptive statistics are designed to give you information about the distributions of your variables. Kaur, Stoltzfus and Yellapu (2018) confirm that descriptive statistics, applied in this study, help describe or review the relationship between variables in a population sample. For example, a brief account of the sample of the demographic profile had variables such as the level of education, size of the firm, gender, age, position in the organization, and industry type.

3.6 Measurement Model

The measurement model is presented with a summary of the items used for assessing; Correlation matrix, Composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted, Discriminant validity and Cronbach alpha.

3.6.1 Reliability - Cronbach Alpha Coefficient

Chinomona (2011) states that higher reliability of the measurement scale signifies the level of coefficients, and 0.6 is recommended. Therefore, Sharma (2016) mentioned that to indicate the level of internal reliability of a scale, Lee Cronbach developed the Cronbach's alpha. Hence, Cronbach alpha is represented as a value between 0 and 1 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). In the study, the correlation coefficients were used to assess the internal reliability of each construct. Therefore, to check if the scales were reliable or not and to check if reliability confirmation had a number more than 0.7, the assessments were conducted (Kim, Park & Choi, 2017). The outcomes reported in this study indicate that the coefficients ranged between 0.764 and 0.911, as shown in Table 4.8 (Chapter 4).

3.6.2 Composite Reliability

Composite Reliability was computed using the method below:

$$(CR): CR\eta = (\Sigma\lambda yi)\ 2/\ [(\Sigma\lambda yi)\ 2+\ (\Sigma\varepsilon i)]$$

CR values were as follows: Buyer-Supplier Engagement (BSE) 0.860, Supplier Selection (SSE) 0.910, Buyer-Supplier Trust (BST) 0.800, SSU 0.740, Firm Performance (FP) 0.770, and Factors Influencing Buyer-Supplier Relationship (FIBSR) 0.9. The values are between 0.74 and 0.91. Hence, 0.7 and above is the acceptable threshold of Composite Reliability (Zalli, Nordin & Hashim, 2020).

3.6.3 Average Value Extracted (AVE)

The standardized factor loading values in the CFA results were assessed in determining the AVE. The below formula was utilized to compute the AVE;

$$(AVE): V\eta = \Sigma\lambda yi2/\ (\Sigma\lambda yi2+\Sigma\varepsilon i)$$

The researcher used the formula provided to find AVE. The items for each variable were

square-rooted, and the values were added to get the total sum. The sum was then divided by the number of items for each variable. Figure 4.8 shows that AVE values were above 0.4 and are listed as follows; Buyer-Supplier Engagement (BSE) 0.480, Supplier Selection (SSE) 0.420, Buyer-Supplier Trust (BST) 0.500, Supplier Success (SSU) 0.590, Firm Performance (FP) 0.460, and Factors Influencing Buyer to Supplier Relationship (FIBSR) 0.420. The AVE values ranged between 0.42 and 0.59. AVE for supplier success (SSU) was 0.59, which was above 0.5, therefore, showing a good representation of the latent construct (Dubihlela & Dhurup, 2015).

3.6.4 Discriminant Validity (DV)

DV is the degree to which the construct varies from one another empirically (Cant et al., 2013). In line with that, Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt (2015) state that the point at which the constructs differ from one another empirically is called Discriminant validity. Accordingly, Black and Babin (2019, p. 121) stated that DV is "the degree to which a construct is genuinely separate from another construct in terms of how much it correlates with the construct and how distinctly measured variables represent only this single construct". The presence of discriminant validity is assessed using an inter-construct correlation matrix. It also measures the degree of differences between the overlapping construct. The convergent validity was checked in Table 4.14 if the item loadings were above 0.5. The item loadings were between 0.55 and 0.84, suggesting high convergent validity (Shau, 2017). In the same tone, Ab Hamid et al. (2017) stated that a few authors suggest a threshold of 0.85 while others proposed a value of 0.90. To confirm DV, the AVE for each construct "must be higher than the squared correlations between the constructs and all other constructs in the research model" (Ab Hamid et al., 2017 p. 12). Therefore, to get high DV, values of not more than 0.8 are required (O'Rourke & Hatcher, 2013).

3.6.5 Convergent Validity (CV)

Dmitrienko (2007) discussed that CV is the extent to which a strong relationship between specific constructs shares a high proportion of variance in common. Hence, loadings that are above 0.5 indicates CV (Alzgool et al., 2021). Cheung and Wang (2017) stated that the Fornell-Larcker standard for convergent validity requires the AVE to be "higher than 0.5". Similarly, Darmo et al. (2021) indicated that the criteria for CV require the AVE to be "greater than 0.5", standardized factor loading of all items not "less than 0.7".

3.6.6 AVE and Shared Value (SV)

In order to achieve the acceptable weights, the value of AVE should be above or equal to 0.5 (Ahmad, Zulkurnain & Khairushalimi, 2016).

3.6.7 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA is the primary statistical analysis technique that allows the researcher to investigate the researcher's hypotheses about what constructs of the current test is measuring and provides an observed result (Schubert et al., 2017). Therefore, to ensure validity and obtain the standard regression weights, each scale was analysed using CFA. The outcomes in Table 4:10 indicate if the observed variables are acceptable or are from the same distribution. The results indicate that they are all above or equal to .9 for the IFI=.913, TLI=.901, CFI=.912 and RMSEA=0.05.

3.6.8 Structural Equation Modelling and Path Modelling

Vinodh and Joy (2012) define structure equational modelling as the arithmetical method used to build the dimension and operational model. It includes regression analysis, factor analysis, simultaneous equation modelling and multivariate regression analysis (Gebauer, 2010). Therefore, Structural equation modelling can assess the dormant core constructs recognized by factor analysis and assessing the hypothesized relationships between the variables (Astrachan, Patel & Wanzenried, 2014). Hence, SEM was useful in assessing the hypothesized relationships of the model researched. SEM is an all-inclusive and flexible investigation technique that requires an accurate model description to be tested. Figure 4.8 is the path diagram for the structural model; the round sphere or oval characters symbolize the latent variables, whereas rectangles symbolize items to be measured (von Oertzen, Brandmaier & Tsang, 2015). The model fit results represent the relationships that indicated that they are equal to or greater than 0.9, which shows that they are accepted (Black & Babin, 2019). For RMSEA of less than 0.08 and Chi-square to be accepted, it should be listed as chi-square no more than 3. The model fit result indicated the following: (CMIN/DF) =1.165, IFI=0.913, TLI=0.901, CFI=0.912 and RMSEA=0.05.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethics refer to respect, anonymity, privacy, or simply what is wrong and right (Barrow, Brannan & Khandhar, 2021). The research process involved the human element; therefore, measures were placed to ensure that participants' information was secured and the reputation

of the University of Witwatersrand. The respondents provided consent before responding to the questionnaire and were not forced to participate in the study or offered incentives. The respondents were assured of confidentiality, and that communication concerning the research was done with honesty and transparency. All information provided by the participants was to be used only for the research study.

3.8 Chapter Summary

The research method and design for the study were discussed in this chapter. The research was a quantitative approach, and the analysis is discussed thereof. The chapter also discussed population and sampling design, the sample's selection, and scope. Next was on how survey information was gathered and the method used with a focus on ethical considerations, questionnaire design, and the questionnaire layout. Lastly, the section presented data capturing and editing and, finally, external and internal validity and reliability limitations. The following chapter presents and discusses the study results.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter demonstrates the findings and presentation of the study's empirical results. It provides the presentation and discussion of the statistical analysis and results acquired after data collection. First, the results are discussed based on how the factors influencing the buyer to supplier relationships, such as buyer to supplier engagement, supplier selection and buyer-supplier trust, would influence the retail SMEs' supplier success and firm performance. Next, a summary of descriptive statistics, the validity of the measurement scales and an investigation of the consistency is made. Lastly, confirmatory factor analysis and structural model assessment summary is conducted and presented.

4.2 Main Survey Results

After checking for missing values and outliers, the actual number of completed questionnaires added up to 259 out of 300 participants. Therefore, this provided an 86.3 percent response rate. Out of 300, 41 surveys were not used because they were incomplete, such that a few questions did not show the answers on the survey. Participants would normally return a questionnaire when they noticed that the survey was essential and warrants their co-operation.

4.3 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Classification of information refers to the respondents' demographic information, which specifies the class of the individuals who participate in the study (Malhotra, 2010). The data collected is shown through tables. The questionnaire's section A presents the demographic details of the total sample. Demographic details include the gender, age, level of education, position in the organization, size of the firm, and industry type of the participants'. All of these elements are discussed in the next sections.

4.3.1 Demographic profile summary

Table 4.1 summarises the demographic profile results, frequencies, and percentages achieved to support the outcomes discussed further in the subsequent sections.

Table 4.1: Respondent demographics

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Male	139	53.7
Female	93	35.9
Prefer not to say	27	10.4
Total	**259**	**100.0**
Age	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
18-25	30	11.6
26-33	50	19.3
34-41	75	29.0
42-49	67	25.9
50+	37	14.3
Total	**259**	**100.0**
Level of education	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Matric	70	27.0
Diploma	70	27.0
Degree	57	22.0
Post Graduate Diploma	44	17.0
Masters	18	6.9
Total	**259**	**100.0**
Position in organization	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Top Management	33	12.7
Middle Management	74	28.6
Owner	88	34.0
Sales manager	64	24.7
Total	**259**	**100.0**
Size of the firm	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Less than 10 employees	36	13.9
11-20 employees	47	18.1
21-31 employees	66	25.5
More than 31 employees	110	42.5
Total	**259**	**100.0**
Industry type	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Food industry	52	20.1
Chemical	9	3.5
Auto and Electronics	48	18.5
Fiber, leather & Clothing	143	55.2
Construction	7	2.7
Total	**259**	**100.0**

Table 4.1 presents the information on the respondent's demographics that were surveyed in this study. The outcomes shown suggest that they support all the variables utilized in the study.

The table below shows the summary of all the participating respondents; Male -139, Female-93, Prefer not to say -27 giving the sum of 259 and the percentage of 100.

The ensuing section addresses the 6 parts of the survey included in the demographic section. These parts were; gender, age, level of education, position and size of the firm, and industry type and the achieved results are discussed.

4.3.1.1 Respondents Gender

Table 4.2 below shows the information on the gender of the respondents. Most of the study's respondents were males, with 53.7 percent (n=139), followed byfemales, with 35.9 percent (n=93). The remainder of the respondents, i.e. 10.4 percent (n=27), preferred not to say.

Table 4.2: Respondents' Gender

Gender					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	Male	139	53.7	53.7	53.7
	Female	93	35.9	35.9	89.6
	Prefer not to say	27	10.4	10.4	100.0
	Total	259	100.0	100.0	

4.3.1.2 Age of the respondents

Most of the participants specified that they were aged between 34 and 41, and the percentage of those ages 34-41 was 29 percent (n=75). Next was 25.9 percent (n=67) of those participants who showed that they were aged between 42 and 49. The next group of the participants were 19.3 percent (n=50), who indicated that they were aged 26-33. The rest of the respondents were 14.3 percent (n=37) who clicked on the age above 50. Lastly, the remaining respondents were 11.6 percent (n=30), showing that they were aged 18-25.
The distribution of age of the sample is shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Age of the respondents

Age					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	18-25	30	11.6	11.6	11.6
	26-33	50	19.3	19.3	30.9
	34-41	75	29.0	29.0	59.8
	42-49	67	25.9	25.9	85.7
	50+	37	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	259	100.0	100.0	

4.3.1.3 Level of education

The outcome on the educational levels showed the following results, 70 percent (n=27) of the respondents indicated that they had Diplomas and matric certificates, respectively. This was 22 percent (n=57) of those who responded revealed that they have degrees. In addition, 17 percent (n=44) indicated that they are holders of post-graduate diplomas. The remainder of the sample, 7.0 percent (n=18), stated that they had masters' degrees.

Table 4.4: Level of education

Level of education					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	Matric	70	27.0	27.0	27.0
	Diploma	70	27.0	27.0	54.1
	Degree	57	22.0	22.0	76.1
	Post Graduate Diploma	44	17.0	17.0	93.1
	Masters	18	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	259	100.0	100.0	

4.3.1.4 Position in the organization

The outcome on the position in the organization of the respondents. Most of the respondents - 34 percent (n=88), were specified as business owners. Followed by 28.6 percent (n=74) who responded that they were in the middle management. Then 24.7 percent (n=64) indicated as sales managers. The remainder of the respondents, 12.7 percent (n=33), revealed thatthey are in top management. The positions of the respondents are graphically depicted in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Position in the organization

Position in your Organization					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Top Management	33	12.7	12.7	12.7
	Middle Management	74	28.6	28.6	41.3
	Owner	88	34.0	34.0	75.3
	Sales Manager	64	24.7	24.7	100.0
	Total	259	100.0	100.0	

4.3.1.5 Size of the firm

The respondents had an opportunity to reveal the firm's size by providing the number of employees in an organization (see Table 4.6). The majority of the respondents, 42.5 percent (n=110), indicated more than 31 employees in their firm. 25.5 percent (n=66) revealed that they have 21-31 employees in their firm. Furthermore, 18.1 percent (n=47) revealed that they have 11-20 employees in their organization. However, the remainder of the respondents, 13.9 percent (n=36), revealed that they have less than 10 employees in their organization.

Table 4.6: Size of the firm

Size of your Firm					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 10 employees	36	13.9	13.9	13.9
	11-20 employees	47	18.1	18.1	32.0
	21-21 employees	66	25.5	25.5	57.5
	More than 31 employees	110	42.5	42.5	100.0
	Total	259	100.0	100.0	

4.3.1.6 Industry type

The respondents had an opportunity to reveal the industry type their business operates (see Table 4.7). The majority of the respondents, 55.2 percent (n=143), indicated that they were in the fibre, leather and clothing industry. This was then followed by 18.5 percent (n=48), indicating that they were in the auto and electronics industry. The people who showed that they were in the food industry were 20.1 percent (n=52). Furthermore, 3.5 percent (n=9) of the respondents were in the chemical industry. 2.7 percent (n=7) of the respondents indicated that they were in the construction industry.

Table 4.7: Industry type

Industry Type					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	Food Industry	52	20.1	20.1	20.1
	Chemical	9	3.5	3.5	23.6
	Auto and Electronics	48	18.5	18.5	42.1
	Fibre, leather & Clothing	143	55.2	55.2	97.3
	Construction	7	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total	259	100	100	

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

Tables 4.8 to 4.13 show the means and standard deviations (SD) data. The tables show that the mean value for all the items is between 3 and 4, meaning most participants had a neutral 3 or agreed 4 on the Likert scale with the statements given. SD values were calculated systematically to determine the variance of responses on each variable. As discussed, Chuchu and Madinga (2019) indicated that when there is a small estimated SD between the mean and the SD, the respondents' answers were consistent. Similarly, Maziriri (2020) stated that the distribution score is placed slightly next to the mean when the standard deviation is low between the mean and SD. On the other hand, Kapferer and Laurent (2016) stated that when there is a significant standard deviation, the responses will differ, forcing the response distribution values to decrease and gradually move from the mean distribution. Moreover, the SD “should be less than 1, but it is recommended to at least include a value of less than 2 to ensure that there is no issue of outliers” (Drost, 2011, p. 108).

Table 4.8: Descriptive statistical analysis (Factors influencing buyer to supplier relationships of retail SMEs in Johannesburg)

Code	Factors	Item Statistics				
Factors influencing buyer to supplier relationships		**Mean**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Std. Dev.**	**Valid N**
FIBSR1	*The consistency in contacting the supplier.*	3.94	1	5	1.089	259
FIBSR2	*The high incentives to generate momentum.*	3.98	1	5	.982	259
FIBSR3	*The high degree of performance and ability to solve problems with suppliers.*	3.94	1	5	.958	259
FIBSR4	*The technical and operational support needs.*	3.97	1	5	1.039	259
FIBSR5	*The flexibility and freedom in relationships that the supplier provides.*	3.88	1	5	1.090	259
FIBSR6	*Supplier protection is provided for any erroneous actions.*	3.88	1	5	1.039	259
FIBSR7	*The high incentives to generate momentum.*	4.04	1	5	.964	259
FIBSR8	*The respect and social engagements with the traders, provides a good relationship, regardless of goods purchased*	3.99	1	5	.972	259
FIBSR9	*High brand status leads to supplier feeling superior*	3.97	1	5	1.047	259
FIBSR10	*Feeling of gratefulness due to supplier's providing support in economically hard times*	3.86	1	5	1.101	259
FIBSR11	*Buyer to supplier collaborations on common organizational goals*	4.00	1	5	.978	259
FIBSR12	*Buyer to supplier collaborations on common organizational goals*	4.10	1	5	.963	259

Factors influencing buyer-to-supplier relationships (FIBSR), which was contained in Section B of the survey, showed it had the largest mean score of 4.10 (FIBSR12) and the smallest mean score of 3.86 (FIBSR10), showing a range of 0.24. Precisely, the smallest mean number of 3.86 (Item FIBSR10) showed that the respondents were neutral and partly agreed that they had a feeling of gratefulness due to suppliers' providing support in economically hard times. Alaya, Gerstlberger and Frank (2018) supported that in an excellent business relationship, suppliers are willing to support companies during economically hard times by offering alternatives. The outcomes from Part D on the survey emphasized the point that the largest mean number was 4.10 (FIBSR12). Most respondents agreed that industrial buyers' motivation

to collaborate with innovative suppliers is important in terms of suppliers' willingness to fit the corporate culture of the customer. Likewise, Budur and Poturak (2021) supported that collaboration with innovative suppliers is essential since the need of customers are constantly changing, and suppliers should be able to adapt to changing demands. Table 4.8 revealed that the factors influencing the scale of the buyer-to-supplier relationship had the highest SD values reported at 1.101 (Item FIBSR10) and the smallest SD value at 0.958 (Item FIBSR3). The SD values are all less than 2, and all factors were "clustered around the mean".

Table 4.9 reveals that the buyer-to-supplier trust scale had the highest SD value reported at 1.096 (Item BST2), and the lowest SD value was 1.043 (Item BST3). With SD values of below 2, these results suggested that there were no outliers.

Table 4.9: Descriptive statistical analysis (Buyer to supplier trust)

Code	**Factors**	**Item Statistics**				
Buyer to Supplier Trust		**Mean**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Std. Deviation**	**Valid N**
BSTS1	*Our suppliers are concerned about our well-being when making decisions*	3.66	1	5	1.335	259
BSTS2	*Our suppliers take into consideration how their actions and decisions will affect us.*	3.74	1	5	1.096	259
BSTS3	*Our suppliers consider our future goals and objectives*	3.78	1	5	1.043	259
BSTS4	*Our suppliers take into consideration our best interest*	3.90	1	5	1.152	259

"Buyer-to-supplier trust", from Section C of the survey instrument, showed the highest mean of 3.90 (BST4), while the smallest mean was 3.66 (BST1); therefore, having a value of 0,24. In Table 4.9, results show the lowest mean of 3.66 (Item BST1), indicating that the respondents were neutral and partly agreed that their suppliers are concerned about their well-being when making decisions. The results imply that most of the respondents were neutral or partly agreed that their suppliers considered their best interests.

Table 4.10 shows the descriptive statistical analysis for Supplier selection, and the interpretation follows.

Table 4.10: Descriptive statistical analysis (Supplier selection)

Code	Factors	Item Statistics				
Supplier Selection		**Mean**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Std. Deviation**	**Valid N**
SSE1	*The size of the company*	3.66	1	5	1.433	259
SSE2	*Company ethical standards*	3.97	1	5	0.958	259
SSE3	*Company's testing capability*	3.87	1	5	1.018	259
SSE4	*Scope of resources for the company*	3.85	1	5	1.046	259
SSE5	*Supplier's technical expertise*	3.95	1	5	0.947	259
SSE6	*Supplier's commitment to quality*	4.05	1	5	0.953	259
SSE7	*Firm's capability to deliver in a timely manner*	3.92	1	5	1.038	259
SSE8	*Cost goods, resources and supplies*	4.00	1	5	1.058	259
SSE9	*Quality of goods and services*	3.94	1	5	0.932	259
SSE10	*Closeness of location*	3.86	1	5	1.130	259
SSE11	*Exchange of data with the vendor*	3.93	1	5	1.074	259
SSE12	*The size of the contract with the selected vendor*	3.89	1	5	1.071	259
SSE13	*Suppliers' dedication to process improvement in products or services*	4.03	1	5	1.052	259
SSE14	*Suppliers' willingness to attend to unpredicted requests or calls.*	4.00	1	5	1.040	259

Supplier selection, contained in Section D of the survey, indicated the largest mean score (4.05 for SSE6) and the smallest mean score of 3.66 (SSE1), showing a value of 0.39. Precisely, Table 4.10 shows 3.66 (Item SSE1) lowest mean, indicating that the company size is important when selecting suppliers. The outcomes from Section C of the survey also indicated the largest mean score of 4.05 (Item SSE6). More responses agreed that commitment to quality is essential when selecting suppliers. Additionally, Stojic et al. (2021) stated that supplier quality is an essential factor for securing competitive advantage. Table 4.10 showed that the supplier selection scale had the largest SD value stated at 1.433 (Item SSE1), and the smallest SD value was 0.932 (Item SSE9).

Table 4.11 illustrates the buyer-to-supplier engagement descriptive statistical analysis.

Table 4.11: Descriptive statistical analysis (Buyer to supplier engagement)

Code	Factors	Item Statistics				
Buyer to Supplier Engagement		**Mean**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Std. Deviation**	**Valid N**
BSE1	*Engaging in sourcing decisions of your suppliers*	4.18	1	5	1.030	259
BSE2	*Using general data exchanged suppliers and customers*	4.02	1	5	0.960	259
BSE3	*Using accurate data exchange with customers*	4.01	1	5	0.934	259
BSE4	*Refining the engagement of events with suppliers*	3.87	1	5	1.037	259
BSE5	*Informing suppliers about the future goals*	3.95	1	5	1.006	259
BSE6	*Building high levels of trust among your firm's supply chain members*	4.08	1	5	0.886	259
BSE7	*Integrating friendly communication tools or information systems with your suppliers and customers*	4.16	1	5	0.864	259

Buyer to supplier engagement, which consisted of Section E of the survey, indicated the highest mean score (4.18 for BSE1) while the smallest mean score was 3.87 (Item BSE4), showing the value of 0.31. Precisely, the lowest mean, 3.87 (Item BSE4), indicated that the business improves the integration of activities across its supply chain, and outcomes from Part B of the survey indicated the highest mean score was 4.18 (BSE1). Many of the respondents agreed to participate in the sourcing decisions of their suppliers. Considering the results, it is reasonable to conclude that sourcing comprises of building relationships with suppliers and negotiating for the best possible price (Wagner, Gross-Ruyken & Erhun, 2018). Table 4.11 reveals that the buyer-to-supplier engagement scale had the highest SD value of 1.037 (Item BSE4) and the lowest SD value of 0.864 (Item BSE7). With all SDs less than 2 and clustered mean values, the results suggested the absence of outlier factors.

Table 4.12 illustrates the supplier success descriptive statistical analysis.

Table 4.12: Descriptive statistical analysis (Supplier Success)

Code	Factors	Item Statistics				
Supplier Success		**Mean**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Std. Deviation**	**Valid N**
SSU1	*Improving and increasing product quality*	4.24	1	5	0.877	259
SSU2	*Reducing the product cost*	4.08	1	5	0.896	259
SSU3	*Speeding up the new product development time*	3.95	1	5	0.949	259
SSU4	*Constantly improving the buyer-supplier communication*	4.08	1	5	0.928	259

Supplier success, represented by Section F of the survey, indicated the largest mean of 4.24 (Item SSU1). It also had the smallest mean number of 3.95 (Item SSU3), providing a range of 0.29. Precisely, the lowest mean, 3.95 (Item SSU3), indicated that the respondents were neutral and partly agreed that their relationship with suppliers is successful in terms of speeding up the new product development time. At the same time, the outcome of Section D of the survey had the largest value of 4.24 (Item SSU1) among the means. Most respondents agreed that their relationship with suppliers successfully improves and increases product quality. Likewise, Yu & Lee (2021), supported that supplier success is as a result of collaborating well with business partners to improve product quality. Table 4.12 reveals that the supplier success scale had the highest standard deviation value reported at 0.949 (Item SSU3), and the lowest standard deviation value was 0.877 (Item SSU1). Again, with SDs < 2 and closely clustered mean values, the results suggested the absence of outlier factors.

Table 4.13 illustrates the Firm performance descriptive statistical analysis.

Table 4.13: Descriptive statistical analysis (Firm performance)

Code	Factors	Item Statistics				
Firm Performance		**Mean**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Std. Deviation**	**Valid N**
FP1	*Overall high-level customer satisfaction*	4.40	1	5	0.881	259
FP2	*High-quality standards of product or service*	4.17	1	5	0.877	259
FP3	*Employee empowerment in their respective roles in the organization*	3.92	1	5	0.973	259
FP4	*Good customer service levels*	4.11	1	5	0.972	259
FP5	*Offers the best price in the market*	3.91	1	5	1.127	259

Firm performance (FP) consisted of Section G of the survey. The firm performance indicated the largest mean number of 4.40 (FP1) and the smallest mean number of 3.91 (Item FP5), showing a value of 0.49. Precisely, the smallest mean number of 3.91 (Item FP5) indicated that the respondents were neutral and partly agreed that they offer the best price in the market, while the outcomes from Section F of the questionnaire indicated that the largest mean value of 4.40 (Item FP1). The participants agreed that to overall high-level customer satisfaction. In addition, Otto, Szymanski & Varadarajan (2020) observed that customer satisfaction contributes highly to firm performance. Therefore, companies are becoming more and more customer centric through observation and understanding the desires and needs of the customer to enhance firm performance.

4.5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) Results

This part comprises discussions on the CFA results and the hypothesis results assessed using SEM. Kilne (2011) defined confirmatory factor analysis as a special form of factor analysis utilized to test how well the construct's measurements are compatible with the construct's phenomena. Therefore, Bagozzi and Yi (2012) stated that SEM is a quantitative research technique used to test the connections among latent variables, such as dependent and independent constructs.

The measurement scales' psychometric characteristics were assessed using a CFA. CFA was utilized to examine the construct's model fit and to measure validity and reliability. The CFA valuations results are shown below in Table 4.14. The table also indicates the factor loadings per item on the study's constructs.

Table 4.14: Psychometric properties (Reliability and validity) of the measurement scales

Constructs		Item-to-total correlation	Cronbach's α	CR value	AVE	Factor loadings
Code	**Coded Item**					
BSE	BSE1	0.555	0.864	0.860	0.480	0.585
	BSE2	0.643				0.712
	BSE3	0.711				0.769
	BSE4	0.695				0.750
	BSE5	0.576				0.628
	BSE6	0.645				0.695
	BSE7	0.611				0.671
SSE	SSE1	0.554	0.911	0.910	0.420	0.585
	SSE2	0.683				0.723
	SSE3	0.640				0.654
	SSE4	0.686				0.758
	SSE5	0.533				0.553
	SSE6	0.536				0.573
	SSE7	0.652				0.699
	SSE8	0.678				0.747
	SSE9	0.658				0.718
	SSE10	0.583				0.573
	SSE11	0.596				0.579
	SSE12	0.677				0.661
	SSE13	0.554				0.571
	SSE14	0.614				0.614

BST	BST1	0.630	0.814	0.800	0.500	0.629
	BST2	0.661				0.641
	BST3	0.675				0.832
	BST4	0.562				0.705
SSU	SSU2	0.615	0.764	0.740	0.590	0.686
	SSU3	0.667				0.838
FP	FP2	0.600	0.767	0.770	0.460	0.659
	FP3	0.569				0.736
	FP4	0.546				0.671
	FP5	0.550				0.635
FIBSR	FIBSR1	0.555	0.902	0.900	0.420	0.650
	FIBSR2	0.620				0.681
	FIBSR3	0.695				0.754
	FIBSR4	0.598				0.679
	FIBSR5	0.663				0.666
	FIBSR6	0.654				0.654
	FIBSR7	0.612				0.655
	FIBSR8	0.607				0.611
	FIBSR9	0.595				0.579
	FIBSR10	0.656				0.641
	FIBSR11	0.652				0.643
	FIBSR12	0.564				0.590

Note: *BSE = Buyer to supplier engagement; SSE = Supplier selection; BST = Buyer to supplierengagement; SSU= Supplier success; FP= Firm performance; FIBSR= Factors influencing buyer to supplier relationships.*

Further investigation of the above revealed that, on SSU, two items (SSU1 and SSU4) were deleted, and FP, one item (FP1) was deleted. The items were removed because the item-to-total correlation scores showed less than 0.5. Hence, it is valuable to point out that these items (SSU1, SSU4, and FP1) were removed since they did not measure 50% of what they were meant to measure. Therefore, they did not meet convergent validity, and the actual items did not need further investigation. Ravinder and Saraswati (2020), noted that coefficient reliability typically ranges between 0 and 1 in data analysis. The closer the values are to 1 (typically between 0.7 and 1), the more reliable and acceptable the scale items (Babin & Zikmund, 2016). This study reported coefficients ranging around 0.764 and 0.911, as shown in Table 4.14. This suggests that the measurement scales used in this study were reliable and internally consistent. Spiliotopoulou (2009) noted the delicacy of Cronbach's alpha in addressing some abnormalities from normality test statistics and how this can be subjectively subjected by the number of scale items. In support of this, Pallant (2011) highlighted that the number of scales used in the study could increase or decrease with coefficients. In this study, the average reported coefficients were between 0.533 and 0.711, suggesting results indicated the internal consistency reliability

of the scale items used.

Table 4.14 indicates the factor loadings per item on their construct. The table shows that the smallest number for each factor loading was 0.553, implying the loadings were beyond the 0.5 minimum recommended score, hence were acceptable, reliable and converging well, as guided by literature (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

4.6 Correlation matrix

The correlation matrix plays an essential role in many statistical models, and one of those roles is to measure the validity of measurement items, such as discriminant validity (Ab Hamid, Sami & Sidek, 2017). The correlation coefficients measure the strength of two variables, so if the variables' correlation coefficient is higher (>0.85), the validity will be lower (Maziriri et al., 2019).

Table 4.15 shows the correlations of the study's variables. The table shows that the largest correlation was 0.704, and the smallest correlation value was 0.408. Therefore, it can be concluded that since the correlation values are below 0.85, hence all of the study's constructs had discriminant validity.

Table 4.15: Correlation Matrix

Correlations						
		BSE	**SSE**	**BST**	**SSU**	**FP**	**FIBSR**
BSE	Pearson Correlation	1					
SSE	Pearson Correlation	.473**	1				
BST	Pearson Correlation	.490**	.580**	1			
SSU	Pearson Correlation	.553**	.408**	.410**	1		
FP	Pearson Correlation	.670**	.464**	.459**	.559**	1	
FIBSR	Pearson Correlation	.688**	.534**	.541**	.640**	.704**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: BSE = Buyer to supplier engagement; SSE = Supplier selection; BST = Buyer to supplier engagement; SSU= Supplier success; FP= Firm performance; FIBSR= Factors influencing

4.7 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Figure 4.16 shows a diagram representing the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) model. The diagram shows the latent variables with the symbol of a circle or oval shape (Lewis, 2017). The diagram also shows the observed variables, shown by the rectangular shapes. Next on the diagram is the observed variables which are measurement errors. These are adjacent to the observed variables and are also symbolized by circle shape (Zhang, 2022). The bi-directional arrows mean that there is a relationship between the latent variables.

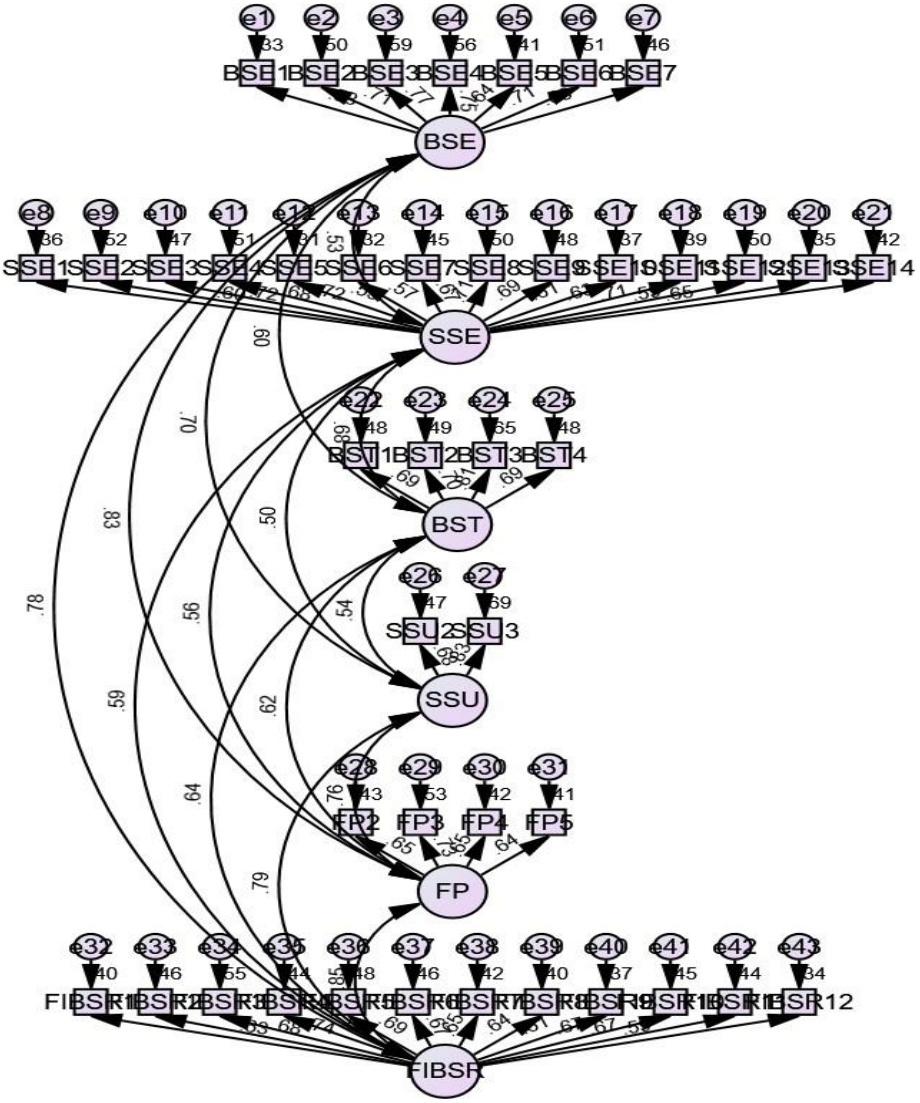


Figure 4.1: CFA Model

Note: BSE = Buyer to supplier engagement; SSE = Supplier selection; BST = Buyer to supplierengagement; SSU= Supplier success; FP= Firm performance; FIBSR= Factors influencing buyer to supplier relationships.

4.7.1 CFA Model Fit Assessments

AMOS (V. 26) was used to apply CFA. The accuracy measures of the measuring instruments for the corresponding constructs were recognized using CFA. Table 4.16 below provides the conceptual model fit evaluation results, discussed further in Section 4.8.

Table 4.16: Model fit results

Model Fit Criteria	**CMIN**	**(DF)**	**Chi-square (χ2 /DF)**	**IFI**	**TLI**	**CFI**	**RMSEA**
Indicator Value	1318.186	800	1.648	0.914	0.901	0.913	0.05

The model fit outcomes shown in Table 4.16 above demonstrate the "acceptable goodness-of-fit". Schreiber et al. (2006) stated that satisfactory and acceptable model fit is confirmed if all measures are above 0.9 and RMSEA 0.05. Considering the outcomes, the results suggest that all the pointers aligned with the acceptable thresholds equal to 0.9 or above, for IFI=0.914, TLI=0.901, CFI=0.913 and equal or less than 0.08 for RMSEA=0.05.

4.8 Discussion on Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis

4.8.1 SEM model fit analysis

The following indices were used in the SEM model fit analysis to measure IFI, TLI, CFI, RMSEA and the chi-square value over the degree of freedom (DF).

Table 4.17 below indicates the SEM model fit results.

Table 4.17: SEM model fit indexes

Fit Indices*	Acceptable threshold	Study test results	Decision
Chi-square (CMIN/DF)	Tabled chi-square ≤ 3	1.165	Accepted
IFI	Value ≥ 0.90	0.913	Accepted
TLI	Value ≥ 0.90	0.901	Accepted
CFI	Value ≥ 0.90	0.912	Accepted
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.050	Accepted

**RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation; CFI: Comparative fit index; TLI: Tucker-Lewis index IFI: Increment fit index*

The results in Table 4.17; shows the following results IFI =0.913, TLI=0.901, CFI=0,912 and equal or equal less than 0.08 for RMSEA=0.05 (Kenny, McCoach & Kaniskan, 2015). As a result, it could be suggested that the information reflected in the above table fits the model. Hence, it could be concluded that the model is acceptable.

4.8.2 The structural model path analysis

Garson (2008) stated that the structural model path analysis could be utilized to assess the causal relations among the interacting variables.

Therefore, path coefficients represent the relationships between variables and are represented by single-headed arrows (Wong, 2013).

Indicated in the below diagram is the observed variables, which are measurement errors; these are adjacent to the observed variables and symbolized by circle shape (Lewis, 2017). Below, figure 4.2 shows the path diagram for the model structure.

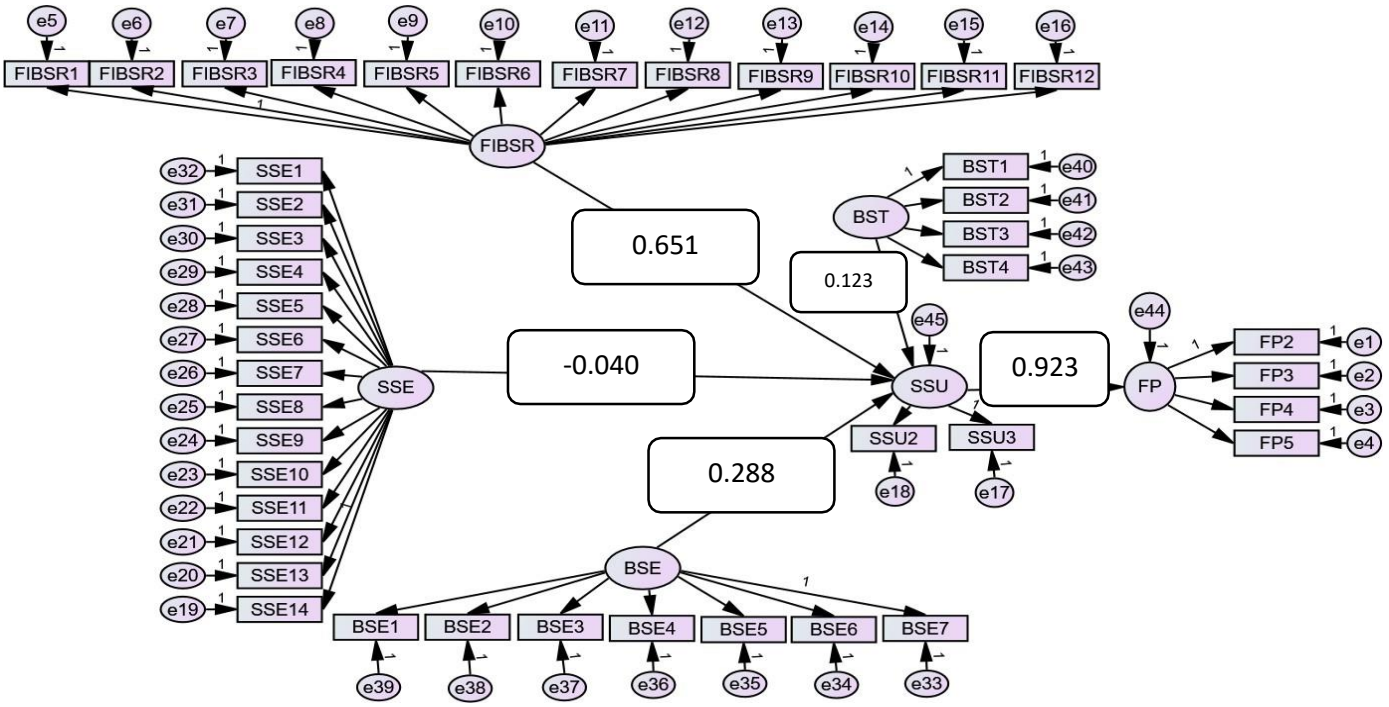


Figure 4.2: SEM path model structure

Note: BSE = Buyer to supplier engagement; SSE = Supplier selection; BST = Buyer to supplier engagement; SSU= Supplier success; FP= Firm performance; FIBSR= Factors influencing buyer to supplier relationships

Table 4.18: Hypotheses Test Results

Relationships	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient β	*P* Value	Remarks
SSU <--- FIBSR	**H1**	0.651	0.000***	Positive and significant
SSU <--- SSE	**H2**	-0.040	0.544	Negative and insignificant
SSU <--- BST	**H3**	0.123	0.133	Positive and insignificant
SSU <--- BSE	**H4**	0.288	0.001	Positive and significant
FP <--- SSU	**H5**	0.923	0.000***	Positive and significant

Note: BSE = Buyer to supplier engagement; SSE = Supplier selection; BST = Buyer to supplier engagement; SSU= Supplier success; FP= Firm performance; FIBSR= Factors influencing buyer to supplier relationships

From the above diagram, the results show that was model was acceptable. It clearly shows that three out of the five hypotheses were supported. Therefore, the outcomes confirmed the acceptability of the model. The following section discusses the hypotheses' results.

4.9 Hypotheses Results

To evaluate the latent variables' relationships, the proposed hypotheses were tested. This section discusses the final hypotheses test results. Table 4.19 summarises the hypotheses test results.

4.9.1 Outcome of Testing Hypothesis 1 – Factors that Influence Buyer to Supplier Relationship

Hypothesis 1 states that "Factors that influence the buyer to supplier relationship significantly positively impact supplier success." According to the concluding model testing results, the association between factors influencing buyer-to-supplier relationships and supplier success is confirmed at $\beta = .651$, and $p = 0.000$. Because the association is significantly positive, this outcome confirms that hypothesis 1 is supported. Therefore, factors influencing buyer-to-supplier relationships positively and significantly influences supplier success. Furthermore, Karungani's (2019) findings discuss that factors that influence buyer-to-supplier relationships such as trust, engagement, commitment, and communication are associated with the supplier and organizational success. This study's findings reinforce those of Knol et al. (2018), who examined the dynamics that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship such as planning, management support, flexibility, objectivity positively correlated to supplier success.

4.9.2 Outcome of Testing Hypothesis 2 – Supplier Selection

The outcome of Hypothesis 2 states that "Supplier selection has a positive and significant impact on supplier success." Based on the final model testing results, the relationship between supplier selection and supplier success ($\beta = -0.040$; $p = 0.544$) validate that hypothesis 2 is not supported because the relationship is insignificant. The results show that the buyer-to-supplier selection was negative and insignificantly influenced the supplier's success. Therefore, it could be suggested that these outcomes are similar to the results obtained in the study of Taherdoost and Brard (2019), who found that effective supplier selection can be significant to the success of the business in that the supplier selection process installs a massive amount of a firm's financial resources. Therefore, it plays a fundamental role in the success of any organization.

4.9.3 Outcome of Testing Hypothesis 3 – Buyer to Supplier Trust

The results of Hypothesis 3 states that "Buyer to supplier trust has a significant positive impact on the supplier success". Based on the final model testing results, the relationship between buyer-to-supplier trust and supplier success indicates a $\beta = 0.123$ and a p-value of 0.133. These results demonstrate that hypothesis 3 is not supported because the relationship is insignificant. Hence, it is worth mentioning that buyer-to-supplier engagement positively and insignificantly influences supplier success. Based on the findings, Wang (2018) stated that trust is vital as it permits the willingness to integrate between firms and their suppliers. Therefore, it could be suggested that these findings highlight the results obtained in the study of Kim (2021), who found that relationship trust can be positive, negative, or neutral depending on the levels of trust.

4.9.4 Outcome of Testing Hypothesis 4 – Buyer to Supplier Engagement

Hypothesis 4 states, “Buyer to supplier engagement has a positive and significant impact on the supplier success." According to the concluding model testing results, the association between Buyer to supplier engagement and supplier success is confirmed at $\beta = .288$ and $p = 0.001$. Because the association is significantly positive, this outcome confirms that hypothesis 5 is supported. Hence, it is worth mentioning that Buyer to supplier engagement positively and significantly influences supplier success. Furthermore, the study’s findings resonate with those obtained by Soh et al. (2016), who confirmed the relationship between Buyer to supplier engagement and the success of suppliers. The results further resonate with Esslinger et al. (2019), who pointed out that buyer-supplier engagement is essential to the relationship, leading to numerous opportunities for unexpected positive benefits.

4.9.5 Summary of the hypotheses results

Shown below in Table 4.19 is the summary of variables under the investigation and the summary of the hypothesis results.

Table 4.19: The summary of the hypotheses testing

Relationships	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient *B*	*P* Value	Remarks
SSU <--- FIBSR	**H1**	0.651	0.000***	Positive and significant
SSU <--- SSE	**H2**	-0.040	0.544	Negative and Insignificant
SSU <--- BST	**H3**	0.123	0.133	Positive and insignificant
SSU <--- BSE	**H4**	0.288	0.001	Positive and significant
FP <--- SSU	**H5**	0.923	0.000***	Positive and significant

Note: BSE = Buyer to supplier engagement; SSE = Supplier selection; BST = Buyer to supplier engagement; SSU= Supplier success; FP= Firm performance; FIBSR= Factors influencing buyer to supplier relationships

The study verifies that the variables act as instruments in stimulating business improvements in the retail SMEs business in Johannesburg. Grounded on the final model test results, the evidence demonstrates that the association between factors influencing buyer-to-supplier relationships and supplier success (H1) shows $\beta = 0.651$ and p = 0.000. The results suggested that the relationship is significant. Next, the supplier selection and supplier success relationship indicated a $\beta = -0.040$ and a p-value of 0.544, indicating negative and insignificant results, which may have been due to the restricted COVID-19 period, which interrupted the supply chain processes resulted in a scarcity of products. The relationship between buyer-to-supplier trust and supplier success (H3) shows a $\beta = 0.123$ and a p-value of 0.133, suggesting that buyer-to-supplier trust positively and insignificantly influences supplier success.

Finally, the relationship between buyer-supplier engagements and supplier success (H4) indicates a $\beta = 0.288$ and a p-value of 0.001, suggesting that hypothesis 4 is supported because the relationship is significant. Therefore, the findings confirm that buyer-to-supplier engagement positively and significantly impacts supplier success. The relationship between supplier success and firm performance indicate $\beta = 0.288$ and p = 0.001. The results indicate

that hypothesis 5 is supported and the relationship is significant. Hence, the most important aspect of a business's success depends on the association between businesses and their suppliers, as it helps the businesses to achieve competitive positions (Goncalo & Alencar, 2014). Precisely, in a successful relationship, the Buyer is willing to address the company's objectives and goals with the partnering firm (Jack & Powers, 2015).

4.10 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 covered the presentation of the survey outcomes and also discussed the empirical findings. The chapter presented a summary of the respondents' demographic profiles. Further discussions were based on descriptive statistics and confirmatory factor analysis. The correlation matrix was also discussed. Next, data were assessed using descriptive analysis, reliability and validity. The relationship between the variables was established. A summary of the hypotheses results was discussed at the end of the chapter. The next chapter will discuss the summary, conclusions, recommendation, and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 Summary

The research is divided into five main sections. The problem statement, the purpose, the aims, and the objectives of this research paper is discussed in chapter 1. The research problem which has been revealed and discussed in the study states that failure to follow a customer-centric strategy in business relationships and operations has resulted in the decrease of sales, loss of customers, the decline in profits, reduced income, cut down of operations, and loss of employment (Matriano and Khan, 2019). Thus, it has made it difficult for SMEs to survive in the highly competitive retail industry as the buyer-to-supplier relationships experience a lack of communication and trust (Douglas, Muturi, Ochieng, 2017). The chapter discussed the significance of the study both theoretically and practically. The limitations of the research are explored. The section also provided a conceptual model, hypotheses statements, and assumptions. This is followed by chapter 2, which contains the background and context of the study's empirical and theoretical literature. Next, chapter 3 discusses the design and methodology. Chapter 4 presented the analysis, presentation, and discussion of the results of the demographic profile of the respondents the consistency of the measurement instrument. Data analysis was undertaken using descriptive analysis, reliability and validity. SEM was used to evaluate the relationship between the constructs. Lastly, the section provides the summary, conclusions, and limitations.

There is little known on the study in Johannesburg to explain the success of buyer-to-supplier relationships in the retail industry and the impact of relational variables on firm performance (Akkermans et al., 2013). As a result, there is insufficient knowledge on the study of buyer-to-supplier relationships and firm performance in retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

5.2 Conclusions

The conclusions relating to the study’s objectives are discussed. The study aimed to examine the buyer-to-supplier relationship and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg. Below are conclusions of the findings relating to the study's objectives.

5.2.1 To determine the impact of factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

The factors influencing the buyer-to-supplier relationship are crucial to supplier success and firm performance. A positive relationship was hypothesized between factors influencing the buyer to supplier and supplier success (H1) of retail SMEs. The model's outcomes confirmed the correlation between factors influencing buyer-to-supplier relationships and supplier success (β = 0.651; p = 0.000). This indication confirms that factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier association have a positive and significant relationship with supplier success. Factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship between buyers and suppliers of retail SMEs can impact the way relationships are managed and affect firm performance (Pahurkar, 2020). Specifically, Brito and Miguel (2017) clearly stated that the relationship between buyers and suppliers often depends on trust and reputation. The more companies engage and share information about the firm's needs, the more likely they will develop confidence. The findings confirm that the direct effect of the factors that influence buyer-to-supplier relationship on supplier success are positive.

5.2.2 To evaluate the effect of supplier selection on the success of the buyer-supplier relationship and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

Supplier selection is crucial in purchasing management and significantly affects the firm's competitiveness. The survey was conducted during the COVID-19 restriction period, a negative relationship was hypothesized between supplier selection and supplier success (H2) of retail SMEs. The findings of the model testing of the between supplier selection-supplier success relationship show a β= -0.040 and a p-value of 0.544. In support of that, Micheli, Johnson and Godsell (2021) stated that COVID-19 caused a pandemic at all levels, specifically the decrease in production and supply triggered by the unprecedented and unpredictable demand and interruptions to supply chain processes that resulted in a scarcity of products. Hence, under normal circumstances, results could vary. Factor loadings for supplier selection were all above 0.5. Accordingly, Kaur and Sigh (2021) affirmed that supplier selection is one of the essential activities in the supply chain that ensures suppliers can supply the organizational needs. Li, Yamaguchi, and Nagai (2007) stated that when decision-makers focus on preferences or alternations of uncertain supplier attributes, supplier selection can be difficult and problematic. As a result, when suppliers are not selected using proper criteria, the outcome

can negatively impact the performance of the business. Therefore, supplier success is one of the most fundamental features in the procurement function and is vital to a company's competitiveness and customer satisfaction (Florez- Lopez, 2007).

5.2.3 To determine the impact of buyer-to-supplier trust on the relationship and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

Buyer-to-supplier trust is essential to the relationship as it stimulates the performance of both buyers and suppliers (Pahurkar, 2020). Therefore, a positive association was hypothesized between buyer-to-supplier trust and supplier success (H3). The results of the final model testing of hypothesis 3 indicated a $\beta = 0.123$ and a p-value of 0.133. Suggesting that buyer-to-supplier trust positively and insignificantly affects the supplier's success. Additionally, buyer-to-supplier trust is crucial to the relationship as both parties rely on each other to negotiate effectively and fulfil the obligations (Mpinganjira, Roberts & Svensson, 2017).

Furthermore, Ho, Ghauri and Larimo (2018) indicated mutual trust in a relationship when there is better understanding and appreciation between parties. Specifically, Brito and Miguel (2017) clearly stated that the relationship between buyers and suppliers often depends on trust and reputation. Therefore, due to buyer-to-supplier trust, firms can overcome the challenges and facilitate access to knowledge acquisition (Dahwa, Al-Hakim & Ng, 2013). Hence, we can conclude that buyer-to-supplier trust affects the firm performance of retail SMEs. In addition, the success of a relationship depends on the levels of trust. It can be positive, negative, or neutral (Narayanan, Narasimhan & Schoenherr, 2015). Hence, Burt (2019) stated that trust reduces if there is no proper affiliation between the business parties. Therefore, the findings indicated an association between buyer-to-supplier trust and supplier success.

5.2.4 To determine the impact of buyer-to-supplier engagement on supplier success and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

Supplier engagement is normally a fundamental methodology for companies looking for product improvements and better product improvements and designs resulting from constant engagements (Yepeng et al., 2022). In addition, supplier engagements encourage the exchange of information, which is the crucial ingredient in achieving increased coordination and fast material flow (Awan, Sroufe & Kraslawski, 2019). Therefore, a positive and significant relationship was hypothesized between buyer-to-supplier engagements (H4). The outcomes of the final model testing show a $\beta = 0.288$ and a p-value of 0.001, which indicates that hypothesis

4 is supported because the relationship is significant. Thus, Hardwick and Anderson (2019) stated that buyer-to-supplier engagement benefits suppliers and customers in developing new products. Hence, the ongoing supplier engagements can transform business practices into innovation, impacting firm performance.

Likewise, Kannan and Tan (2006) found that positive outcomes from the supplier relationship result from engagements favourable to the relationship's success. Therefore, the findings confirm that buyer-to-supplier engagement positively and significantly impacts the success of suppliers.

5.2.5 To establish the impact of supplier success on firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

The model results of the relationship between supplier success and firm performance was a β= 0.288 and a p-value of 0.001. The hypothesized results indicated an affirmative and substantial association between supplier success and business performance (H5). This indication suggests that hypothesis 5 is supported since the relationship is significant. Hence, Zaid et al. (2021) established that partnerships with the suppliers are vital drivers of firm performance for customer satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, the findings confirm that Supplier success is strongly linked to business development. Hence the final results conclude that supplier success has a significant impact on the business growth of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Evaluating supplier performance

Supplier evaluation is a highly recommended valuation process companies use to assess suitable suppliers. Therefore, supplier evaluation criteria will vary according to the organization’s requirements. Additionally, supplier evaluation criteria can include product quality, service, contract, supplier behaviour, product life-cycle assessments, and data analysis. In addition, periodic supplier evaluation is recommended to assess the defective products, price, and payment terms. Several approaches exist in procurement for supplier evaluation. Therefore, the management team can decide on the approach and the evaluation form to use during the assessments.

Below is the recommended supplier evaluation form that is simple and easy to use.

Table 2.20 Supplier evaluation form

Supplier Evaluation form			
Name of supplier			
Address of Supplier			
Phone number			
Date of Supply			
Name of Supplied Product			
Number of Products			
Characteristics	**Qualification**		
	Low	Adequate	Excellent
Price		X	
Number of defective products			X
Number of damaged products due to transportation		X	
Accuracy of transport			X
Payment terms	X		
Payment terms		X	

Source: Szegedi-PrezenZki, 2005, p. 93

5.3.2 Inculcate the culture of selecting the right suppliers

Firms must adopt the culture of selecting suitable suppliers and following the supplier appraisal checklist in decision-making. This principle of choosing the right supplier for the firm can satisfy the business needs and contribute to the firm's long-term success.

The findings show that selecting the right supplier is the most effective practice for improving procurement management.

Based on the above-mentioned, companies must have the highest selection criteria and include past and new suppliers. For instance, supplier selection helps to eliminate business risks such as failed deliveries, bankruptcy, or cancellation of tenders. Hence, successful businesses are concentrated on sourcing and purchasing from sustainable suppliers. From the elucidations mentioned above, it is recommended that small businesses implement the seven steps of selecting the right supplier. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the company to select the best suppliers for their business.

The seven steps for supplier selection are: *Recognize the need for supplier selection, Identify the sourcing requirements, determine the sourcing strategy, identify potential suppliers, reduce the number of suppliers in the selection pool, determine the method of supplier evaluation, and conduct supplier selection.* Figure 4.3 represents the seven steps for supplier selection process

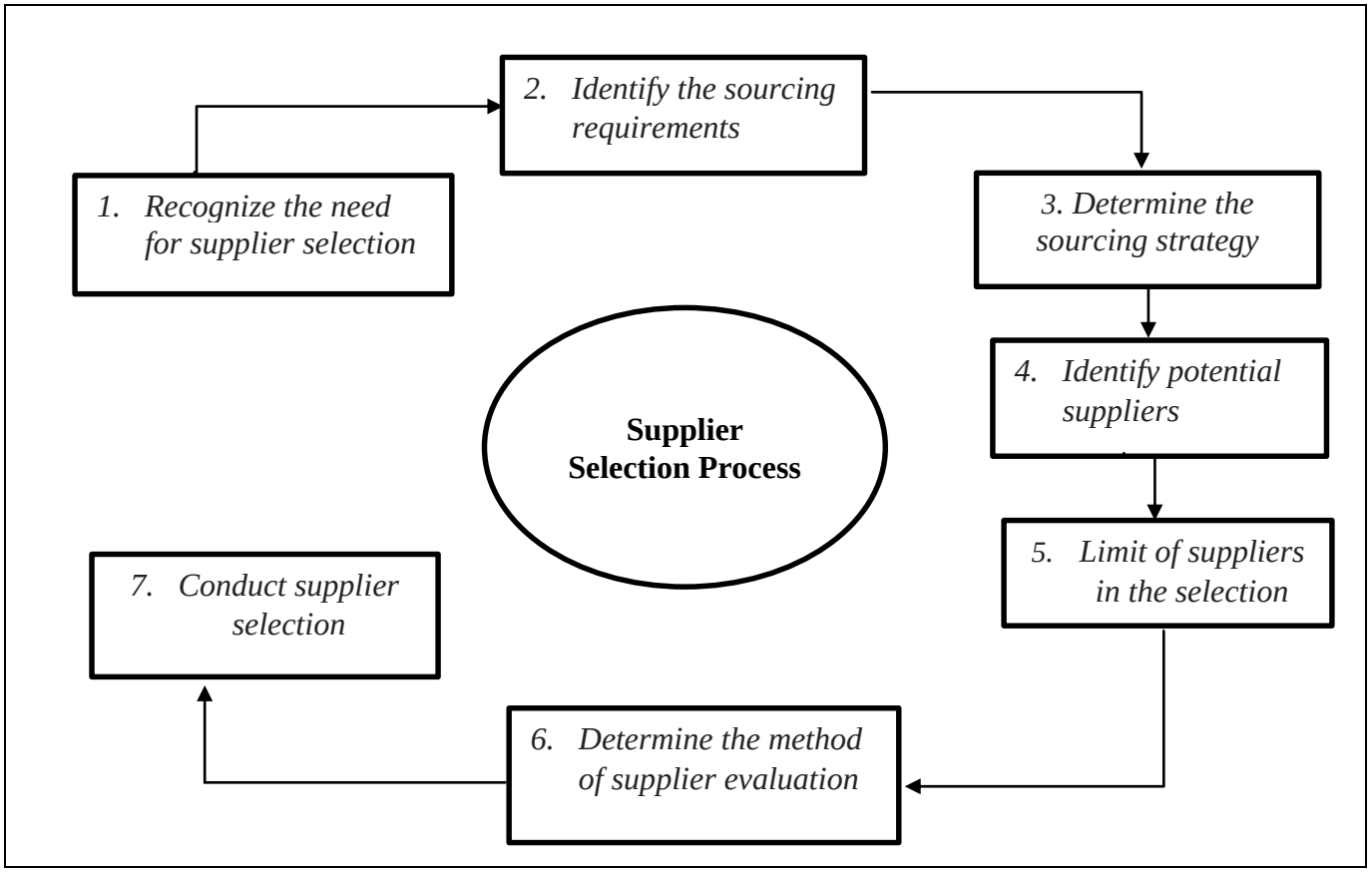


Figure 4.3 Selection Process

Source: Monczka et al. (2011)

5.3.3 Use Communication to achieve performance improvements

The success of a supplier involves constant interactions between the business parties. In addition, communication between buyer and supplier relationships allows for performance improvements regarding business processes and procedures. Therefore, good buyer-to-supplier communication has been recommended to improve supply chain quality and innovation. Previously, CRM and CSR were suggested as the best practices for buyers and suppliers to communicate their interests or aspirations. Therefore, the policies make it practical for companies to communicate their strategic priorities.

5.4 Contributions of the study

Hypothetically, this research study makes substantial progress in business theory and consumer behaviour by methodically investigating an interplay between factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship and supplier success on firm performance. This study is thus an essential contributor to the existing literature on supplier relationship management. On the practical front, factors that influence buyer-to-supplier relationship, buyer-supplier engagement, and supplier success were exerted as influencing firm performance; hence improvements in these factors could enhance the firm performance of the retail SMEs in Gauteng province of South Africa. Buyer-to-supplier trust can be improved by ensuring that the collaboration between buyer and supplier is enforced and those relationship marketing concepts are implemented to foster customer loyalty, interaction, and long-term buyer-to-supplier engagement.

5.5 Research Limitations

Many dynamics influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship in the retail industry; the study focused on five factors due to time constraints and a demographically defined region. Future research can expand further on factors that influence the buyer-to-supplier relationship in large corporations in the retail industry. Moreover, the results were grounded on a sample of 259, which proved adequate for the study area, but could be increased.

5.6 Future Research

The current study leaves room for further research on factors influencing buyer-to-supplier relationships and firm performance in retail SMEs in Johannesburg. Future research can cover the nine provinces in South Africa, and researchers could use the same sample size to get in-depth representative views. The study chose a quantitative approach since it was strictly an online survey due to COVID-19 restrictions. Future research could try other methods such as the mixed-methods approach or qualitative research to collect rich data through in-depth views can also be considered. Further research could expand focus on theories that have not been argued in this study.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number:	WBS/SM1561931/331 This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).
Project title	Buyer to supplier relationships and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg
Investigator/ Researcher	Mrs. KAPUNGWE CHISHALA
Nature of Project	MM (Strategic Marketing)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.
Issue Date of Certificate	2021-04-15
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project report
Chairperson	Prof Anthony Stacey +27 11717 3587 +27 82 880 4531 anthony.stacey@wits.ac.za

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Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research, and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

16 April 2021
Date:

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)

Date: 2 March 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Kapungwe Chishala, and I am Master of Management student in Strategic Marketing at Wits. Business School, Johannesburg. As part of my master's degree, I am conducting research on buyer to supplier relationship and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

Johannesburg has the largest number of retail businesses in South Africa which has led to high competition and threats in the retail business. Due to this reason most SMEs have been affected in their business performance and have resulted in downsizing or complete closure of operations. The focus has now increased on the relationship of buyer to supplier relationships and firm performance.

As the business owner/sales manager you are invited to participate in the survey. The purpose of this survey is to find out the factors that influence buyer to supplier relationship and firm performance in retail SMEs in Johannesburg.

Your response is important and there are no right or wrong answers. This survey is both confidential and anonymous. Anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed by not needing to enter your name on the questionnaire. Your participation is completely voluntary and involves no risk, penalty, or loss of benefits whether or not you participate. You may withdraw from the survey at any stage. All information provided will be used only for the proposed research study.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. The survey was approved by the SEBS Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), Protocol Number: WBS/SM1561931/331.

Thank you for considering participating. Should you have any questions, or should you wish to obtain a copy of the results of the survey, please contact me on (011) 645 1400 or at 1561931@wits.ac.za.
My contact details: kapungwe.chishala@wits.ac.za – Cell number: 083 466 3578
My supervisor's name and email are: fanny.saruchela@wits.ac.za

Yours Sincerely,

Kapungwe Chishala
School of Economic and Business Sciences
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM (SPCF)

Title of research project: Buyer to Supplier relationship and firm performance of retail SMEs in Johannesburg

Names of principal researcher: Kapungwe Chishala

I,..... , agree to participate in this research project. The research has been clarified to me and I know what my contribution will involve. I agree to the following.

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I, ..., agree that my participation will remain anonymous.	**YES**	**NO**
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report.	**YES**	**NO**
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	**YES**	**NO**

Signature of Participant: ……

Name of Participant: ……...

Signature of person who sought consent: ……...

Name of person who sought consent……

Date: ……

APPENDIX D: ACTUAL RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

This part of the questionnaire requests personal information about you. This information is important to attain, as this will affect the outcome.

Please show your answer by clicking on the right block.

A1	**Specify your gender category**
1	Male
2	Female
3	Prefer not to say

A2	**What is your age**
1	18-25
2	26-33
3	34-41
4	42-49
5	50+

A3	**What is your level of education**
1	Matric
2	Diploma
3	Degree
4	Post Graduate Diploma
5	Masters
6	PhD

A4	**Please indicate your position in your organization**
1	Top Management
2	Middle Management
3	Owner
4	Sales manager

A5	**Please indicate size of your firm**
1	Less than 10 employees
2	11-20 employees
3	21-31 employees
4	More than 31 employees

A6	**Please indicate your industry type**
1	Food industry
2	Chemical
3	Auto and Electronics
4	Fibre, leather & Clothing
5	Construction

SECTION B: FACTORS INFLUENCING BUYER TO SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS (FIBSR)

How important are industrial buyers motivated to collaborate with innovative suppliers in terms of.

1.Extremely Unimportant 2. Unimportant 3. Not Sure 4. Important 5. Extremely Important

Please show your answer by clicking on one number.

FIBSR1	The consistency in contacting the supplier.	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR2	The high incentives to generate momentum.	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR3	The high degree of performance and ability to solve problems with suppliers.	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR4	The technical and operational support needs.	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR5	The flexibility and freedom in relationships that the supplier provides.	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR6	Supplier protection is provided for any erroneous actions.	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR7	The high incentives to generate momentum.	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR8	The respect and social engagements with the traders, provides a good relationship, regardless of goods purchased	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR9	High brand status leads to supplier feeling superior	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR10	Feeling of gratefulness due to supplier's providing supportin economically hard times.	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR11	Buyer to supplier collaborations on common organizational goals	1	2	3	4	5
FIBSR12	Supplier's willingness to adjust to business values of the customer.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION C

Buyer to Supplier Trust (BST)

Please, indicate how much do you agree with the below statements

1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly disagree

Please show your answer by clicking on one number.

BST1	Vendors take into consideration how their actions and decisions will affect us	1	2	3	4	5
BST2	Our suppliers consider our future goals and objectives	1	2	3	4	5
BST3	Our suppliers take into consideration our best interest	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION D

Supplier selection (SSE)

How important are the following when selecting key suppliers?

1. Extremely Unimportant 2. Unimportant 3. Not sure 4. Important 5. Extremely Important

Please show your answer by clicking on one number.

SSE1	The size of the company	1	2	3	4	5
SSE2	Company ethical standards	1	2	3	4	5
SSE3	Company's testing capability	1	2	3	4	5
SSE4	Scope of resources for the company	1	2	3	4	5
SSE5	Supplier's technical expertise	1	2	3	4	5
SSE6	Supplier's commitment to quality	1	2	3	4	5
SSE7	Firm's capability to deliver in a timely manner	1	2	3	4	5
SSE8	Cost goods, resources and supplies	1	2	3	4	5
SSE9	Quality of goods and services	1	2	3	4	5

SSE10	Closeness of location	1	2	3	4	5
SSE11	Exchange of data with the vendor	1	2	3	4	5
SSE12	The size of the contract with the selected vendor	1	2	3	4	5
SSE13	Suppliers' dedication to process improvementin products or services	1	2	3	4	5
SSE14	Suppliers' willingness to attend to unpredicted requests or calls.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION E

Buyer to supplier engagement (BSE)

How important are the following in engaging with your firm's key suppliers?

1. Extremely Unimportant 2. Unimportant 3. Not sure 4. Important 5. Extremely Important

Please show your answer by clicking on one number.

BSE1	Engaging in sourcing decisions of your suppliers	1	2	3	4	5
BSE2	Using general data exchanged suppliers andcustomers	1	2	3	4	5
BSE3	Using accurate data exchange with customers	1	2	3	4	5
BSE4	Refining the engagement of events with suppliers	1	2	3	4	5
BSE5	Informing suppliers about the future goals	1	2	3	4	5
BSE6	Building high levels of trust among your firm's supply chain members	1	2	3	4	5
BSE7	Integrating friendly communication tools or information systems with your suppliers and customers	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION F

Supplier Success (SSU)

How successful do you think your relationships are? Specify the level to which you agreeor disagree with each of the following success factors.

1. Extremely Unsuccessful 2. Unsuccessful 3. Not sure 4. Successful 5. Extremely Successful

Please show your answer by clicking on one number.

SSU1	Improving and increasing product quality	1	2	3	4	5
SSU2	Reducing the product cost	1	2	3	4	5
SSU3	Speeding up the new product development time	1	2	3	4	5
SSU4	Constantly improving the buyer-supplier communication	1	2	3	4	5

Section G

Firm performance

Show the level to which you agree that the below contribute to the level of your firm'sperformance compared to that of major competitors in terms of;

1-Strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly disagree

Please show your answer by clicking on one number.

FP1	Overall high-level customer satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5
FP2	High-quality standards of product or service	1	2	3	4	5
FP3	Employee empowerment in their respective roles in the organization	1	2	3	4	5
FP4	Good customer service levels	1	2	3	4	5
FP5	Offers the best price in the market	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX E: LANGUAGE EDITING CONFIRMATION

EDITING CONFIRMATION

To whom it may concern:

This memo serves to confirm that the manuscript/research project detailed below has been language-edited and/or proof-read.

Regards,

-IETS-

IET Innocent *(Cert. Lang. Ed.)*
Language Editor

****

Manuscript Title:

BUYER TO SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS AND FIRM PERFORMANCE OF RETAIL SMEs IN JOHANNESBURG

Author:

KAPUNGWE CHISHALA

Issued on:

24/02/2022

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*** Professional Editors ***

sarchcot@gmail.com