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Editorial

We are pleased to present the regular special issue of JABEM, which features three exciting articles from three emerging markets in Asia and Africa. These three articles were carefully selected to represent diversity in topic, region, and methodology.

In the lead article, Redda examines the nexus between utilitarian and hedonic motivations, online shopping satisfaction, and purchase intentions, focusing on the mediating role of online shopping satisfaction. Employing a descriptive research design and a single cross-sectional survey in South Africa, the results indicate that both utilitarian and hedonic motivations are significant predictors of online shopping satisfaction, which, in turn, influences purchase intentions. However, utilitarian motivations exhibit a stronger predictive power for online shopping satisfaction than hedonic ones. Further, online shopping satisfaction does not appear to mediate the relationship between utilitarian motivations and purchase intentions; however, it partially mediates the relationship between hedonic motivations and purchase intentions. By balancing utilitarian and hedonic elements, business managers can cater to diverse motivational needs, fostering stronger customer relationships and increasing revenue potential.

In the second article, Cauyan examines the impact of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) programs on cooperative membership growth, focusing on the mediating role of program beneficiaries in cooperatives. Based on the Stakeholder Theory, the study investigates the role of cooperative SDG programs in fostering trust, participation, and inclusive membership growth. Using an exploratory-descriptive quantitative research design, the study analyzes trends in SDG program participation, program beneficiary engagement, and cooperative membership growth by employing annual reports and organizational data. Findings show that while direct relationships are nonsignificant, persistent trends indicate aligned SDG programs support organizational legitimacy and stakeholder participation. Strategic interventions in health, education, and livelihoods are associated with increased program beneficiary participation and incremental growth in cooperative membership. The findings imply that cooperatives with SDG goals integrated into core business activities are likely to satisfy member demands and the expectations of the community. This study provides recommendations to cooperative managers and policymakers on implementing inclusive, impact-based programs that promote sustainable development and organizational resilience.

In the final article, Basera and Nyathi explore the influence of buyer-seller relationships on organizational competitiveness in the beverages industry. The research aimed to investigate the significance of building and maintaining strong buyer-seller relationships in enhancing the competitiveness of organizations operating in the highly competitive beverages market. Using a quantitative research methodology, they collected data through questionnaires. Results indicate that buyer-seller relationships in Zimbabwe's beverages industry led to increased customer loyalty, improved market responsiveness, enhanced product quality, and greater differentiation from competitors. Although achieving organizational competitiveness requires mutual understanding and commitment, the authors recommend that managers in the beverages industry should prioritize developing and maintaining strong buyer-seller relationships through improved communication, collaboration, mutual trust, and transparency among supply chain partners to achieve competitiveness.

In the book review section, Sriram reviews the book by Dana-Nicoleta Lascu entitled *International Marketing*. He assesses the value and quality of low-cost textbooks, with a specific focus on a global marketing book published by Textbook Media and intended for students enrolled in an elective international marketing class.

Trust this issue will be worth reading. Please do share your comments.

Dr Satyendra Singh

Editor-in-Chief, Journal of the Academy of Business and Emerging Markets



The nexus between utilitarian and hedonic motivations, online shopping satisfaction, and purchase intentions

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This study examines the nexus between utilitarian and hedonic motivations, online shopping satisfaction, and purchase intentions, focusing on the mediating role of online shopping satisfaction. Employing a descriptive research design and a single cross-sectional survey in South Africa, the results indicate that both utilitarian and hedonic motivations are significant predictors of online shopping satisfaction, which, in turn, influences purchase intentions. However, utilitarian motivations exhibit a stronger predictive power for online shopping satisfaction than hedonic ones. Further, online shopping satisfaction does not mediate the relationship between utilitarian motivations and purchase intentions; however, it partially mediates the relationship between hedonic motivations and purchase intentions. By balancing utilitarian and hedonic elements, business managers can cater to diverse motivational needs, fostering stronger customer relationships and increasing revenue potential.

Keywords: utilitarian, hedonic, satisfaction, intention, online shopping

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Introduction

Online shopping, or purchasing products through the Internet of Things (IoT), has become an integral part of our daily lives in many ways. While billions of people must still gain access to the Internet and be able to engage in activities such as online shopping, a significant number of people, including those in developing economies, have already done so. Figures from Statista (2024) indicate, "currently, there were 5.44b internet users worldwide, which amounted to 67 percent of the global population. Of this total, five billion, or 62 percent of the world's population, were social media users", offering an excellent opportunity for e-commerce. By the end of 2023, worldwide online shopping revenue was estimated at 6 trillion USD, projected to surpass eight trillion dollars by 2027. Smartphones accounted for almost 74 percent of retail site visits globally in the first quarter of 2023. They generated 63 percent of online shopping orders (Chevalier 2023), signifying the importance of mobile phone usage in consumers' daily activities.

COVID-19 has positively impacted the global adoption of online shopping and e-commerce. This is most likely one of the few positive impacts of the pandemic. During the first year of the COVID-19

outbreak, online consumer spending in South Africa increased by 68 percent (Newsroom 2020) and has been steadily growing. Beyond the points made above, there is a real business case for the phenomenal growth of the e-commerce industry. Businesses are drawn into online retailing and e-commerce because of the unique opportunity created by the Internet to reach a large and diverse consumer base, which results in reduced costs of maintaining *brick and mortar* stores and reduced labor costs. Similarly, consumers are drawn to online shopping due to its convenience.

As elucidated above, online shopping has become a popular and easy way to purchase products and services, and understanding what influences customer satisfaction and purchase intention in the online environment is therefore crucial. Briefly described, utilitarian motivation refers to the practical benefits of a product or service, such as price, quality, performance, convenience, dependability, or reliability (Babin & Harris 2016). In contrast, hedonic motivations are more emotional in nature, such as pleasure derived from using the product or service (Arnold & Reynolds 2003). Evidence in the literature suggests that utilitarian and hedonic motivations positively contribute to customer satisfaction (Anand et al. 2019), and customer satisfaction positively influences purchase intentions (Bai, Law & Wen 2008). This study, therefore, aims to investigate the nexus between utilitarian and hedonic motivations, online shopping satisfaction, and purchase intentions, with a particular focus on the mediating role of online shopping satisfaction. By doing so, the study aims to bridge the existing gap in the literature and provide valuable empirical insights, as no prior research has specifically addressed this issue. This research intends to fill the void by offering a comprehensive analysis and contributing to the academic discourse, which currently lacks a thorough exploration of the subject.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Utilitarian Motivation

Utilitarian motivation refers to the "gratification derived from something that enables the consumer to solve problems or accomplish tasks" (Babin & Harris 2016). Utilitarian motivations are related to efficiency and logical decision-making processes; they pertain to an object's usefulness, functional value, worth, or qualities (Batra & Ahtola 1991). In other words, they are goal-oriented traits related to efficiency and logical decision-making; they pertain to an object's utility or functional value (Davis, Lang & Gautam 2013; Redda 2020). In the digital marketplace, utilitarian motivations manifest in various ways, such as the pursuit of time savings, cost-effectiveness, or the convenience of accessing products online (Fang et al. 2016). These motivations are often seen in consumers who prioritize product features, reliability, and overall value for money when purchasing. For instance, a consumer with utilitarian motivations might prefer online shopping for the ability to quickly compare prices, read reviews, or find specific items without the need for physical store visits (Davis et al. 2013)

Literature has shown that utilitarian motivations are crucial in shaping online shopping satisfaction and subsequent purchase intentions. For example, consumers with strong utilitarian motivations tend to focus on the efficiency and effectiveness of their shopping experience, which directly influences their satisfaction levels. This, in turn, enhances the likelihood of repeat purchases and positive purchase intentions (Lee & Wu 2017). Understanding the impact of utilitarian motivations on consumer behavior is essential for e-commerce platforms aiming to cater to consumers seeking practical and functional benefits in their online shopping experience.

Hedonic Motivation

Hedonic motivation refers to the drive to engage in activities primarily for the sake of experiencing pleasure, enjoyment, or emotional satisfaction (Batra & Ahtola 1991). In consumer behavior, hedonic motivation is the desire for sensory gratification, excitement, novelty, or fun that a person seeks from a product or service. Hedonic attributes include sensory experiences such as emotion, satisfaction, and

fantasy (Arnold & Reynolds 2003). As a result, emotional or sensory shopping experiences are the driving factors of hedonic consumption incentives (Redda 2020). In hedonic shopping, consumers emphasize the shopping process (To et al. 2007).

Hedonic motivation often leads consumers to prioritize the enjoyment of the shopping journey rather than acquiring specific products or services (Kim, Lee & Kim 2011). This drive for sensory pleasure and emotional engagement is evident in impulse buying, browsing for enjoyment, and exploring new or unique products (Ponsignon, Bauman & Lunardo 2024). Consumers motivated by hedonic factors may derive satisfaction from the aesthetics of a product, the joy of discovering new items, or the thrill of an unexpected find, emphasizing the experiential aspects of shopping (Haq, Khan & Ghouri 2014).

Research suggests that hedonic motivations significantly influence online shopping behavior, particularly in environments that offer rich, immersive experiences (Chang et al. 2023). For instance, online platforms that provide visually appealing interfaces, personalized content, and interactive features can enhance the hedonic value of shopping, fostering greater engagement and emotional satisfaction (Bilgihan, Kandampully & Zhang 2016). The emphasis on the sensory and emotional aspects of shopping underlines the importance of creating compelling digital environments that cater to hedonic consumers, who are driven not just by the end purchase but by the pleasurable experiences encountered along the way (Lee & Wu 2017). Understanding hedonic motivation is therefore essential for e-commerce platforms aiming to attract and retain consumers who value the experiential dimensions of shopping.

Online Shopping Satisfaction

When considering online shopping satisfaction, it is important to understand how utilitarian and hedonic values can contribute. Utilitarian value is important in satisfaction because it relates directly to practical concerns about the product or service being purchased (Anitha & Krishnan 2021). If customers feel that they are getting good value for their money—in terms of quality, price, and performance—they will be more satisfied with their purchase decisions (Davis et al. 2013). Hedonic motivation also contributes significantly to overall satisfaction with an online shopping experience (Evelina et al. 2020). This is because customers often derive pleasure from their purchases; they may be excited about acquiring something new or feel good about finding a bargain price on an item they want (Kertasunjaya, Mediasari & Manaf 2020). These emotional responses help create an overall enjoyable customer experience when shopping online.

Online Purchase Intention and Satisfaction as a Mediator

Online purchase intention refers to a consumer's conscious plan or willingness to buy a product or service through an online platform (Meskaran, Ismail & Shanmugam 2013). It represents the cognitive and affective components of a consumer's decision-making process, reflecting the likelihood that they will complete an online transaction (Chen, Lu & Wang 2017). Few studies have explored the mediating role of satisfaction, for example, between hedonic and utilitarian and e-loyalty (Doghan & Albarq 2022), between website quality and intention (Tandon, Kiran & Sah 2017), and between e-service quality and purchase intention (Lestari & Ellyawati 2019). However, the mediating role of online shopping satisfaction in the relationship between utilitarian and hedonic motivations and purchase intentions, consumer behavior within digital contexts is unexplored. Therefore, this study provides insights into how e-commerce platforms can optimize their strategies to enhance customer satisfaction and drive purchase intentions by focusing on utilitarian and hedonic motivational drivers. By examining the interplay between these factors, this study addresses a gap in the literature regarding their combined effect on online shopping behaviors and purchase intentions. Such understanding is crucial for e-commerce retailers seeking to improve customer engagement and conversion rates in highly competitive online markets.

Research Objectives

As elucidated above, utilitarian motivation is based on an action or decision's practical, functional, or instrumental value. Individuals motivated by utilitarian considerations focus on achieving practical benefits or solving problems. They prioritize efficiency, effectiveness, and the usefulness of their choices. In contrast, hedonic motivation is driven by the pursuit of pleasure, enjoyment, and sensory gratification. People with hedonic motivations seek experiences or products that offer immediate satisfaction, comfort, or indulgence. Utilitarian and hedonic motivations often intersect in consumer decision-making, with individuals evaluating practical benefits alongside personal enjoyment. Recognizing and understanding these motivations is essential for businesses and marketers, as it allows them to craft targeted marketing strategies, develop appealing products, and deliver services that resonate with a diverse consumer base. By addressing both the practical and emotional aspects of consumer needs and desires, businesses can create more compelling value propositions and enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. Accordingly, the following questions have been formulated to guide the study: (1) Do utilitarian and hedonic motivations influence customer satisfaction in an online shopping environment? (2) Do utilitarian and hedonic motivations directly influence online purchase intentions? (3) Does online shopping satisfaction directly influence online purchase intentions? (4) Does online shopping satisfaction play a mediating or intervening role between the two motivations (utilitarian and hedonic motivations) and online purchase intentions?

In line with the literature review and research questions, the study aims to examine the nexus between utilitarian and hedonic motivations, online shopping satisfaction, and purchase intentions, with a particular focus on the mediating role of online shopping satisfaction

Hypotheses Formulation

The section below elucidates the hypothesis formation in support of the research objective of the study.

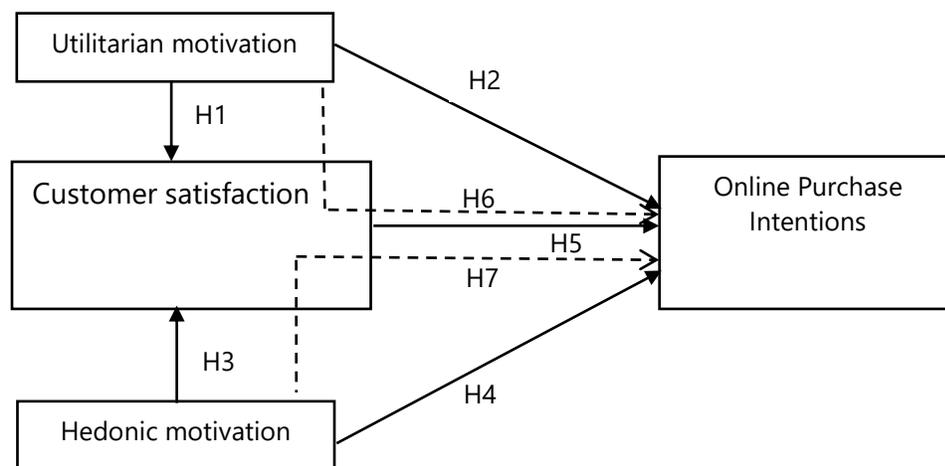


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: the author. Dotted lines = mediation.

Utilitarian Motivation on Online Shopping Satisfaction and Purchase Intentions

Utilitarian motivation can be described as goal-oriented behavior where customers seek efficiency, convenience, and functional benefits during their online shopping experience. Previous research suggests that when online platforms meet utilitarian needs, customers are likely to feel satisfied (Redda 2024). For

instance, consumers driven by strong utilitarian motivations prioritize the efficiency and effectiveness of their shopping experience, which directly impacts their satisfaction levels (Lee & Wu 2017). One can, therefore, argue that when online shopping experiences align more closely with consumers' utilitarian expectations, such as efficiency, reliability, and ease of use, customer satisfaction is likely to be significantly enhanced. Consumers driven by utilitarian motives seek a seamless, goal-oriented shopping process that minimizes effort and maximizes functionality. When online platforms effectively cater to such expectations by offering streamlined navigation, clear product descriptions, fast checkout processes, and dependable delivery services, shoppers are more likely to perceive the experience as valuable and satisfying (Khan et al. 2023). Accordingly, the study posits that:

H1. Utilitarian motivation positively impacts customer satisfaction.

Customers driven by utilitarian motives are more likely to prioritize functional and practical aspects of online platforms, such as ease of navigation, quick transactions, and reliable services (Febrilia, Rahmi, Lada & Chekima 2024). Such attributes are said to directly influence their purchasing decisions, independent of satisfaction (Fülöp et al. 2023). When consumers perceive online shopping as an effective means to fulfill their functional needs, they are more inclined to complete transactions, as the perceived benefits outweigh potential uncertainties. Factors such as ease of navigation, quick access to product information, secure payment methods, and reliable delivery services enhance the efficiency and practicality of online shopping, reinforcing consumers' confidence in the purchasing process (Islam 2024). Additionally, utilitarian shoppers prioritize the ability to compare prices, access discounts, and find specific products with minimal effort, further strengthening their purchase intentions (Chang et al. 2023). Since utilitarian motivation is rooted in goal-oriented and rational decision-making, consumers are more likely to complete transactions when e-commerce platforms meet their expectations for convenience and functionality. Consequently, utilitarian motivation acts as a critical driver of online purchase intentions by reducing decision-making complexity, increasing perceived value, and ensuring a seamless shopping experience (Magai 2024). Thus, it is postulated that:

H2. Utilitarian motivation positively influences online purchase intentions.

Hedonic Motivation – Customer Satisfaction and Online Purchase Intentions

Hedonic motivation enhances online shopping satisfaction by creating enjoyable, immersive, and emotionally engaging experiences. Hedonic motivation is associated with the enjoyment, pleasure, and emotional gratification derived from the shopping experience, directly influencing customer satisfaction (Magai 2024). Online platforms offering engaging content, aesthetic appeal, and interactive features often enhance customers' emotional satisfaction (Cai & Xu 2011). Redda (2024) found that "status, adventure, social shopping, idea shopping, and gratification," dimensions of hedonic motivation, significantly contribute to customer satisfaction. In line with this literature evidence, the third hypothesis is as follows:

H3. Hedonic motivation positively impacts customer satisfaction.

Hedonic motivation, driven by the pursuit of enjoyment, sensory stimulation, and emotional gratification, plays a crucial role in shaping online purchase intentions (Fülöp et al. 2023). Unlike utilitarian consumers, hedonic shoppers engage in online shopping for pleasure, entertainment, and experiential value rather than solely for functional benefits (Parker & Wang 2016). Research indicates that visually appealing websites, interactive features, and personalized recommendations enhance the enjoyment of online shopping, thereby increasing purchase likelihood (Koufaris 2002). Hedonic motivation encourages impulse buying, as emotionally driven shoppers are more likely to be influenced by persuasive triggers like flash

sales, exclusive deals, and visually appealing product displays (Platon 2024). One can argue that by creating an enjoyable and immersive shopping experience, e-commerce platforms can leverage hedonic motivation to strengthen consumer engagement and positively influence online purchase intentions. The study thus hypothesizes that:

H4. Hedonic motivation positively influences online purchase intentions.

Customer Satisfaction — Online Purchase Intentions

The concept of satisfaction, referring to consumers' fulfilment response (Oliver, Rust & Varki 1997), is viewed as a comparison between customer expectations and experience of the actual delivery of a product or a service (Bloemer & De Ruyter 2017), and it plays a pivotal role in any kind of business. Literature suggests that when consumers are content with their online shopping experiences, they are more likely to make repeat purchases and recommend the platform to others. For example, the study by Coker (2013) identifies four key dimensions, navigation, content, performance, and trust, that significantly influence website satisfaction and customer loyalty. Satisfied customers exhibit higher loyalty and engage in positive word-of-mouth, further enhancing the retailer's reputation and attracting new customers (Maxham 2001). Therefore, ensuring high levels of customer satisfaction is essential for fostering positive online purchase intentions and sustaining business growth (Coker 2013). In line with this narrative, this study posits that:

H5. Customer satisfaction positively influences online purchase intentions.

Customer Satisfaction as a Mediator

Customer satisfaction as a construct has been treated as a mediator in a variety of contexts, between website quality and purchase intentions (Tandon et al. 2017), between satisfaction and loyalty (Picón Castro & Roldán 2014), between e-satisfaction and online purchase intentions (Trivedi & Yadav 2018), and between E-banking quality and customer loyalty (Redda 2023). Other studies that attempted to explore the mediating role of satisfaction include Doghan and Albarq (2022), between hedonic and utilitarian and e-loyalty, Tandon, Kiran and Sah (2017), between website quality and intention, and Lestari and Ellyawati (2019), between e-service quality and purchase intention.

The present study aims to test the mediating role of customer satisfaction between the two motivations (utilitarian and hedonic motivations) and purchase intentions, which are currently not covered in empirical studies. Thus, this study argues that customer satisfaction is pivotal in mediating the relationship between utilitarian and hedonic motivations and online purchase intentions. For instance, when online retailers effectively cater to utilitarian motivations by offering user-friendly interfaces, efficient navigation, and reliable services, customers' functional needs are met, increasing satisfaction. This heightened satisfaction may subsequently enhance their intention to make purchases. Conversely, when retailers provide engaging, aesthetically pleasing, and enjoyable shopping experiences that appeal to hedonic motivations, customers derive pleasure from the process, which may result in greater satisfaction and a higher likelihood of purchasing. By addressing both utilitarian and hedonic aspects of their online businesses, retailers can effectively enhance customer satisfaction, positively influencing online purchase intentions. Based on the literature reviewed above and the argument put forward, this study postulates the following two hypotheses:

H6. Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between utilitarian motivation and online purchase intention.

H7. Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between hedonic motivation and online purchase intentions.

Methodology

A descriptive research design with a quantitative method was applied in this study. The study employed non-probability sampling strategies such as convenience and snowball sampling. A structured self-administered questionnaire was issued using *SurveyMonkey* to collect data from diverse internet buyers in Gauteng—South Africa’s economic hub. Using this data collection method, 215 valid responses were received and analyzed. The study conformed to ethical standards and obtained ethics clearance. This study's variables and measuring items for the utilitarian, hedonic, and satisfaction components were derived from previously validated instruments. A mediation analysis was performed using the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2018) to explore the mediating role of online shopping satisfaction in the relationship between hedonic and utilitarian motivations and online purchase intentions. Non-parametric bootstrapping was employed to test the indirect effect. The analysis utilized 50,000 bootstrap samples, with the percentile bootstrap estimation method and a 95% confidence interval (Shrout & Bolger 2002).

Analyses and Results

Table 1 reports the correlation coefficient between the four study constructs. The results indicate a significant positive association between each pair of the study constructs. The signs of the correlation were as expected and logically pointed toward the nomological validity of the measurement theory. Multicollinearity was not an issue as the coefficients are below .9 and VIF under 10. Similarly, Cronbach's Alphas (>.7) suggest the internal consistency and reliability of the scales.

Table 1. Correlation Analysis

	Utilitarian	Hedonic	Satisfaction	Intentions
Utilitarian	1			
Hedonic	.80**	1		
Satisfaction	.75**	.69**	1	
Intentions	.45**	.69**	.40**	1

** $p < .001$

Table 2 illustrates the results of the beta coefficients of the regression analysis (adjusted $R^2 = .59$). The two motivations (hedonic and utilitarian motivations), the independent variables (IVs), were regressed with customer satisfaction, the dependent variable (DV). H1, postulated as *utilitarian motivation positively impacts customer satisfaction*, is accepted ($\beta = .57$, $p < .00$). Similarly, H3, posited as *hedonic motivation positively impacts customer satisfaction*, is accepted ($\beta = .22$, $p < .00$). Regarding effect size, utilitarian motivations ($\beta = .57$) have a stronger predictor of customer satisfaction than hedonic motivations ($\beta = .33$). This finding corroborates the findings of Lee and Wu (2017), who found “the effect of utilitarian value on satisfaction to be greater than that of hedonic value.”

Table 2. Coefficients of Regression Analysis – DV: Customer Satisfaction

	Unstandardized	Standardized	p	VIF	Results
Constant	-.26		.46		
Utilitarian	.74	.57	.00	2.85	H1 → supported
Hedonic	.33	.22	.00	2.85	H3 → supported

H2, utilitarian motivation positively influences online purchase intentions, is supported ($\beta = .46$, $p < .00$). H6, customer satisfaction does not mediate the relationship between utilitarian motivation and online

purchase intentions ($\beta=.14, p>.05$). Customer satisfaction was also tested (Regression adjusted $R^2=.16$) as a predictor of purchase intentions. $H5$, customer satisfaction has a significant positive effect on online purchase intention, is not accepted ($\beta=.15, p>.05$). $H4$, hedonic motivation positively influences online purchase intentions, is supported ($\beta=.17, p<.05$). $H7$, customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between hedonic motivation and online purchase intention ($\beta=.14, p<.05$). However, since the direct effect of hedonic motivation on online purchase intention remained significant ($p<.01$) even after accounting for the mediation effect of satisfaction, this mediation is classified as partial mediation (Hayes 2018).

Table 3. Path Analysis Results

<i>Paths</i>	<i>Effects</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Results</i>
Utilitarian → Intention	.46	.00	$H2$: Supported
Satisfaction → Intention	.15	.12	$H5$: Not supported
Utilitarian → Satisfaction → Intention	.14	.11	$H6$: Not supported
Hedonic → Intention	.17	.00	$H4$: Supported
Hedonic → Satisfaction → Intention	.14	.00	$H7$: Supported

Discussion

We can draw several conclusions regarding the nexus between utilitarian motivations, hedonic motivations, online shopping satisfaction, and online purchase intentions. The analysis indicates no significant mediating role of online shopping satisfaction in the relationship between utilitarian motivations and online purchase intentions. This means that the influence of utilitarian motivations on online purchase intentions is not significantly channeled through online shopping satisfaction. However, the mediation analysis does show evidence of partial mediation between hedonic motivations and online purchase intentions through the online shopping satisfaction of consumers. This suggests that while hedonic motivations directly impact online purchase intentions, a portion of their influence is passed through customer satisfaction. In other words, online shopping satisfaction acts as a mediator, partially explaining the relationship between hedonic motivations and online purchase intentions. The findings of the present research add to the growing body of knowledge of prior studies that have explored the mediating role of satisfaction within other contexts, such as between hedonic and utilitarian and e-loyalty (Doghan & Albarq 2022), between website quality and intention (Tandon et al. 2017), and between e-service quality and purchase intention (Lestari & Ellyawati 2019).

Online shopping, facilitated by the Internet and the Internet of Things (IoT), has become an essential part of modern life, though many people worldwide still lack access. A substantial number, however, including those in developing economies, are already engaged in online shopping. Mobile devices play a crucial role in this growth, accounting for nearly 74 percent of retail site visits and 63 percent of online shopping orders in early 2023, highlighting the importance of smartphones in daily consumer behavior.

Given the importance of e-commerce in the global economy, this study contributes to the expanding body of research on online shopping behavior by offering deeper insights into how consumers make decisions in digital environments. The findings reveal that utilitarian and hedonic motivations significantly predict online shopping satisfaction, subsequently influencing online purchase intentions. Moreover, the study shows that utilitarian motivations exert a stronger effect on shopping satisfaction than hedonic motivations.

The mediation analysis part of the study indicates that online shopping satisfaction does not play a significant mediating role in the link between utilitarian motivations and online purchase intentions. This means that the level of online shopping satisfaction does not primarily influence the impact of utilitarian motivations on online purchase intentions. In contrast, the mediation analysis provides evidence of partial

mediation between hedonic motivations and online purchase intentions through online shopping satisfaction. This indicates that while hedonic motivations directly affect online purchase intentions, a portion of their influence is conveyed through the level of online shopping satisfaction experienced by consumers. In simpler terms, online shopping satisfaction acts as a mediator, partially explaining the connection between hedonic motivations and online purchase intentions.

Conclusion

This study's findings offer valuable insights into the underlying mechanisms that drive online purchase intentions, considering consumers' motivations and satisfaction within the context of online shopping. Recognizing the role of mediating variables, such as online shopping satisfaction, could benefit businesses and marketers, as it enables them to develop targeted strategies to enhance consumer satisfaction and optimize online purchase behavior. However, it is crucial to remember that the conclusions made from this study are specific to the data and context of this study. To ensure the generalizability and reliability of the results, further research and replication studies should be carried out in various contexts and with diverse samples.

This study provides valuable insights into the interplay between utilitarian and hedonic motivations, online shopping satisfaction, and purchase intentions. However, future research could explore the role of additional moderating variables, such as trust, perceived risk, and personal involvement, to gain deeper insight. Longitudinal studies could also provide a deeper understanding of how consumer motivations and satisfaction evolve over time. Expanding the study to different cultural and economic contexts could also enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, as any study does. Using a cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish causality between the studied variables. The sample was drawn from South African online consumers, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other markets. Additionally, it must be noted that the reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability and response biases, potentially affecting the accuracy of the results.

The findings offer actionable insights for e-commerce managers seeking to optimize consumer engagement and purchase intentions. Given the strong influence of utilitarian motivations on online shopping satisfaction, managers may focus on enhancing functional aspects such as website usability, transaction efficiency, and product reliability. Integrating immersive and enjoyable shopping experiences—such as interactive content and personalized recommendations can further drive customer satisfaction and repeat purchases.

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Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) programs and cooperative membership growth: the mediating role of program beneficiaries

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This study examines the impact of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) programs on cooperative membership growth, focusing on the mediating role of program beneficiaries in cooperatives. Based on the Stakeholder Theory, the study investigates the role of cooperative SDG programs in fostering trust, participation, and inclusive membership growth. Using an exploratory-descriptive quantitative research design, the study analyzes trends in SDG program participation, program beneficiary engagement, and cooperative membership growth by employing annual reports and organizational data. Findings show that while direct relationships are nonsignificant, persistent trends indicate aligned SDG programs support organizational legitimacy and stakeholder participation. Strategic interventions in health, education, and livelihoods are associated with increased program beneficiary participation and incremental growth in cooperative membership. The findings imply that cooperatives with SDG goals integrated into core business activities are likely to satisfy member demands and the expectations of the community. This study provides recommendations to cooperative managers and policymakers on implementing inclusive, impact-based programs that promote sustainable development and organizational resilience.

Keywords: cooperative, membership growth, SDG programs, Stakeholder Theory

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Introduction

The United Nations has established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an international framework to address the issues of poverty, healthcare, education, and climate change. The cooperative model, which emphasizes active member participation and shared ownership, is effective in promoting the achievement of the SDGs. The cooperative model of member participation and community participation is also aligned with the SDGs' emphasis on inclusivity and sustainable development (Iyer et al. 2020). Cooperatives in the Philippines play a crucial role in driving socioeconomic growth, alleviating poverty, and expanding financial access to society. Their ability to mobilize local funds, provide inclusive services at reasonable rates, and build social networks positions cooperatives at the center stage of the country's development agenda (Gas-ib-Carbonel 2019). While the role of cooperatives in SDG promotion has been

recognized, there is a lack of empirical research on the impact of SDG programs on the internal organization of cooperatives, especially cooperative membership growth. Cooperative membership growth is a crucial measure of a cooperative's sustainability, as it reflects the effectiveness of resource mobilization, member participation, and the retention of committed members who are ideologically aligned with the cooperative's vision and mission (Birchall & Simmons 2004). While the social impact of SDG programs, including alleviating poverty and empowering people, has been well documented in the academic literature, a gap remains concerning their direct and indirect effects on cooperative membership growth in cooperatives (Díaz de León et al. 2021). This gap limits the capacity of cooperative leadership to design effective SDG programs that can pursue social goals and guarantee organizational sustainability. It is, therefore, essential to integrate SDG programs into the strategic plans and governance structures of cooperatives.

Organizations acquire legitimacy and credibility by acting in the best interest of their stakeholders, as posited by Stakeholder Theory (Freeman & McVea 2001). This research examines the link between SDG programs and the cooperative membership growth rate. It explores the mediating role of program beneficiaries—affected and participating individuals and organizations—between cooperative activity and cooperative membership growth. Such data are of particular value to cooperative leaders seeking to leverage SDG programs as strategic levers to promote trust, legitimacy, and sustainable development among cooperatives. The purpose of this research is to determine the direct impact of SDG programs on cooperative membership growth, the effects of SDG programs on the number of program beneficiaries, and whether or not such program beneficiaries are a mediating variable between SDG programs and cooperative membership growth in cooperatives. The following sections provide a literature review, conceptual framework, hypotheses, and methodology, followed by the results and discussion.

Literature Review

Cooperatives are increasingly engaging in SDG-related activities in response to international appeals for social justice, environmental protection, and inclusive economic development. The activities have been classified into programs and initiatives that align organizational strategies with the SDGs, as well as strategic development objectives such as poverty reduction, improved health outcomes, enhanced education, women's empowerment, and climate resilience building (Battaglia et al. 2020). Cooperative organizations consider their engagements in such activities as real, not symbolic. Instead, it is regarded as a deliberate strategy to demonstrate relevance, acquire legitimacy, and reaffirm a long-term commitment to sustainable development (Dave & González Blanco 2020). The integration of SDG programs with the cooperative models is best understood by applying Stakeholder Theory, which asserts that organizations generate value and legitimacy by balancing the interests of all the stakeholder groups. In the cooperative model, a multilateral, diverse group of stakeholders comprises members, employees, program participants, and community constituents. Becchetti et al. (2013) highlight that membership in cooperatives is a natural source of trust and reliability building, critical elements for strong stakeholder relationships. The value of trust is supported by the fact that members serve in different roles, including users, owners, and champions. The dual role of cooperative members as stakeholders and decision-makers enhances the strategic value of trust creation through the effective implementation of socially focused programs. Democratic governance is the core framework facilitating the involvement of stakeholders in cooperatives. Novkovic (2008) finds that cooperatives have an inherent ability to balance economic and social goals through participative governance frameworks. Programs implemented in such a democratic environment are likely to achieve maximum levels of acceptance, support, and tolerance among members.

Recent research highlights the significance of digital transformation and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices in fostering stakeholder engagement within cooperative movements. Filippi et

al. (2023) find that digital technology has opened up communication channels for cooperatives, facilitated data-based decision-making, and promoted program inclusivity. The study has implications for the SDGs because program performance requires real-time feedback, open monitoring, and active member engagement. Lafont et al. (2023) agree that a sense of progress by a cooperative leader towards the SDGs is key in setting direction and guiding stakeholders. This supports the widespread existence of transformative leadership as a key to the program implementation of SDGs through engagement and collective efficacy. Bijman et al. (2014) argue that these approaches are rooted in the principles of the cooperative movement, resulting in institutions that are responsive to community needs, regardless of changes in the socioeconomic environment. The impact of SDG programs on organizational progress depends not only on strategic planning but also on intangible assets that cooperatives rely on for their success. Schaltegger et al. (2018) suggest that integrating sustainability into organizational frameworks strengthens stakeholder relationships, as evidenced by increased membership. Mazzarol et al. (2013) find that cooperatives are strategic networks that interact better with stakeholders through strong social programs. Open planning and program implementation also strengthen such interaction. Zeng et al. (2023) demonstrate that transparent governance in cooperative operations fosters stakeholder trust and facilitates active participation. These studies indicate that SDG programs are more than symbolism; they are effective ways to develop membership. Mozas-Moral et al. (2020) argue that trust, social capital, and legitimacy are critical drivers that facilitate the nexus between sustainability initiatives and tangible sustainable organizational outcomes. SDG programs cannot be regarded as standalone activities but rather conceptualized as part of a cohesive strategy aimed at raising the internal social capital base of cooperatives. The intangible assets discussed above serve as building blocks for resilience and competitive differentiation. Despite the growing institutional emphasis on aligning with the SDGs, research gaps remain. Borzaga and Galera (2016) argue that, although cooperatives are implementing numerous sustainability programs, there is still a pertinent lack of empirical evidence directly associating these programs with internal performance indicators, such as cooperative membership growth. Even if the theoretical rationale is robust, the shortage of quantitative and longitudinal evidence limits cooperative managers in assessing the overall organizational impact of their sustainability programs.

Another area that has not been adequately examined is the mediating role of the program beneficiaries in the cooperative development and the SDG programs process. Carini et al. (2024) observe the very significant role of program beneficiaries—those directly involved in cooperative programs—to evolve into active members influencing organizational development. Within this dynamic, program beneficiaries' perceptions of trust and satisfaction emerge as critical factors in converting casual program engagement into formal membership. This relationship mirrors findings in the banking sector, where trust significantly enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty (Alejandrino & Palma-Samson 2023). This shows that cooperatives, by delivering relevant and socially responsive SDG programs, can foster durable stakeholder relationships anchored in perceived value. The connection between service quality and stakeholder satisfaction, as established in financial institutions (Hoang & Nguyen 2022), further emphasizes the role of program delivery excellence in meeting expectations. Applied to cooperatives, these insights imply that beneficiaries who perceive responsiveness and value in SDG programs are more inclined to formalize their association through membership. This beneficiary-to-member transformation is especially relevant for cooperatives aiming to achieve maximal social impact and intraorganizational vitality. It is crucial to understand how program beneficiaries' experiences influence their intentions to formalize participation through membership, thus maximizing program design and cooperatives' sustainability. The literature affirms the strategic importance of SDG programs to cooperative firms. Not only do the activities reinforce the social values embedded in the cooperative form, but they also engage the relational and structural drivers—participation, trust, legitimacy—that fuel long-term development. The limited empirical evidence documenting SDG programs and internal achievement, such as

cooperative membership growth, validates the call for specialized research, particularly within the Philippine context.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study draws on Stakeholder Theory, which posits that organizations can create lasting value, acquire legitimacy, and achieve sustainability by aligning their operations with the interests, needs, and expectations of various stakeholders (Afolabi & Ganiyu 2021). Unlike traditional businesses, where shareholders hold the dominant position, cooperatives operate under a unique system in which members serve in a dual role as both owners and beneficiaries. This dual capacity renders stakeholder alignment not only a strategic imperative but also a prerequisite for collaborative success. Ritala et al. (2021) suggest that member participation, trust, and perceived value in stakeholder-oriented models are inexorably linked with the resilience and advancement of the firm. SDG programs are planned and intentional projects initiated by cooperatives aimed at enhancing their engagement in global sustainability while pursuing their respective social and economic goals. SDG programs encompass a diverse range of community-based initiatives, including poverty alleviation programs, education for all, gender equality, improved healthcare, and adaptation to climate change. According to Wanyama (2016), such projects are inherent to the nature of cooperatives and hence strengthen the cooperatives' identity as development and social responsibility institutions. Such projects also enhance the cooperatives' credibility among stakeholders, as they demonstrate the organization's responsiveness to the community's well-being and its adaptability to the evolving needs of society. Hamann et al. (2018) argue that trust and accountability are crucial for establishing long-term relationships between stakeholders and organizations. Where SDGs are well-defined and well-implemented in an open system, institutions are highly responsive. These accountability systems not only retain current members but also attract potential members who are eager to join socially responsible cooperatives. SDG programs serve as dual mechanisms for the social production of value and organizational branding, enabling cooperatives to establish and maintain trust among members and the broader public.

The beneficiaries' position in the program is a key element in this model. Program beneficiaries who derive high levels of value from cooperative programs are more likely to establish trust in the organization and seek to formalize their relationship as members (Dave & González Blanco 2020). Program beneficiaries are an organic connection between a cooperative's social programs and its development goals. Their positive experience suggests that the cooperative's impact on membership growth is significant. Such cultural transformation from being a beneficiary to becoming a member is a process of conversion based on trust, where perceived value enables the expansion of formal membership in the organization.

The theoretical background is complemented by the Philippine operational environment of cooperatives, which prioritizes participatory governance and community participation. Moon and Lee (2020) elaborate that Philippine cooperatives are particularly recognized for their decision-making mechanisms that prioritize stakeholder involvement and responsiveness to local needs. Such governance frameworks enhance the legitimacy of SDG programs by guaranteeing that such programs are responsive to the actual priorities of stakeholders. Such responsiveness not only increases the quality of acceptance but also the quality of implementation and mutual trust among members. Doherty et al. (2014) describe cooperatives as hybrid organizations that integrate social and economic foundations to engage in value creation approaches in search of balance. Their ability to combine mission-driven activities with market operations allows them to effectively utilize SDG programs, creating both social value and institutional resilience. The hybrid nature enables cooperatives to create intangible resources, such as trust, social capital, and community integration that are essential for sustaining cooperative membership growth.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model for this study. The model outlines that SDG programs influence cooperative membership growth through two distinct paths: a direct path, where SDG programs enhance organizational legitimacy and trust, and an indirect path, where program beneficiaries serve as intermediaries by interpreting their positive program experience into increased membership participation. The model emphasizes that sustainable cooperative development is not merely service provision—it is more about aligning services with stakeholder expectations, acquiring trust, and sharing value with economic and social undertones.

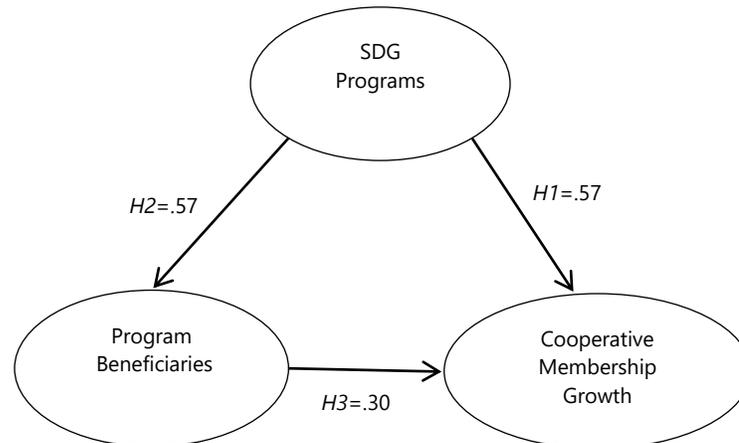


Figure 1. Conceptual framework with coefficients

Hypotheses Development

Cooperatives, by their very nature, are established on the assumption that their members play dual roles as both owners and beneficiaries of the services being offered (Novkovic 2008). The duality necessitates stakeholder alignment more than in the evaluation of the effects of sustainable development programs on major organizational indicators, including membership growth. Based on Stakeholder Theory and the literature, I suggest the following hypotheses to test the interrelationships between SDG programs, program beneficiaries, and cooperative membership growth in cooperatives:

The actions of cooperatives aligned with the SDGs are not merely symbolic statements of social responsibility. Such efforts, by their nature, are strategic and thus enable the construction of legitimacy, trust, and the recommitment of members. Sachs (2012) suggests aligning institutional action with social objectives, thereby enhancing organizational legitimacy and generating public trust. Trust is a key influencer of cooperative recruitment as well as membership retention through sustainability-based programs that are value-driven by the organization and responsive to community needs. The integration of sustainability into organizational frameworks strengthens stakeholder relationships, as evidenced by membership growth (Schaltegger et al. 2018). Cooperatives are strategic networks that interact more effectively with stakeholders through strong social programs (Mazzarol et al. 2013). Open planning and program implementation also strengthen such interaction. Zeng et al. (2023) find that transparent governance in cooperative operations strengthens stakeholder trust and enables active participation. These studies suggest that SDG programs are more than symbolism; they are effective ways to develop cooperative membership. So I propose to test first hypothesis:

H1. SDG programs influence cooperative membership growth.

SDG program's success in engaging many stakeholders depends on project design principles centered on social equity and inclusiveness as key themes. Stakeholder Theory suggests that employing inclusive strategies toward various stakeholders is crucial for organizational effectiveness and legitimacy (Frey & Sabbatino 2018). Imaz and Eizagirre (2020) find that responsible innovation in SDG programs increases awareness of changing social needs. In inclusive environments, inclusion is not only a normative requirement but also a strategic necessity. The co-creation of SDG programs increases transparency, which is important for reaching excluded stakeholder groups (Duguid & Rixon 2023). However, integrating corporate social responsibility with the SDGs enhances an organization's capacity to engage stakeholders (Kulkarni & Aggarwal 2022). When programs are co-designed with organizations and local communities, the trust and legitimacy generated foster greater stakeholder engagement (Díaz-Perdomo et al. 2021). Thus, the argument that SDG programs influence the number of program beneficiaries is grounded in their design elements, which emphasize inclusivity, transparency, and responsiveness to the community's needs. Hence, I propose the second hypothesis:

H2. SDG programs influence the number of program beneficiaries.

Those who realize meaningful impacts through collective action can become committed members, especially if legitimacy and trust are established through mutual interactions. Stakeholder Theory suggests that trust-based relationships are essential in building member commitment and fostering long-term organizational sustainability (Yamane & Kaneko 2022). The transformation of becoming an active member from a program beneficiary is described by Borzaga et al. (2023), who argue that social capital and trust-based mechanisms enhance the intensity of participation in cooperative activities. This is complemented by governance institutions that support democratic participation. Hao (2018) finds that participatory governance systems enhance member commitment and allegiance, while Barraud-Didier et al. (2012) find that leadership and decision-making trust significantly increase the potential for increased active participation. In addition, Chen and Sun (2019) suggest that internal trust is one of the most influential factors in people's willingness to participate and engage within the group. The evidence thus supports the argument that program beneficiaries who view the cooperative as socially responsible and trustworthy are more likely to legitimize cooperative membership by assuming an active participant role. So, program beneficiaries are a key driver of cooperative membership growth. Hence, the final hypothesis is:

H3. Program beneficiaries influence cooperative membership growth.

Methodology

The study employed quantitative research method to examine the relationship between SDG programs, program beneficiaries, and cooperative membership growth in the cooperative sector. The design aligns with the research goals because it allows for a systematic investigation of organizational-level trends and correlations, providing empirical evidence for the identification of the direct and indirect impacts of SDG programs on program beneficiaries. Information was gathered from the annual reports of the ACDI Multipurpose Cooperative from 2020 to 2024, one of the largest in the Philippines. Annual reports were used to gather comprehensive documentation on the activities of SDG programs, the beneficiaries of these programs, and patterns of cooperative membership growth. To ensure comprehensive data representation and reduce selection bias, all reports available for the study period were considered. Organizational-level annual information was used, as the analytical framework was designed to focus on cooperative performance rather than individuals' experiences.

Variables were operationalized based on the conceptual framework of the study. SDG programs were operationally defined as programs that the cooperative has undertaken steps towards one or more United Nations SDGs, such as health, education, livelihood, renewable energy, and community development programs, as evident from the annual reports. To maintain the integrity of the SDG programs, the data remained uncompromised. A strict validation process was adhered to by confirming program listings, narrative reports, and financial reports in the annual reports. The process ensured that the SDG programs variable accurately represented the documented programs, thereby enhancing the credibility of the analysis. Program beneficiaries were operationalized as individuals or groups who were noted to have benefited from or participated in these SDG programs, whereas cooperative membership growth was measured as the annual change in the cooperative's total membership.

A data extraction template was created to enable consistent and precise documentation of important variables throughout the study period. Descriptive statistics were used to provide yearly summary trends in SDG programs, program beneficiaries, and cooperative membership growth, thus presenting a detailed description of collaborative performance. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to explore the direction and magnitude of association among the variables, while Spearman's rank correlation was also conducted as a robustness check due to the small sample size of five and non-normal distribution of residuals. Additionally, time series trend visualization was applied to support descriptive insights. To verify data validity and reliability, numbers were cross-compared with one another through table, narrative, and graphical comparisons in each annual report. Inconsistencies were noted and included in the analysis. Data were cross-checked with other sections of the reports for accuracy and consistency.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 summarizes the SDG programs, program beneficiaries, and cooperative membership growth from 2020 to 2024. There are an average of 1,721 SDG programs per year, with a standard deviation (SD) of 778, indicating notable variation in program volume across the years. The number of program beneficiaries averaged 97,759.60 individuals annually, with a relatively high SD of 78,787, reflecting fluctuating outreach and varying program scale. Meanwhile, cooperative membership remained more stable, with an average of 247,817 members per year and a lower SD of 29,462, suggesting steady and consistent growth. These figures provide a descriptive foundation for examining potential relationships among the variables in the succeeding correlation and trend analyses.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	SD
SDG Programs	553	2,594	1,721	778
Program Beneficiaries	203	214,653	97,759	78,787
Cooperative Membership Growth	217,242	286,850	247,817	29,462

The data indicate that while SDG program implementation and beneficiary reach vary annually, the cooperative membership growth remains positive. This trend provides a preliminary basis for examining the relationships between SDG programs and membership outcomes in the subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Correlations among Variables

Variable Paths	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	ρ_s	<i>p</i>
H1. SDG Programs → Cooperative Membership Growth	.34	.57	.50	.50
H2. SDG Programs → Program Beneficiaries	.34	.57	.40	.60
H3. Program Beneficiaries → Coop Membership Growth	.59	.30	.70	.29

Table 2 presents the correlation results using both Pearson's r and Spearman's ρ_s to explore the relationships among SDG programs, program beneficiaries, and cooperative membership growth from 2020 to 2024. For $H1$, which examined the relationship between SDG programs and cooperative membership growth, both Pearson's correlation ($r=.34, p=.57$) and Spearman's rank correlation ($\rho_s=.50, p=.50$) indicate a weak to moderate positive association. For $H2$, examining the link between SDG programs and program beneficiaries, a similar pattern emerged. Pearson's r remained weak ($r=.34, p=.57$), while Spearman's ρ_s suggested a modest positive correlation ($\rho_s=.40, p=.60$). These results imply a directional alignment between program delivery and outreach. For $H3$, which assessed the relationship between program beneficiaries and cooperative membership growth, Pearson's r indicated a moderate correlation ($r=.59, p=.30$), and Spearman's ρ_s yielded a stronger coefficient ($\rho_s=.70, p=.29$). The results from both correlation methods point toward nonsignificant positive trends across all hypotheses. Therefore, the findings suggest that increases in SDG program implementation and program beneficiary reach may be associated with growth in cooperative membership.

Figure 2 illustrates the time-series trends of the SDG programs, program beneficiaries, and cooperative membership growth from 2020 to 2024. The data reveal that cooperative membership steadily increased each year, from approximately 224,000 (2020) to 286,850 (2024). This sustained growth suggests continued stakeholder engagement, underpinned by strong organizational trust and service relevance.

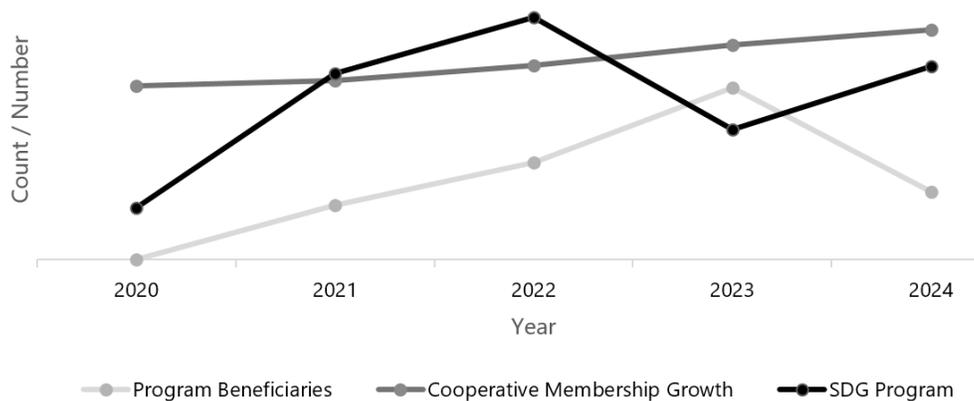


Figure 2. Time Series Trends in SDG Programs, Program Beneficiaries, and Cooperative Membership Growth

Program beneficiaries follow a similar trajectory, rising sharply from 67,532 in 2021 to 121,620 in 2022 before declining to 64,710 in 2024. This peak in 2022–2023 reflects the heightened outreach activities during those years, supported by 2,598 social development programs in 2022 alone. However, the decline in 2024 may indicate operational reprioritization, possibly due to strategic shifts in resource allocation toward workforce development, internal systems optimization, such as data analytics training, and digital transformation, as highlighted in the 2024 annual report. In contrast, the number of SDG programs implemented remained relatively stable, ranging from 553 to 2,594 per year, without dramatic expansion. While program quantity did not rise substantially, the strategic targeting and quality of programs appear to contribute to the program beneficiaries. The cooperative membership growth was particularly evident in 2022 and 2023, suggesting the impact is driven by focused, community-aligned initiatives rather than program volume alone.

The findings support the correlations between SDG programs, program beneficiaries, and cooperative membership growth. Although statistically nonsignificant, the trends suggest a meaningful association. This aligns with Stakeholder Theory and the arguments of Tulus (2020), who posits that cooperatives strengthen legitimacy and sustainability by aligning programs with community needs and SDG priorities. From 2020 to 2024, the program portfolio demonstrates a healthy convergence with several key SDG programs, which is a testament to its responsiveness to community needs. In support of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), the cooperative implemented medical missions, including blood donation campaigns, provided COVID-19-related services, and offered insurance programs to enhance the health resilience of its members. In support of SDG 4 (Quality Education), it provided scholarship grants, donated school materials, and facilitated digital learning through the establishment of computer laboratories. SDG 5 (Gender Equality)-related programs included women's programs and inclusive education activities that ensure gender-sensitive participation. In response to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), the cooperative implemented livelihood training, gave focused loans, and promoted entrepreneurial endeavors through Koopreneur and other initiatives. Programs aligned with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) included welfare assistance to vulnerable individuals, support for retirees, and disaster response and recovery programs that enhanced community resilience. The cooperative also supported SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through regular collaborative efforts with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), and other peacebuilding and institutional strengthening programs.

However, gaps exist in the cooperative's alignment with some SDGs. Specifically, SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) was only briefly addressed at the conceptual level but did not progress to actual program implementation. Similarly, SDGs 6, 12, 14, and 15, which focus on environmental protection, water management, and sustainable production, are also not yet fully addressed. Closing these thematic gaps would further enhance alignment with global development paradigms and build institutional trust and member confidence, as noted by Díaz de León et al. (2021). The observed trends suggest that the capacity to scale social and economic impact is not solely dependent on expanding the number of programs, but instead on offering high quality, responsive, and community-based services. These findings reflect the cooperative's social enterprise character, which creates lasting value through trust, participation, and stakeholder-focused development. Moving forward, integrating under-addressed SDGs and strengthening their data strategy can help cooperatives sustain their growth path while deepening their impact across Philippine communities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study examined the correlation between the implementation of SDG programs, program beneficiaries, and cooperative membership growth from 2020 to 2024. The observed trends suggest strong and consistent relationships. Cooperative membership increased consistently over the five years, while program beneficiaries had their peaks in the years of highest SDG-targeted reach, 2022 and 2023. The trends suggest that the quality of the program, the quality of participation at the community level, and organizational prestige are the primary determinants of member recruitment and retention. The SDG portfolio of programs is aligned with some of the most critical global goals, particularly those related to health, education, livelihood, gender equality, and community resilience. The cooperative's achievements in these areas of focus demonstrate that a lasting impact can be achieved through well-designed and well-targeted initiatives, even in the absence of a sudden increase in the number of programs. Yet, under-emphasized areas were noted, such as environmental goals, including SDG 6 (Clean Water), SDG 7 (Clean Energy), and SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption), which offer new avenues for cooperative innovation and sustainability. Beyond numbers, this study highlights the cooperative's role in building social trust, equity, and grassroots resilience. The findings affirm that when cooperatives integrate SDG principles into their

core strategies, they do not just fulfill mandates but also shape more inclusive, responsive, and future-ready organizations.

Building on the findings and consistent with the exploratory nature of this study, several recommendations may be considered to inform cooperative practice and future research. The observed trends suggest that cooperatives may benefit from expanding their SDG program portfolios to address emerging challenges facing communities, particularly those related to environmental sustainability, resource equity, and resilience. While the cooperative has shown alignment with key SDGs such as health, education, and livelihood, other areas, including clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), appear underrepresented. These gaps are relevant amid rising climate risks, energy insecurity, and community vulnerability, especially in rural and marginalized areas where cooperatives often serve as frontline institutions.

It may also be helpful for cooperatives to adopt an integrated SDG planning framework that aligns development initiatives with both organizational goals and global sustainability benchmarks. Aligning current programs to the 17 SDGs and setting clear outcome indicators can enhance strategic alignment and enable impact tracking. This allows cooperatives to be more proactive in addressing stakeholder needs while demonstrating accountability to both members and external partners. Based on observed trends, it is desirable to enhance impact measurement systems. Standardizing program evaluation and the utilization of digital tools for data management may improve the cooperative's capacity to track and adjust services in real-time.

Additionally, strengthening feedback mechanisms may help ensure that programs remain responsive and inclusive. Cooperatives operate in dynamic social contexts where the members' needs, desires, and expectations change over time. Institutionalized feedback mechanisms, such as member satisfaction surveys, community consultations, or online suggestion boxes, can facilitate participatory governance and enhance the legitimacy of cooperative activities. These recommendations may offer insights for cooperatives seeking to address emerging sectoral challenges while building on their contributions to inclusive, resilient, and people-centered development. In a world where the value of impact is increasingly recognized alongside intentions, the findings of this study suggest that cooperatives, if supported by a clear purpose, backed by evidence, and aligned with overall sustainability goals, can make meaningful contributions to enabling transformational action at the community level.

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The influence of buyer-seller relationships on organizational competitiveness in the beverages industry in Zimbabwe

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This study explored the influence of buyer-seller relationships on organizational competitiveness in the beverages industry. The research aimed to investigate the significance of building and maintaining strong buyer-seller relationships in enhancing the competitiveness of organizations operating in the highly competitive beverages market. Using a quantitative research methodology, data were collected through questionnaires. Results indicate that buyer-seller relationships in Zimbabwe's beverage industry led to increased customer loyalty, improved market responsiveness, enhanced product quality, and greater differentiation from competitors. Although achieving organizational competitiveness requires mutual understanding and commitment, the study recommends that managers in the beverages industry prioritize developing and maintaining strong buyer-seller relationships through improved communication, collaboration, mutual trust, and transparency among supply chain partners to achieve competitiveness.

Keywords: buyer-seller relationship, trust, communication, cooperation, commitment, organizational competitiveness

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Introduction

Managing relationships between buyers and suppliers involves establishing and maintaining strategic connections between organizations that procure goods or services and potential vendors. The study examined how the management of supplier relationships impacts organizational competitiveness. Lysons and Farrington (2018) state that buyer-supplier relationship management is a strategy and that it is based on helping procuring entities to manage relations with suppliers effectively. Supplier relationships are an integral part of the overall corporate strategy, especially in the manufacturing sector, where suppliers' activities directly affect business profitability (Steele & Court 1996). Various authors (Buttle 2009, Lysons & Farrington 2018) confirm that the procurement department is responsible for operationalizing the buyer-supplier relationship strategy. The Zimbabwean production sector has faced serious economic bottlenecks

over the years. Besides competition, an uncertain economic environment characterized by foreign currency shortages and raw material shortages has also besieged the manufacturing sector. The buyer-supplier relationship is a strategy that can be leveraged to enhance a company's competitiveness. Organizations are seeking innovative ways to improve effectiveness and efficiency as the world is becoming increasingly competitive. Wachira (2013) argues, "internal processes have been the firm's main focus, which is being replaced with ways to create value to improve levels of effectiveness and efficiency. The importance and visibility of relationship management have increased over the years as firms have recognized the need to manage their internal and external organizational processes. Krause et al. (2007) confirm that when buying firms are committed to long-term relationships with key suppliers by sharing their goals and values with them and engaging in supplier development initiatives, this results in higher performance. Buying organizations ought to treat supplying firms as partners (Lascelles & Dale 1990). Several benefits are realized when firms invest in buyer-supplier relationships, such as reduced risk, enhanced knowledge sharing, improved trust and communication, greater openness, improved decision-making, and greater overall competitiveness for both parties (Handfield & Bechtel 2002, Vonderembse & Tracey 1999). While there is evidence of extensive literature on buyer-seller relationships and their influence on organizational success from other industry sectors (e.g., Kamau & Sammy 201, Munyimi & Chari 2018, Mushi et al. 2021, Nyaga et al. 2010), there is scant evidence in extant literature on studies that cover this subject in the context of the beverages industry in Africa, let alone in Zimbabwe. Very few studies have been conducted in South Africa (e.g. Loury-Okoumba & Mafini 2018, Mutekwe et al. 2020), and these studies do not provide adequate answers to pertinent questions about buyer-seller relationships and competitiveness in the Zimbabwean beverage context, which this study aims to address. The researchers are convinced that no study has been conducted in Zimbabwe that aimed to address issues of buyer-seller relationships and their connections to organizational competitiveness in Zimbabwe's beverage sector. Hence, a gap exists in extant literature that the study endeavours to close by examining how four variables of buyer-seller relationships determine the competitiveness of organisations in the beverage industry in Zimbabwe.

Thus, this study endeavors to explore the strategic relevance of fostering collaboration, trust, communication, and commitment in buyer-seller relationships to achieve organizational competitiveness in the beverages industry. Moreover, it has significant implications for both academics and various supply chains. The study provides empirical insights into buyer-seller relationships in beverage supply chain management and organizational competitiveness. The study discusses different forms of strategic relationships that buyers and sellers can emphasize to improve competitiveness. Results from this study are also intended to assist managers and executives not only in this particular sector but across all industries worldwide, as buyer-seller relationships are a necessity for organizational success. This study begins by providing an overview of the literature, the hypotheses, the methodology, the significant findings, the conclusions, and the recommendations.

Theoretical Framework

We examine agency and system theories to develop a comprehensive approach to buyer-seller relationship management. Wilhelm and Sydow (2018) discuss the relationship between business managers and agents. It emphasizes aligning agent actions with organizational objectives to enhance profitability and shareholder value. The theory addresses conflicts that may arise when suppliers fail to meet the company's goals, such as providing inadequate goods or services, insufficient quantity, delayed deliveries, or increased operating costs. These conflicts can erode trust between supply chain members. The agency theory is relevant to this study as it provides strategies for cultivating positive supplier relationships. By implementing supplier development strategies, the company can ensure suppliers meet its requirements and preferences, thereby improving contract performance. Supplier development, as

explained by Cheshmberah and Beheshtikia (2020), involves long-term collaboration between a purchasing company and its suppliers to enhance technical capabilities, quality, delivery, and cost efficiency, while also fostering continuous improvement. The Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (2013) describes supplier development as a process that focuses on individual collaboration with specific suppliers to enhance their performance and capabilities in support of the purchasing organization. Supplier development activities not only offer companies a competitive advantage but also contribute to suppliers' long-term growth and relationship enhancement (Salimian et al. 2017).

Similarly, systems theory integrates various elements, such as human resources, capital, information, materials, and financial resources, within a complex supply chain. These elements form part of a broader supply chain system. By its nature, the theory emphasizes the importance of considering both internal and external factors to understand their impact on organizational performance, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the frameworks. In today's uncertain business environment, the interconnection between buyer and supplier systems has intensified, leading to their functioning as a unified entity with subcontractors. In the supply chain, information components encompass communication and decision-making infrastructure. The Enterprise Research Center (LERC) highlights the significant purpose of information flow in supply chain management (Lambert et al. 1998). Rodoula and Wirtz (2012) emphasize the importance of information flow across three stages of the buying process: pre-transactional, transactional, and post-transactional. The exchange of data is critical as it enables the coordination of various supply chain activities. Accurate information exchange among participants is essential for material flow within the supply chain, allowing the firms to respond effectively to market dynamics. The design of the supply chain influences the extent to which information can be shared. Sharing information facilitates supply chain optimization and enhances firm performance. Bowersox et al. (2000) suggest that sharing demand forecasts and promotional information throughout the supply chain is necessary for optimal supply chain performance. Based on the above discussion, we present the conceptual framework and hypotheses development in the following section.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

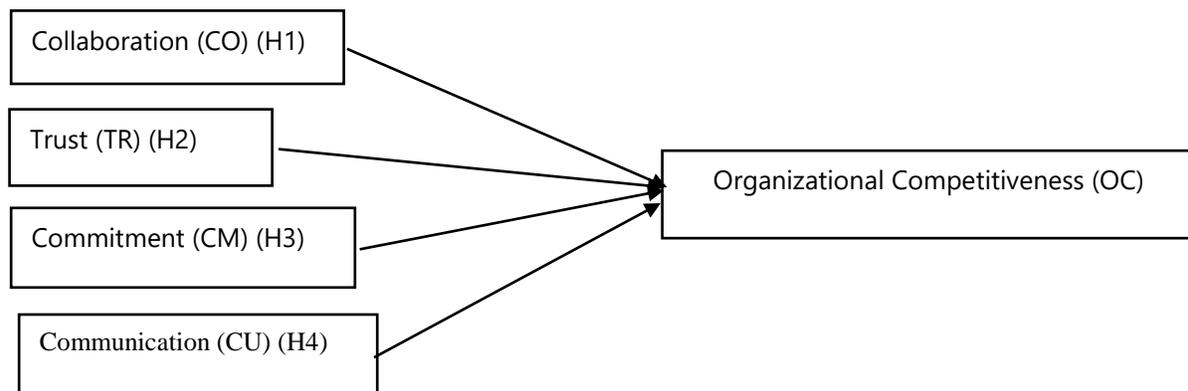


Figure1. Conceptual Framework

Source: the authors

Collaboration relates to the performance of tasks jointly by two or more organizations in a business relationship to achieve collective benefits (Fekpe & Fiagbey 2021). It is a form of inter-organizational relationship whereby buyers and sellers share information and duties aimed at achieving common goals in order to realize and sustain competitive advantage (Fekpe & Fiagbey 2021). Supply chain collaboration has been found to yield multiple benefits such as efficient inventory management and effective demand forecasting. Building strong buyer-supplier relationships is not only critical for business success but also a

game-changer. In their study in Kenya, Kamau and Sammy (2017) found that collaboration between buyers and suppliers resulted in a “win-win situation, but also a win more-win more situation”. In a related study, Mofokeng and Chinomona (2019) find that collaboration and partnerships were the major drivers of supply chain performance. Collaboration and integration are critical determinants of a buyer-seller relationship that yield long-term organizational benefits. When buyers and sellers collaborate, they realize multiple benefits besides financial gains, such as increased customer networks and product and service improvements. Collaboration helps buyers and sellers share information, thereby making operational issues such as order processing, replenishment, and product deliveries easier. Moreover, collaboration is cost-effective because it reduces transaction costs. Nonetheless, despite yielding several benefits, collaboration may be inadequate if it lacks technological support (Uwamahoro et al. 2024). Organizations in the beverage industry can achieve greater competitiveness by sharing timely, precise data, as information quality is a driver of successful collaboration. Similarly, visibility is critical for nurturing trust and loyalty, which is crucial for positive collaboration. Harnessing the benefits of buyer-seller collaboration (BSC) reduces overall costs, creates a win-win situation for partners, and, above all, increases profit margins and market competitiveness. Based on the foregoing discussion, this study proposes that:

H1. Collaboration between buyers and sellers positively impacts an organizations' competitiveness.

Trust is the mainstay of any relationship. The trust between buyers and suppliers plays a crucial role in an organization's overall performance. Buyer-seller trust is the fulcrum of any successful business partnership, underscoring the rationale for establishing strong partnerships and contributing immensely to organizational competitiveness. Strategic business partnerships characterized by mutual trust prompt partners to respond promptly. Trust promotes inter-organizational dependencies that enhance collaboration and mitigate unbridled opportunistic business behaviors between buyers and sellers. Trust defines partners' willingness to abide by each other's actions and decisions, and it is the bedrock of successful partnerships. It is particularly crucial for information exchange, resource mobilization, and expertise sharing, which are key to organizational competitiveness. Trust is the extent to which an organization like Delta Beverages is confident that its supply chain partners will honor their obligations in good faith. Trust has a strong bearing on what buyers and sellers do and the decisions they make, which are paramount to organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Trust is a multifaceted construct whose success depends on the interplay of variables such as benevolence, credibility, competence and integrity in a buyer-seller relationship (Ngouapegne & Chinomona 2018). Rooted in the relational exchange theory, trust, together with cooperation and commitment, results in competitiveness and consolidates buyer-seller relationships. Trust is a significant intermediary in inter-organizational trust, fostering resilience and organizational competitiveness by encouraging transparency, reducing transaction costs, and enabling long-term win-win benefits for both parties. Loury-Okoumba and Mafini (2018) studied how buyer-seller relationships impacted organizational performance in the FMCG retail sector. They found that trust had the most significant influence, followed by commitment, engagement, communication, and collaboration. Matevž and Maja (2013) examined the impact of buyer-supplier relationships on organizational competitiveness within a multinational company. They found that interpersonal trust and joint problem-solving were the major predictors of organizational competitiveness. Based on evidence from past studies, the current research presumes that:

H2. Trust between buyers and sellers positively impacts the organizations' competitiveness.

Buyer-supplier commitment is “the belief that two parties perceive and value their relationship and are thus willing to exercise their utmost devotion to maintaining it” (Loury-Okoumba & Mafini 2018, p. 5). When buyers and sellers are willing to fulfill their contractual obligations, they can successfully achieve

their goals. Moreover, the organizations are more eager to commit to a relationship when they derive satisfaction. In other words, the more buyers or sellers perceive that they are satisfied with their business partners, the greater the level of commitment. Thus, when committed partnering organizations become more dedicated to executing their operations diligently, they ensure a consistent supply of materials, timeous deliveries, and short lead times. Product development and customer satisfaction. Commitment significantly determines buyer-supplier intentions in a relationship. It influences the partner's desire to continue or terminate the relationship. Commitment leads to relationship longevity, which is the basis for competitive advantage. Besides, when commitment prevails, buyers and sellers can make short-term sacrifices to protect their interests. Accordingly, commitment is a bond that keeps buyers and suppliers together, regardless of whether they are happy or dissatisfied. Commitment can take three forms: continuance commitment (calculative and instrumental), affective commitment (inclined to identification and liking), and normative commitment (obligatory). A study by Loice (2015) established that the constructs of buyer-seller relationships, namely, commitment, communication, cooperation, and trust, had a significant positive influence on procurement performance in the Kenyan supermarket industry. Similarly, Mafini and Loury-Okoumba (2024) examined buyer-supplier commitment, confidence, and cooperation as determinants of business performance in the fast-moving consumer goods sector. They conclude that the three factors had a significant positive influence on business performance. Thus, organizations must embrace long-term cooperation with the major suppliers to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, which is essential for overall organizational performance. Based on the discussions in extant literature, this study postulates that:

H3. Commitment between buyers and sellers positively impacts organizations' competitiveness.

Effective communication is key to a sustainable business relationship. According to Loury-Okoumba and Mafini (2018, p.7), "buyer-supplier communication refers to the effective exchange of information between customers and business partners, to smooth out their operations processes and establish long-term relationships". When buyers and sellers communicate effectively, they improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their operational processes. The Zimbabwean beverage sector can effectively utilize communication to broaden its market base. This can be achieved by employing joint marketing communications with their trade partners, which ensures product awareness and visibility among customers. In the beverage business, continuous communication is indispensable because it enables organizations to monitor and track product movement between buyers and suppliers consistently. Thus, communication results in highly reliable, responsive supply networks that guarantee on-time product delivery, which is critical for organizational competitiveness. Tucker et al (1996) posit that effective communication is key to achieving and sustaining competitive advantage. Effective communication fosters trust between buyers and sellers and ensures mutual benefits accrue to both parties through transparency and openness, enabling long-term collaboration. In Tanzania's maize market, Musemwa et al. (2017) found that communication variables, such as the provision of reliable, credible, and timely information, the desire to disseminate it, and receptiveness to share meaningful information, contributed significantly to organizational performance. In South Africa, Loury-Okoumba and Mafini (2018) explored five buyer-seller relationship variables for Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) in Gauteng province. They found that engagement, communication, commitment, cooperation, and trust exerted a considerable positive effect on supplier performance. Similarly, if buyers and sellers in the Zimbabwean beverage industry establish effective communication networks, the entire supply chain would operate smoothly, thereby enhancing competitiveness. Advancements in technology have made communication easier. Information can now be shared between partners in a supply chain using information technology communications to coordinate activities among business partners and to facilitate interactions between buyers and sellers. User-friendly

and efficient ITC necessitated easy communication, which is vital for competitiveness. This study, therefore, hypothesizes that:

H4. Effective communication between buyers and sellers enhances organizations' competitiveness.

Methodology

We used a quantitative method for this study. We used a sample of 248 from a sample frame of 700 participants across the supply chain, using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) method. Data were gathered through surveys via the drop-and-pick method, in which participants were given self-completion questionnaires. Response rate was about 80 percent. The sample consisted of male/female (85/15%), undergraduate/graduate (65/35%), and age below and over 45 (87/13%). The sample was derived from members of Delta Beverages' supply chain, and targeted participants were managers and supervisors of organizations that supplied raw materials and accessories to Delta, and those that bought and resold beverage products from Delta. A list of registered organizations that traded with Delta was provided in the Government Gazette of Zimbabwe (2020) report. Delta was ideal, given that it is the major player in the production of all forms of beverages in the country, and the organization with the largest market share in the Zimbabwean beverages industry. Nonresponse bias is a major deterrent to research, but to address it, post-survey adjustments were implemented to mitigate bias (Toepoel & Schonlau 2017). Moreover, the researchers prevented nonresponse by ensuring the questionnaire design was acceptable to the targeted respondents.

Analyses and Results

We used SPSS for analysis. The data collected were sorted and coded. Descriptive statistics were used for demographics, and simple regression and correlations were employed to analyze the associations between buyer-seller relationship constructs and organizational competitiveness. As suggested by These et al. (2016), the study adopted a commonly used significance level of $p < .05$, and, as reflected in the table below, all p -values fell below the threshold. As such, all the associations between the independent sub-variables and the dependent variable were significant. The unstandardized regression coefficients (β) estimated from the regression model are easy-to-interpret statistics that explain how the independent variable influences the dependent variable, and they are often presented alongside their corresponding standard errors (SE) (Nieminen 2022). The smaller standard errors confirm that the sample statistic for this study closely reflects the population parameter.

Table 1. Relationships among Variables

<i>Paths</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Result</i>
CO → OC	.91	.02	.01	<i>H1</i>	Supported
TR → OC	.87	.03	.01	<i>H2</i>	Supported
CM → OC	.95	.01	.01	<i>H3</i>	Supported
CU → OC	.95	.03	.01	<i>H4</i>	Supported

H1 (CO→OC) is supported ($\beta=.91$, $p<.01$). This suggests that there is a positive correlation between competitive advantage and the level of collaboration. When suppliers demonstrate greater flexibility, it increases the likelihood of doing business with the buyer and fosters greater cooperation between the two parties. The study also examined competitive interactions from a coordination perspective, emphasizing the role of coordination mechanisms in promoting collaboration among firms (Mariani 2016). Extensive coordination and positive coordination outcomes encourage increased collaboration, leading to a positive spiral effect (Gulati et al. 2012). Developing common understandings, shared goals,

and collective ideologies among network members enhances cooperation and aligns their thinking processes (De Carolis & Saporito 2006, Inkpen & Tsang 2005, Krause et al. 2007). The study supports the idea that defining clear buyer and supplier roles based on the purchased product is crucial (Kraljic 1983, Lacoste & Johnsen 2015). Different supplier roles should have distinct expectations within the framework contract. This differentiation allows for complementary strengths and a focus on win-win outcomes, rather than competition between the buyer and supplier. Clearly defining these roles creates expectations and enables a more effective buyer-supplier relationship. When there is effective collaboration between sellers and buyers, organizations like Delta Beverages can manage significant threats prevalent in Zimbabwe, owing to resource restraints and economic instability, by sharing knowledge, mobilizing limited resources, and engaging in joint risk management. Integration among buyers and sellers boosts competitiveness for all supply chain partners, improves effectiveness, efficiency, and resilience, which cannot be achieved individually in a volatile business environment. Nonetheless, collaborations can be impeded by a country's economic volatility, a repressive regulatory environment, and operational and relational management issues, a phenomenon common in Zimbabwe. In the South African petrochemical industry Botes et al. (2017) resolved that buyer-supplier collaboration did not directly influence supply chain resilience, but that it influenced the determinants of supply chain resilience. Similarly, in Nigeria Ogonu and Nwokah (2023) established that buyer-supplier collaboration was strongly correlated to organizational performance.

H2 (TR→OC) is supported ($\beta=.87, p<.01$). It indicates that a higher level of trust between the buyer and supplier leads to greater operational efficiency and a stronger relationship between them. This outcome aligns with Sahay (2003), who emphasized the significance of trust in developing and sustaining fruitful business relationships. Fawcett et al. (2011) highlight that trust underpins the building and maintenance of supply chain relationships. Additionally, Handfield and Bechtel's (2002) empirical analysis of various manufacturing firms supports the notion that high levels of trust facilitate collaboration, information sharing, and overall operational performance. The research consistently indicates that trust plays a pivotal role in enhancing an organization's operational performance. It fosters a strong business network, contributes to firm success, and encourages long-term focus in buyer-supplier relationships. Trust is crucial for maintaining continuity in conventional channel relationships, as it drives improved competitiveness, reduced transaction costs, and better performance outcomes. Considering the beverage industry in Zimbabwe, trust plays a pivotal role in supplier-buyer relationships. Trust is a critical catalyst for partnership success and competitive advantage, and even across distinct trades. Trust is universally recognized as foundational and influences the decisions supply chain partners make, relational dynamics, and corporate engagements. Thus, trust is an invaluable asset that promotes innovation, resilience, and organizational competitiveness for supply chain partners. To build trust and manage risk, buyers and sellers in Zimbabwean supply chains should adopt proactive partnership strategies, such as establishing ethics codes and forging clear contractual agreements, to reduce exposure. Thus, buyers and sellers can build trust by fostering open communication and aligning rewards and goals across partners. When organizations create and sustain a culture of trust amongst members, the resulting benefits include reductions in transactional costs, increased innovation, and improved operational efficiencies, all of which are enablers of organizational competitiveness. However, despite the benefits it creates for chain members, implementing trust in buyer-seller relationships is also hindered in Zimbabwe by economic turbulence, stringent regulatory controls, and power asymmetry.

H3 (CM→OC) is supported ($\beta=.95, p<.01$). Suppliers' commitment to collaborating with buyers is positive, which can lead to increased business activities between the two parties. Like any other organization, Delta Beverages strives for long-term success and, as such, aims to sustain long, relatively stable partnerships. For the organization, relationship stability entails continuity and longevity, in which the company and its partners sacrifice short-term returns to reap long-term benefits through a strategic partnership. Buyers and sellers in this chain must maintain stability and be committed to satisfying the major stakeholder, the customer. Thus, organizations that have durable partnerships, share experiences,

and are, as a result, more familiar and better understand each other, thereby leading to increased levels of commitment and trust. While Zimbabwean beverage organizations are keen to cultivate successful buyer-seller alliances, they are not immune to supply chain management challenges. Implementation challenges, uncertainties in demand and supply, limited information technology capabilities, and political and legal issues, e.g., government regulation, can curtail partner commitments, thereby impacting organizational competitiveness. This result echoes findings by Mthiyane et al. (2025) established that buyer-supplier commitment, quality information sharing, and trust were the main anchors of organizational performance in the automotive industry.

H4 (CU→OC) is supported ($\beta=.95, p<.01$). It indicates that the quality of communication plays a vital role in strengthening the relationship between the buyer and supplier. Strong communication fosters a lasting relationship, ensuring the timely delivery of orders to the buyer and prompt payment to the supplier. The responses obtained underscore the essential nature of effective communication in buyer-supplier relationships (Mohr & Nevin, 1990). Nyaga et al. (2010) also support this notion, highlighting that communication processes are fundamental to organizational behavior and critical to achieving organizational success. Considering the literature and findings, the study acknowledges that effective communication serves as the foundation for a strong customer-buyer relationship. Without it, sustaining a meaningful relationship within a business environment would be challenging. In the Zimbabwean beverages industry, information sharing enhances collaborative partnerships and buyer-supplier competitiveness. Buyer-seller communication in the Delta supply chain may be described in terms of information integration systems, shared communication infrastructure, and data accuracy. Although these are vital to Delta's supply chain competitiveness, numerous hindrances to effective communication between buyers and suppliers stem from inadequate information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, unreliable information-sharing networks, and the cost of acquiring efficient communication means. This situation negatively impacts rapport and trust between buyers and suppliers in this supply chain, leading members to fail to adapt to market dynamics and thereby affecting organizational competitiveness. The findings indicate that modern technology is key to the success of any supply chain in Zimbabwe; buyer-seller communication fosters supply chain visibility, accurate data sharing, and data reliability, thereby resulting in organizational competitiveness. This finding augments Msemwa et al. (2017) who resolved that communication variables such as timeliness, reliability, credibility and willingness to disseminate information were key determinants successful buyer-seller relations vital for organizational performance.

Discussion

Collaboration positively impacts organizational competitiveness. It improves supply chain performance, fosters innovation, mitigates risks, promotes knowledge sharing, builds trust, and drives cost reduction and efficiency. Organizations that prioritize and nurture practical cooperation with their suppliers are better positioned to attain sustainable competitive advantages in the market. Buyer-supplier cooperation positively influences supply chain performance, which is an antecedent of organizational competitiveness, as reflected in cost efficiency, delivery reliability, and product quality. When buyers and suppliers collaborate effectively, they can streamline processes, reduce lead times, and enhance overall supply chain performance; it contributes to organizational competitiveness. Cooperation between buyers and suppliers also stimulates innovation and product development. Open communication and collaboration allow suppliers to provide valuable insights and contribute to the design and development of new products. This cooperation fosters innovation, accelerates time-to-market, and enhances the organization's competitiveness by offering differentiated products.

Trust has been found to influence organizational competitiveness. Thus, buyer-supplier trust plays a crucial role in organizational competitiveness. It promotes collaboration, reliability, flexibility, innovation, and long-term relationships. By fostering trust, organizations can strengthen their supply chains, expand

their product offerings, and differentiate themselves in the market, ultimately enhancing their overall competitiveness. Trustworthy buyer-supplier relationships contribute to an organization's reputation and brand image. When an organization is known for maintaining trust-based relationships with its suppliers, it enhances its credibility and attractiveness to customers, investors, and other stakeholders. A positive reputation can positively impact the organization's competitiveness in the market.

Commitment is a significant contributor to organizational competitiveness. When both buyers and suppliers demonstrate strong commitment to one another, this can have a profound impact on the organization's ability to compete in the marketplace. A strong commitment between buyers and suppliers yields several benefits that enhance organizational competitiveness. Commitment fosters a sense of partnership and collaboration between buyers and suppliers. When both parties are committed to each other's success, they are more likely to work together closely, share information, and align their goals and strategies. Commitment between buyers and suppliers promotes reliability and dependability. Suppliers who are committed to meeting the buyer's requirements are more likely to deliver products or services on time and with consistent quality. This reliability reduces supply chain risks and ensures smooth operations, which is crucial for maintaining competitiveness.

Communication plays a crucial role in managing risks in the buyer-supplier relationship. By maintaining a transparent, open line of communication, both parties can identify and proactively address potential risks. This proactive approach enables the organization to mitigate supply chain disruptions, reduce costs, and maintain a competitive advantage. Effective communication helps in building strong relationships between buyers and suppliers. Trust, mutual understanding, and shared goals are vital for a successful buyer-supplier relationship. When organizations have strong relationships with their suppliers, they can negotiate favorable terms, access new technologies, and receive preferential treatment. These advantages contribute to the organization's market competitiveness. Effective communication between buyers and suppliers is essential for organizational competitiveness. It enables collaboration, information sharing, innovation, risk management, and relationship building. By leveraging these benefits, organizations can enhance their product offerings, streamline their supply chains, and gain a competitive edge in the marketplace.

Implication for Managers

Organizations in the beverage industry and others across supply chain sectors must cultivate effective buyer-supplier relationship strategies, such as partnerships, collaborations, and alliances, to achieve supply chain visibility upstream and downstream. These strategies play a vital role in enhancing organizational competitiveness and creating win-win outcomes for all supply chain stakeholders. In the contemporary business environment, competition extends beyond individual organizations to encompass entire supply chains, underscoring the need to establish relationships with other entities for survival. Organizations should strive to cultivate enduring relationships with their suppliers, aiming for long-term partnerships. Thus, organizations, regardless of their line of business, need to harness virtuous relationships with their buyers/suppliers to enhance organizational competitiveness. Partnering entails establishing a long-term, personalized relationship based on trust, honesty, commitment, transparency, information sharing, and the unconditional desire to create and sustain mutually beneficial relationships between organizations as buyers and sellers in their respective supply chains.

Limitations and Directions for Further Study

While this study fully explores the nexus between buyers and sellers to enhance organizational competitiveness in the beverages sector, its scope is limited, as it focuses on a single organization, thereby limiting the generalizability of its results to other related studies. Data were gathered primarily from participants in one conglomerate organization, which may not accurately reflect the broader

beverage industry's employee demographics. Besides, this study focused on only four elements of buyer-seller relationships that influence organizational competitiveness, thereby limiting its scope. A broader-scope research study that considers the study area with a focus on the entire beverage sector may produce conclusive, generalizable results. A study that includes all employees in the beverages industry will ensure proper representation and authentic participant responses.

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BOOK REVIEW

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In response to the increasing cost of textbooks and their resulting impact, particularly on financially struggling students, individual faculty members and educational institutions have been seeking various solutions to ease the burden on these students. Some universities encourage faculty to explore open educational resources (OER). UNESCO, which adopted the resolution of OER in 2019, defines these as “learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others” (<https://www.unesco.org/en/open-educational-resources>). Individual faculty members, also aware of the impact of textbook costs on student access to materials, have experimented with course reserves, library resources, and materials licensed under Creative Commons, among other approaches. Another response comes from publishers such as Textbook Media, which offer low-cost textbooks in a range of disciplines. Their eBooks often cost below \$50 to students who buy directly from them.

This review assesses the value and quality of low-cost textbooks, with a specific focus on a global marketing book published by Textbook Media and intended for students enrolled in an elective international marketing class. According to their website, Textbook Media was founded by publishing executives and academics to provide affordable textbooks, thereby disrupting the traditional publishing model. Having used this book in my classes, along with other more traditional books published by big publishers in the past, I am quite familiar with it.

The International Marketing text by Lascu is now in its 7th edition, indicating that it remains a widely adopted text. Having used several other texts on this topic, this book compares favorably. It thoroughly covers all the standard topics, and each chapter concludes with a summary, definitions of key terms, discussion questions, and mini-cases. There are also true/false and multiple-choice questions (with answers) so students can check their progress. An international marketing plan template is provided, which is very useful for students if instructors use it as a term project. Understandably, given the publisher's low-cost focus, there are various options for format, ranging from the cheapest — a basic eBook version with 180-day access (but no printing) — to a more expensive color print version. Even the most expensive color print version is less expensive, if bought directly from the publisher, than books published by mainstream college book publishers. Study aid add-ons, such as lecture guides and mini

quizzes, are available for a fee. The instructor's manual provides detailed notes of each chapter and comprehensive answers to the end-of-chapter discussion and case questions. As a course primarily taken by seniors and/or graduate students as an elective, more comprehensive and detailed cases would be a welcome addition. Additionally, some interactive exercises and perhaps a simulation could be included to provide even more application practice for students. The edition has been updated to reflect the impact of the pandemic on global businesses. The examples and cases have been revised, and some new short cases have been added.

What my review of this text has shown is that the book compares favorably with other, more expensive texts I have used for international marketing classes. Although the production quality is not as polished as that of the full-cost books in terms of ancillary materials, paper quality, and color usage, the content remains valuable. It provides a broad foundational knowledge of the relevant topics. As I have often done, instructors can supplement the text with other OER, such as more comprehensive cases, readings, and material they can develop. Much of this material can be made available to students through the university library, which can obtain the necessary copyright permissions. All these initiatives will enable students to gain a deep understanding and absorb the material without undue financial pressure. Most students will appreciate that.

Reviewer



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