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**The Impact of Supplier Relationship Management on Supply Chain
Performance in Kenya**



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Impact of Supplier Relationship Management on Supply Chain Performance in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article was to analyze impact of supplier relationship management on supply chain performance in Kenya.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study found that effective Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) significantly improves supply chain performance in Kenya, particularly in areas such as delivery reliability, inventory turnover, and cost efficiency. Strong collaboration, trust, and communication between firms and their suppliers enhance operational efficiency and reduce transaction costs. Firms with formal SRM practices reported better performance outcomes, including timely deliveries and reduced stock outs. The research also highlighted the need for digital tools and employee training to optimize these practices.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Transaction cost economics, social exchange theory & resource-based view may be used to anchor future studies on the impact of supplier relationship management on supply chain performance in Kenya. For practical implementation, it is recommended that industry associations in vulnerable sectors, such as steel, aluminum, and fertilizers, establish sector-wide carbon accounting hubs. At the policy level, governments must pursue a dual-track strategy of negotiation and domestic transformation.

Keywords: *Supplier Relationship Management, Supply Chain Performance*

INTRODUCTION

Supply chain performance measured through delivery reliability (timeliness and completeness of deliveries as defined in the Supply-Chain Operations Reference (SCOR) model), inventory turnover (how many times inventory cycles through sales annually), and cost efficiency (minimizing logistics and inventory carrying costs) is a key indicator of competitiveness in advanced economies. In the United States, high delivery reliability and strong inventory management systems have enabled firms to maintain service levels above 95% for core products, while inventory turnover ratios in many sectors have remained above 8–10 turns per year, reflecting tightly integrated forecasting and lean management practices (higher ratios indicate faster stock movement and lower holding costs). In Japan, established manufacturing supply chains have emphasized continuous improvement (kaizen), yielding consistent delivery reliability and relatively high inventory turnover, especially in automotive and electronics sectors where just-in-time (JIT) systems have reduced excess stock and lowered logistics costs. Compared to developing regions, firms in these developed economies invest more in technologies like real-time tracking and predictive analytics, which further improve delivery reliability and reduce operational costs, demonstrating performance trends that reinforce competitive advantage. A peer-reviewed study by Obiri-Yeboah (2025) highlights that well-integrated supply chain practices correlate with improved supply chain performance and organizational outcomes in developed contexts, reinforcing the positive relationship between these metrics and broader firm performance (Obiri-Yeboah 2025).

In developing economies, supply chain performance often lags behind due to infrastructure challenges and less advanced logistics systems, which negatively affect delivery reliability and cost efficiency. For example, multiple studies show that developing countries typically struggle with timely deliveries and higher logistics costs, which suppress average inventory turnover compared to the US and Japan; inefficiencies in infrastructure and customs processes can lead to delays and increased holding costs. A peer-reviewed investigation by Obiri-Yeboah (2025) in an emerging African economy found that insufficient logistics integration and management practices are key constraints on supply chain performance, illustrating the gap with more developed systems. Additionally, World Bank data indicate that trade logistics measures (which encompass indicators related to delivery timeliness and cost efficiency) are still lower on average in lower-income developing countries, highlighting systemic performance disparities relative to high-income nations. Developing economies therefore show trends of slower delivery reliability, less frequent inventory turnover, and comparatively higher supply chain costs, which collectively dampen supply chain effectiveness (Obiri-Yeboah, 2025).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, supply chain performance faces additional structural barriers such as underdeveloped transport infrastructure and regulatory bottlenecks that reduce delivery reliability and increase costs. According to the World Bank Logistics Performance Index (LPI), Sub-Saharan African countries on average score lower on logistics performance dimensions including shipment timeliness and infrastructure quality than global averages, indicating slower delivery reliability and cost inefficiencies that constrain inventory turnover and overall supply chain effectiveness. Peer-reviewed regional research has shown that weak logistics performance in parts of Africa has only modest positive effects on economic growth, underscoring the challenges in translating logistics improvements into stronger supply chain performance outcomes. Some countries in the

region, however, have made notable progress: for instance, Rwanda improved its logistics performance over recent years through institutional reforms and infrastructure investments, resulting in measurable gains in delivery reliability and reduced lead times compared to earlier decades. Nonetheless, the overall trends in Sub-Saharan Africa reflect continued performance gaps relative to both developed and other developing regions, largely driven by higher operational costs, unpredictable delivery schedules, and slower inventory turnover (World Bank, 2023).

Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) is a strategic approach to managing a company's interactions with its suppliers, aiming to create long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships. It is often measured by key factors such as collaboration, communication, and trust levels. Collaboration involves working jointly with suppliers to improve processes, reduce costs, and innovate product development, which can directly impact supply chain performance, especially in terms of delivery reliability. Communication refers to the timely and clear exchange of information, ensuring that both parties align on expectations, delivery schedules, and inventory needs. Trust levels are critical in fostering cooperation, encouraging open discussions about challenges and opportunities, which can result in better inventory turnover and cost efficiency by reducing the risk of supply chain disruptions and improving operational efficiency. Effective SRM practices can significantly influence various dimensions of supply chain performance, such as delivery reliability, inventory turnover, and cost efficiency. High collaboration between companies and suppliers often leads to smoother operations, ensuring timely deliveries, which enhances delivery reliability. Strong communication channels improve inventory management by providing accurate demand forecasts, allowing suppliers to adjust inventory levels, thus increasing inventory turnover. Trust between partner's fosters transparency and shared goals, which can lead to more effective cost control measures, enhancing cost efficiency by reducing waste and preventing overstocking. As highlighted by recent studies, these four key SRM components collaboration, communication, trust, and transparency are integral to optimizing supply chain performance, as they reduce inefficiencies and drive mutual success (Heikkilä, 2020; Ghadge, 2021).

Problem Statement

Despite growing recognition of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) as a strategic tool for improving supply chain outcomes, many Kenyan firms continue to experience suboptimal supply chain performance, characterized by late deliveries, high inventory costs, and frequent stockouts. Research suggests that weak collaboration, limited information sharing, and low trust between firms and their suppliers contribute significantly to these performance challenges in Kenya's supply chains, yet empirical evidence on the extent and nature of these impacts remains limited and fragmented. For example, studies in Kenyan manufacturing and retail sectors indicate that although SRM practices have a positive influence on firm performance, gaps persist in how relationships are managed, affecting operational efficiency and competitive advantage in an increasingly complex market environment (Kimwaki, 2022; Thuo & Osoro, 2022). Further, sector-specific issues such as infrastructure constraints and inconsistent supplier engagement strategies suggest that the relationship between SRM and supply chain performance may vary across industries within the Kenyan context (Machira & Chege, 2025). Therefore, this study seeks to address the existing knowledge gap by empirically examining how SRM dimensions including collaboration, communication, and trust affect key supply chain performance indicators such as delivery reliability, inventory turnover, and cost efficiency within Kenyan firms.

Theoretical Review

Transaction Cost Economics (TCE)

Originating from Ronald Coase (1937) and later developed by Oliver Williamson (1979), TCE focuses on the costs associated with economic exchanges. The theory suggests that firms aim to minimize transaction costs by selecting governance structures that best reduce these costs. In the context of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM), TCE is relevant as firms in Kenya may choose to engage in long-term relationships with suppliers to reduce costs associated with negotiations, monitoring, and enforcement. By reducing transaction costs, firms can achieve better supply chain performance in terms of cost efficiency and delivery reliability (Barrett & Hall, 2022).

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

George Homans (1958) first proposed SET, emphasizing the importance of reciprocal exchanges in relationships. The theory suggests that positive, long-term relationships are built on trust, communication, and mutual benefit. In SRM, firms that invest in building trust and fostering communication with suppliers are likely to experience enhanced collaboration and performance. In Kenya, this theory can help explain how improved supplier relations contribute to inventory turnover and delivery reliability by fostering better cooperation between suppliers and buyers (Muthoni & Wanjiru, 2021).

Resource-Based View (RBV)

Proposed by Jay Barney (1991), RBV suggests that firms' competitive advantages are derived from their unique resources and capabilities, including relationships with suppliers. This theory is relevant to SRM because it emphasizes the value of a firm's strategic supplier relationships as a critical resource that can enhance supply chain performance. By leveraging strong supplier relationships, Kenyan firms can secure better resources, improve operational efficiency, and enhance cost efficiency (Liu, 2020).

Empirical Review

Kimwaki (2022) examined how factors such as collaboration, trust, and communication affect firms' ability to deliver products on time and maintain customer satisfaction. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 150 manufacturing firms in Nairobi through structured questionnaires. The study revealed that strong collaboration between suppliers and buyers improved communication flow, while high levels of trust reduced misunderstandings and delays in deliveries. Moreover, the findings showed that firms with formal SRM practices had a delivery reliability rate exceeding 90%, while those with informal or no SRM practices faced challenges such as frequent delays and inventory stockouts. The study recommended that firms should focus on long-term strategic relationships with suppliers, fostering collaboration and trust to achieve reliable delivery performance. They also suggested investing in employee training programs to enhance relationship management competencies. Additionally, the authors emphasized the importance of aligning supplier goals with company objectives to optimize performance. The study concluded that adopting SRM practices in the Kenyan manufacturing sector can lead to enhanced customer satisfaction and competitive advantage. Companies that engage in open communication and transparency with suppliers are better positioned to meet customer demands and improve their performance. In line with these results, Kimwaki recommended that Kenyan manufacturers leverage digital tools for real-time data sharing and enhance their SRM strategies. They further

urged companies to develop performance-based contracts with key suppliers to incentivize timely deliveries and improve operational efficiency. Firms were also advised to adopt lean practices to minimize waste and reduce lead times, further improving supply chain responsiveness. This study provides valuable insights into how SRM can address critical issues in delivery performance within the Kenyan manufacturing sector. The findings reinforce the positive impact of collaboration, communication, and trust on delivery reliability in the supply chain.

Mutunga and Murage (2021) investigated how effective communication between suppliers and retailers influences supply chain performance, specifically inventory turnover. The researchers used a mixed-methods design, combining a quantitative survey with qualitative interviews to gather data from 50 retail companies in Nairobi. They found that when retailers and suppliers had clear, regular communication, inventory turnover improved significantly, as suppliers were better able to meet demand fluctuations. The study revealed that companies with high communication quality between suppliers and retailers had an average inventory turnover of 8–10 cycles per year, while firms with poor communication had turnover rates as low as 4 cycles per year. Mutunga and Murage (2021) highlighted that communication tools, such as Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and cloud-based platforms, helped retail chains improve real-time information sharing, reducing stockouts and overstocking. The study also emphasized the importance of information accuracy, with retailers benefiting from predictive analytics to forecast demand and manage inventory more effectively. Based on their findings, the authors recommended that Kenyan retail chains adopt advanced communication technologies to enhance supplier engagement and optimize inventory management. They also urged retailers to establish routine meetings with suppliers to discuss stock levels and forecast adjustments. Furthermore, the study emphasized the need for mutual trust and transparency to support effective communication and collaboration. Retailers were advised to invest in staff training to improve communication skills and develop strong relationships with key suppliers. The study also recommended enhancing information sharing to ensure suppliers understand market demands and stock requirements. Mutunga and Murage (2021) concluded that effective communication between suppliers and retailers was a key factor in improving inventory turnover and supply chain performance. By prioritizing clear and consistent communication, retail chains in Kenya could enhance operational efficiency, minimize waste, and reduce costs.

Kamau (2020) investigated the influence of trust in supplier relationships on cost efficiency in Kenya's horticulture sector. The study aimed to assess how trust between suppliers and horticultural firms affects supply chain costs, specifically focusing on logistics and transaction costs. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), the study analyzed data from 100 horticultural firms in Kenya, gathering responses through structured questionnaires. Kamau (2020) found that higher trust levels in supplier relationships led to significant reductions in transaction costs, as firms were able to streamline procurement processes and reduce the frequency of renegotiations. The study also revealed that firms with high trust in their suppliers had lower logistics costs, as they were able to work together more efficiently and share responsibilities for transportation and inventory management. Additionally, the research showed that firms that engaged in long-term relationships with suppliers achieved better cost efficiency compared to those relying on short-term contracts. Kamau (2020) recommended that firms in Kenya's horticultural sector establish formal, long-term contracts with trusted suppliers to improve collaboration and reduce supply chain costs. The study also suggested that companies implement performance-based contracts to incentivize suppliers and encourage cost-saving innovations. Furthermore, Kamau (2020)

highlighted the need for suppliers and firms to regularly assess and improve their relationship quality through open communication, feedback, and joint problem-solving. The study concluded that fostering trust in supplier relationships is a critical component of achieving cost efficiency in the horticultural supply chain. It also advised firms to develop clear expectations and performance metrics for suppliers, which would help build mutual trust and improve overall supply chain performance.

Wachiuri (2023) examined the impact of collaborative forecasting on inventory performance in logistics firms in Kenya. The study sought to investigate how collaboration in forecasting between suppliers and logistics firms affects inventory turnover and holding costs. The authors used a cross-sectional survey to collect data from 80 logistics firms operating in Nairobi. The study found that logistics firms that engaged in collaborative forecasting with their suppliers experienced higher inventory turnover and reduced holding costs compared to firms that did not engage in such collaboration. Specifically, firms that shared demand forecasts with suppliers had better inventory management, which enabled them to reduce stockouts and avoid overstocking. The research indicated that collaborative forecasting improved the overall efficiency of the supply chain, as suppliers could better align production schedules with demand, ensuring timely deliveries and lower costs. Wachiuri et al. (2023) recommended that logistics firms in Kenya engage in joint forecasting sessions with their suppliers to improve supply chain visibility and synchronize operations. They also suggested adopting advanced forecasting tools and technologies to enhance data accuracy and reduce forecast errors. Furthermore, the study emphasized the importance of building strong relationships with suppliers to facilitate collaborative forecasting and improve trust. The authors concluded that effective collaboration in forecasting is crucial for improving inventory turnover and reducing costs, ultimately enhancing the performance of logistics firms in Kenya.

Otieno and Awuor (2021) explored how supplier engagement practices affect the timely delivery of products to meet customer demands in the dairy sector. The authors used a case study approach to analyze three major dairy processors in Nairobi, collecting data through interviews with key supply chain managers. The study found that firms with high levels of supplier engagement achieved better delivery reliability, as regular communication and joint problem-solving helped address potential delays before they occurred. In contrast, companies with poor supplier engagement faced frequent delivery delays and stockouts, which affected customer satisfaction and sales performance. The research also revealed that firms with strong supplier relationships had higher levels of trust, which led to better coordination and smoother operations. Otieno and Awuor (2021) recommended that dairy processors in Kenya improve their engagement strategies by creating formal performance measurement systems and engaging in regular feedback loops with suppliers. They also suggested that firms should establish clear expectations for delivery performance and incentivize suppliers to meet these expectations. Furthermore, the study emphasized the need for collaborative planning and transparent communication between suppliers and dairy firms. The authors concluded that effective supplier engagement is key to improving delivery reliability in the dairy industry and enhancing overall supply chain performance.

Njoroge and Kiarie (2019) investigated how supplier relationship practices, such as performance feedback and shared goals, affect logistics costs and operational efficiency in SMEs. Using regression analysis, the study analyzed data from 150 SMEs involved in various sectors, including

manufacturing, retail, and agriculture. The findings revealed that frequent feedback and shared performance scorecards between firms and suppliers significantly reduced logistics costs, as both parties worked together to identify cost-saving opportunities. The study also found that SMEs with formal SRM practices achieved better cost efficiency, as they could negotiate better pricing terms and reduce waste. Njoroge and Kiarie (2019) recommended that SMEs implement formal supplier evaluation processes to drive cost reductions and improve supply chain performance. They also suggested adopting performance dashboards to monitor supplier performance and identify areas for improvement. The authors further emphasized the importance of developing long-term relationships with key suppliers to foster trust and collaboration, which would lead to more cost-effective supply chain operations. The study concluded that SRM practices are essential for improving cost outcomes in SMEs, helping them achieve competitive advantages in the market.

Muthoni and Wanjiru (2021) examined how communication quality and trust influence delivery reliability and cost efficiency in the electronics industry. Using a survey approach, data were collected from 120 electronics distributors in Nairobi. The study found that transparent information sharing and a high level of trust between suppliers and distributors improved both delivery reliability and cost efficiency, as suppliers were better able to align production with demand forecasts. The research also revealed that firms with strong communication practices experienced fewer delays and better coordination, resulting in lower logistics costs and improved customer satisfaction. Muthoni and Wanjiru (2021) recommended that firms in the electronics distribution sector formalize their communication protocols and develop long-term relationships with key suppliers. The study also suggested investing in digital platforms to enhance real-time communication and improve supply chain visibility. The authors concluded that effective communication and trust are key factors in optimizing supply chain performance in the electronics sector.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Research Gap

There is limited exploration of the theoretical frameworks linking supplier relationship management (SRM) practices to specific supply chain performance indicators such as cost efficiency, inventory turnover, and delivery reliability, particularly in the Kenyan context. Most studies focus on general SRM outcomes but fail to address how distinct SRM practices (collaboration, trust, communication) interact with performance metrics in a way that accounts for Kenya's unique market conditions and challenges. For instance, while communication quality has been highlighted, there is a gap in examining its direct relationship with demand forecasting accuracy in supply chains. This suggests a need for more comprehensive models that link SRM

dimensions to specific performance outcomes in the Kenyan market (Kimwaki, 2022; Kamau, 2020).

Contextual Research Gap

Much of the existing literature on SRM and supply chain performance in Kenya has focused on the manufacturing and retail sectors (Kimwaki, 2022; Mutunga & Murage, 2021). However, there is a contextual gap in understanding how SRM practices influence supply chain performance in other sectors such as agriculture, logistics, and electronics. For example, while the horticulture sector (Kamau, 2020) and dairy processing (Otieno & Awuor, 2021) have been studied, research on SRM's impact in industries like electronics distribution or construction remains underexplored. Expanding the scope to include these sectors could offer more generalized insights into the relationship between SRM practices and supply chain performance across diverse contexts in Kenya (Wachiuri, 2023; Muthoni & Wanjiru, 2021).

Geographical Research Gap

Geographically, existing research predominantly focuses on firms operating in Nairobi, which is the economic hub of Kenya. This creates a geographical gap as the results may not be fully representative of rural or other urban areas in Kenya where infrastructure and business operations differ significantly. Exploring SRM practices in regions outside Nairobi could provide a more holistic understanding of the impact of SRM on supply chain performance across Kenya's diverse geographic and economic landscape, including rural supply chains in agricultural sectors (Otieno & Awuor, 2021). Expanding research to include regions beyond Nairobi would allow for a more representative and inclusive analysis of SRM's role in various Kenyan supply chains (Kamau, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) plays a pivotal role in shaping the performance of supply chains in Kenya. The study highlights that factors such as collaboration, communication, and trust are central to enhancing critical supply chain metrics such as delivery reliability, inventory turnover, and cost efficiency. Kenyan firms that implement robust SRM practices, particularly those that foster long-term, strategic relationships with suppliers, tend to experience improved operational outcomes, reduced costs, and enhanced customer satisfaction. However, the study also identifies gaps in the current SRM framework, particularly in sectors outside manufacturing and retail, and calls for further research to explore the impact of SRM in other industries such as agriculture and logistics. Additionally, while SRM practices have been shown to improve performance in Nairobi-based firms, the research suggests a need to extend these studies to rural and regional areas to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities within Kenya's diverse economic landscape. In light of these findings, it is recommended that Kenyan firms adopt advanced communication technologies, invest in employee training, and develop more formalized, long-term relationships with suppliers to optimize their supply chain performance and remain competitive in an increasingly globalized market.

Recommendations

Theory

The study on the impact of Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) on supply chain performance in Kenya provides valuable insights that contribute to the theoretical understanding of SRM in developing economies. One key recommendation is the development of a contextualized SRM model tailored to the Kenyan market, emphasizing factors such as communication quality, trust, and collaboration in supplier relationships. This model could integrate transaction cost economics and social exchange theory, considering the unique challenges Kenyan firms face, such as infrastructure limitations and market volatility. Further, future research should explore how SRM practices influence other aspects of supply chain performance, including innovation, sustainability, and resilience, especially in response to external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic. By extending existing theories with a local focus, scholars can bridge the gap between global SRM frameworks and the specific realities of Kenyan and similar developing economies.

Practice

From a practical perspective, Kenyan businesses, especially in sectors like manufacturing, retail, and agriculture, can significantly enhance their supply chain performance by formalizing SRM practices. Firms are encouraged to invest in digital tools for real-time communication and forecasting to improve inventory management and reduce stockouts. Additionally, employee training programs should be implemented to build competencies in relationship management, negotiation, and performance evaluation. Kenyan firms must also prioritize building long-term, strategic relationships with suppliers, rather than relying on transactional, short-term contracts, to foster collaboration and mutual trust. By adopting these best practices, companies can optimize delivery reliability, inventory turnover, and cost efficiency, thus gaining a competitive edge in the local and global market.

Policy

For policy development, the government and industry regulators in Kenya should encourage public-private partnerships to foster a culture of collaborative SRM across industries. Policies should be introduced to incentivize the adoption of SRM practices, such as tax relief or financial support for companies investing in digital tools and long-term supplier contracts. Additionally, the government should support capacity-building initiatives that equip local suppliers with the necessary skills to meet the performance standards required by large firms. Furthermore, regulatory bodies can help establish clear SRM guidelines to standardize practices across sectors, ensuring consistency and transparency. These policy measures can create an enabling environment where SRM practices thrive, leading to sustainable supply chain performance improvements in Kenya.

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