The Mediating Effect of the Key Supplier Relationship Management Practices in the Relationship between the Supply Chain Orientation and the Organizational Buying Effectiveness

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Abstract- **The study is intended to carry out to examine the mediating effect of the key supplier relationship management (KSRM) practices in the relationship between the supply chain orientation (SCO) and the organizational buying effectiveness (OBE). The study has used the SEM-PLS as a statistical tool to analyses the data. The findings of the study indicate that the value creation for customers is influenced through these dimensions of OBE in the following aspects: Value-oriented Purchasing: there is need for the purchasing managers to focus on the downstream supply chain side (customer) other than the upstream side during the procurement activities. Lateral involvement: specific knowledge is possessed by the employees of different departments related to the nature of products, which are purchased. Therefore, a deep insight is offered by them in the process of purchasing reflecting the qualities of products to be valuable for the customers. Information Sharing in Purchasing: distinct information is possessed by different employees on customer value. Purchasing effectiveness can be improved through sharing of information. The study which is among the pioneering studies in the issue will be helpful for the policy makers and researchers in understanding the issues related to key supplier relationship management (KSRM), supply chain orientation (SCO) and the organizational buying effectiveness.**

Keywords: *Supply chain, Supplier relationship, Organizational buying, SEM-PLS*

1. Introduction

The improved relationship between the suppliers and buyers has become a key concern for researchers over the last two decades [23]. Empirical evidences have been given by previous research studies related to the importance of the coordination among buyers and suppliers and its role in the achievement of competitive advantage [32]. Moreover, through enhanced relationships of buyer-supplier offers a platform for differentiation of value in the supply chain [33]. The ability of organizational management to align its strategies in relation to the other member firms reflects the success of supply chain. Development of association with the members of supply chain can be achievement through making integrative efforts. The value creation process requires the efforts of both customers and suppliers. According to ref. [21], this aspect is regarded as SCO (Supply Chain Orientation). It is required in Supply Chain Orientation that the all the supply chain members need to allocate their capabilities, resources, and efforts for creating value.

An organization communicates with its suppliers and the customers. Collectively, they form a large system, which refers to the supply chain. It is aimed by the supply chain system to offer value to its customers through improved products and services.

Marketing paradigm offers a platform for the integration of supply chain and demand. In this way, it plays a crucial role in the management of supply chain [8], [7]. Value is created by the suppliers for the end customers through integration of demand and supply. SCO has been regard to be an antecedent for the performance of an organization in previous research studies [15, 26]. In this way, it relates the process of upstream and downstream. Similar implications have been given by these research studies but these studies have followed different concepts. It has been suggested by the studies that the role of customers and suppliers in the process of value creation has been recognized by SCO.

In the current literature based on business-to-business marketing, the issues in the management of supplier relations have been explored in the context of supply chain. Traditional researches have claimed that the trend of research on management of supplier relationship is growing including consolidation of supply base [6]. Moreover, the interesting topics for research are emerging to be management of supplier portfolio, creation of value through improvement of relationships and management of supplier relationship [27]. In the relation of buyers and sellers, the research studies have found KSRM (key supplier relationship management) to be highly important [29]. There exists gap in research related to the analysis of antecedents and outcomes of key supplier relationship management [4]. The focus of KSRM is on the strategic relationship management. It is based on the key statement that the overall portfolio of a firm is constituted of relations, which differ in their level of importance [62]. A relation may not fit equally to every aspect. There is need for organization to consider the different among the transaction partners and strategic partners in supply chain. In previous research studies, the impact of KSRM and SCO on organizational performance has been studied [24; 22].

A broader aspect of organizational buying has been considered in this research for resolving the issue of effective purchasing. The organizational buying concept is deep rooted in the literature on business-to-business marketing. In literature, OBE is considered as a latest concept. It is defined as a concept related with the effectiveness of organization for the attainment of purchasing outcomes such as creation of value.

Researchers have worked on different dimensions of effectiveness purchasing behavior in the previous research studies [28]. It is important to consider that only some of the dimensions have been taken into consideration by the researchers. The achievements through goals purchasing in the context of supply chain have not been answered by these studies. This research study examines the relation of effective purchasing behavior and value creation for the customers. The theoretical content has been extended for effective purchasing behavior by using theoretical concepts. When there is insufficient explanation of a concept, the tool, which is useful, is known as "Theoretical triangulation". Theoretical triangulation is considered a suitable approach in this research, as previous research studies on business-to-business marketing have not been successful in offering a good framework for the measurement of effective purchasing behavior.

Effectiveness has been defined as the degree of achieving organization goals [18; 19]. The study is based on the model of competing values in the process of triangulation. The approach represents a suitable way of evaluating the effectiveness of an organization. There are two dimensions involved in this model. These include external and internal attention orientation as well as participation in the process of making decision versus centralization. The collective form of these dimensions results in a 2 by 2 matrix of values. Moreover, the external attention orientation is combined with participation in the process of decision-making results in higher growth, flexibility and organizational profit, as per the results of previous empirical researches. Further, the idea of Blomquist et al, [2] of use of information processing in effective organizations is involved in the study along with the participation and external attention orientation. The third dimension incorporated in the study as the aspect of organizational effectiveness is information sharing. The buying centers of organization are the subsystems, which deal with the issues related to purchasing [12]. There are systemic relations, which make it suitable to use triangular approach. The three dimensions of organizational effectiveness have been triangulated in the buying behavior of an organization. From value oriented purchasing, information sharing in purchasing, lateral involvement, the three dimensions has been transformed into constructs.

2. Formulation of Research Hypotheses

There is limited research available on the concept of SCO. A great interest on the marketing orientation concept has been shown in the literature on marketing since 1990s. In marketing literature, the relation between business performance and market orientation has been evaluated. It has been revealed in the current researches that a direct and positive relation exists between market orientation and performance of business in a significant manner [13]. However, market orientation of firm has been signified by some studies in the downstream of supply chain [14]. The concept of SCO emerged because of the marketing philosophy breakthrough in the management of supply chain. SCO is considered to relate to the recognition of strategic and systematic policies by a firm for managing the upstream and downstream flow in the process of supply chain [1].

Evidences have been provided by the previous research studies about the positive association between the performance of firm and SCO [15]. It has been indicated in the previous research studies that SCO is an organizational capability, which leads to organizational performance. It has been warned by some researchers that there SCO can be imperative for integrating in the purchasing and marketing processes of supply chain [38]. The value creation for customers is supported through the integration of supply and demand sides. A direct influence on the value creation for customers

has been created by downstream processes. SCO makes a firm able to create value through upstream processes [34]. The firm can create customer value through recognizing the role of SCO in the process of purchasing. Through monetary or non-monetary cost, purchasing is an activity that offers value for the customers.

The following research hypothesis has been developed:

H_1: Buying Effectiveness of an Organization is in positive relation with Supply Chain Orientation

Important changes are going through the marketing theory as indicated by [34] in his seminal work. There is need for explanations about the relation of buyer and supplier for long-term orientation and within the context of organizational collaboration. The financial performance of the buying organization is positively influenced through collaboration of suppliers. It has been empirically found by [4]. Several studies have confirmed this relation.

Lower costs and higher benefits can be achieved through managing long-term associations resulting in greater value for customers. Key supplier relationships have a significant impact on the business performance as reflected through literature review [39]. Managing effective relations with the key suppliers of businesses are referred as KSRM. According to [9], the performances of suppliers should be evaluated for determining the actual value. A strategic purchasing orientation has been applied by buyers of an organization during the evaluation of key suppliers' performance [29].

The relation between business performance and KSRM has been restricted by the previous research studies. It has been proposed in this research that there is a significant positive relation between OBE and KSRM. This is because of two facts. The first is related to the effective management of purchasing processes through KSRM. Key status can be achieved by the strategic suppliers in the procurement exchange by offering value adding functions buyers' business processes. The second fact is related to strategic internal relations reflects strategic supply chain relations [40]. Purchasing behavior has a direct implication in the context of supply chain. Inputs need to generated and procured for value creation of its customers. The following research hypothesis has been developed in this regard [31]:

H_2: Buying Effectiveness of an Organization is in positive relation with KSRM (Key supplier relationship management)

Very little investigation has been made regarding the associations in the initiatives of supply chain and performance outcomes. Nomological networks have been proposed by some research studies in which it has been evaluated that customer relationship management and management of supply chain create an impact on the outcomes of performance [36]. The role of SCO as a mediator has been incorporate by some of the previous studies between the relation of market orientation and business performance. Some studies have worked on the role of supply chain management as a mediator on the relationship of business performance and market orientation [11]. The validity of the relation among these variables has been determined by these researches. The initiatives of relationship management such as management of customer and supplier relations and supply chain management have been assessed as well. A differentiated approach has not been established by the researchers did in order to determine the relations in supply chain. This research aims at explaining these relations from a different perspective. It has been proposed that OBE and SCO can be related in a better way by incorporating the role of KSRM. SCO is a capability that is strengthened through activities of KSRM. SCO can be made pragmatic through the development of KSRM system within a firm. The following research hypothesis has been developed:

H_3: Key Relationship Management Practices mediate the relation between Organizational Buying Effectiveness and Supply Chain Orientation

It is important to examine the external validity of OBE, since it is new concept. The ability of a construct to act as expected in relation to other constructs is involved in external validity. A significant relation has been found between the business performance and effective purchasing strategy in the previous research studies. [10] indicated a positive relation between business strategy and alignment of purchasing capabilities with the performance of business.

It is proposed that there is a positive relation of OBE with the profitability of a firm because of the following facts:

- Customers receive higher value because of effective purchasing behavior.
- Higher profitability is achieved along with high customer satisfaction through offering greater value to the customers.

The following research hypothesis has been proposed:

H_4: The profitability of a firm is in positive relation with the buying effectiveness of an Organization

3. Methodology

This study adopts the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) for analysis due to several reasons. SEM is considered to have equal ability with multiple and linear regression analysis which assume that variables are evaluated with no errors.

Even though SEM involves multiple regression and factor analyses, it has a more effective way of estimating instrument for a number of separate multiple regression equations which it evaluates concurrently [42]. It is more potent in analysing and modeling interactions and better in dealing with analysis associated with correlated independents, non-linearity and multiple latent independents correlated error terms and measurement errors, (measured through multiple indicators) and latent dependents with multiple indicators. Equally, when it comes to estimating multiple dependent relationships concurrently, it has better capacity to take care of measurement errors and the strength of relationship between factors can be determined more precisely [43]. Besides, a confirmatory method of data analysis is more preferred than using exploratory factor analysis, testing hypotheses is also easier. Using SEM therefore to analyses data invariably allows the researcher the use of multiple measures to denote or represent constructs and takes care of specific error which makes it easier to substantiate validity of the constructs under study [41]. Being that this study measures multiple underlying variables as predictors, indirect paths and path analysis. Additionally, with the design of questionnaire which comprised of interval and ratio scales and also measures of constructs which are highly hypothetical and conceptual in nature such as this study, the choice of SEM becomes inevitable. Furthermore, it helps to show the causal relationship between variables and further explains the complexity and the unobserved variables in the analysis [44].The scale of SCO is adopted from the study of [45], of KSRM adopted from [46], and of OBE is adopted from [47].

4. Results

The initial step under PLS analysis is the evaluation of the measurement or outer model. The measurement model determines the internal consistency, reliability of individual item, convergent validity, discriminant and content validity [44;48]. It involves estimating the goodness-of-fit measures. Two main criterion were employed for determining the reliability and validity of the measurement model [50].

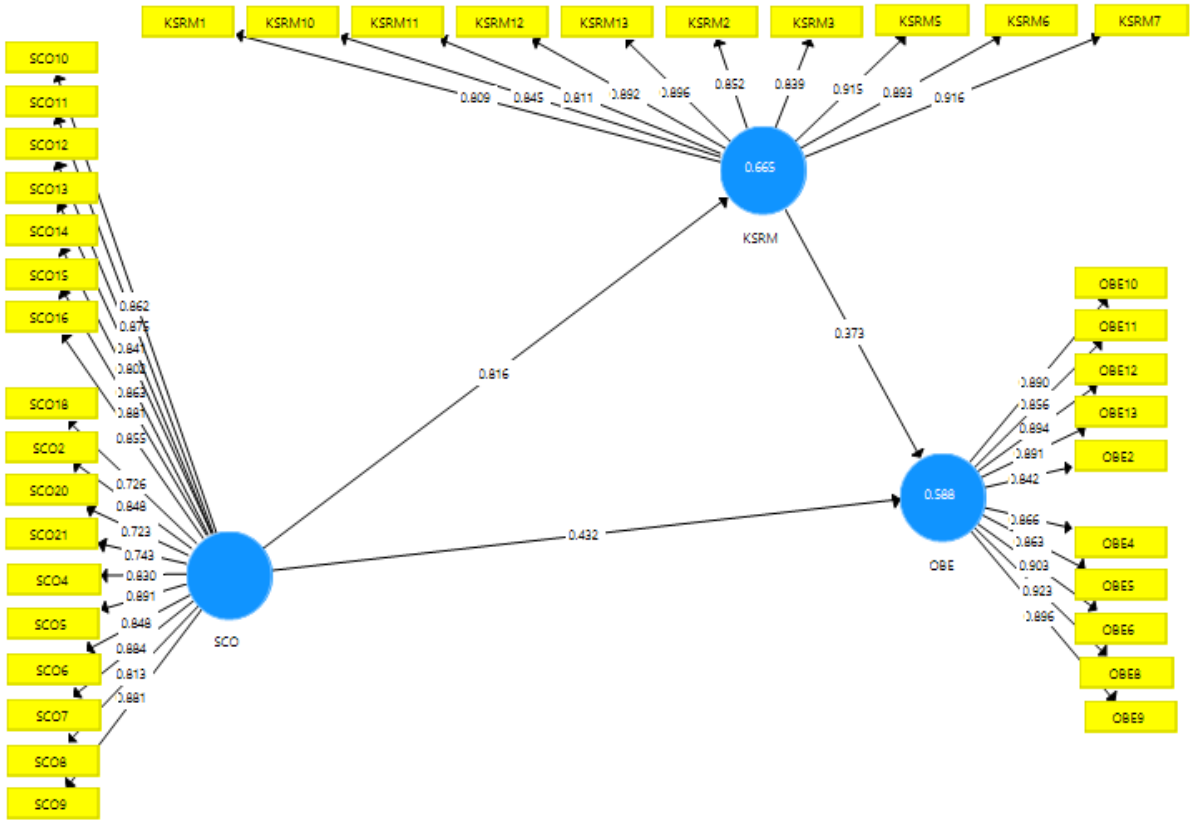

Figure 1. Measurement model

The reliability test attempts to determine the consistency of the measuring tool, i.e. what the measure is intended to estimate, whereas, the validity test attempts to estimate the efficiency of a measure to exactly estimate an underlying concept [43;49].

Table 1. Outer Loading

	KSRM	OBE	SCO
KSRM1	0.809		
KSRM10	0.845		
KSRM11	0.811		
KSRM12	0.892		
KSRM13	0.896		
KSRM2	0.852		
KSRM3	0.839		
KSRM5	0.915		
KSRM6	0.893		
KSRM7	0.916		
OBE10		0.890	
OBE11		0.856	
OBE12		0.894	
OBE13		0.891	
OBE2		0.842	
OBE4		0.866	
OBE5		0.863	
OBE6		0.903	
OBE8		0.923	
OBE9		0.896	
SCO10			0.862
SCO11			0.875
SCO12			0.841
SCO13			0.802
SCO14			0.863
SCO15			0.881
SCO16			0.855
SCO18			0.726
SCO2			0.848
SCO20			0.723
SCO21			0.743
SCO4			0.830
SCO5			0.891
SCO6			0.848
SCO7			0.884
SCO8			0.813
SCO9			0.881

The reliability of an indicator is estimated through observing each measure of the outer loadings' concepts [44;51;52]. A rule of thumb has been suggested by [44] to keep those items having loadings ranging from 0.40-0.70. According to scholar the convergent validity refers to "the level items explicitly represent the intended latent construct as well as correlate with other measures of the same construct". A specific measure is considered to be convergent if item loadings for the related latent construct exhibits value greater than 0.50. There are three principles for assessing the convergent validity, these are: 1) the composite reliability of each item must be above 0.70; 2) the

factor loadings for each item must be adequate at level of significance; 3) the value for AVE must be above 0.50.

Reliability or internal consistency referred as the degree of scale items to estimate the same construct [25]. Composite reliability and Cronbach alpha are the commonly used estimators for measuring the reliability of an organizational research instrument [53]. Although, enough discussion has been made regarding the best and most powerful technique for measuring reliability. Since, Cronbach alpha is a universally used method but it somehow underrates the internal consistency of a measure [43;49]. Whereas, the composite reliability criteria is jointly employed with SEM-PLS models, as it is a more powerful technique as compared to the Cronbach alpha criterion. The coefficient of composite reliability in present study are chosen to estimate the reliability of each measure. The Cronbach alpha presumes that without observing the definite role of each loading, all items contribute equally to measure its construct [54]. Although, the explanation of internal consistency with the coefficient of composite reliability has been developed as a rule of thumb, which is suggested by many authors. Furthermore, [55] suggested that the coefficient of composite reliability should be equal or higher than 0.70. The coefficients for each construct are presented in the Table 4.10, ranging from 0.774-0.894. All the composite reliability coefficients are satisfying the minimum level i.e. above 0.70 level, showing adequate internal consistency of all the measures.

Table 2. Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	**rho_A**	**Composite Reliability**	**Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**
KSRM	**0.963**	**0.965**	**0.968**	**0.753**
OBE	**0.968**	**0.970**	**0.972**	**0.779**
SCO	**0.973**	**0.973**	**0.975**	**0.697**

Another criterion is the discriminant validity, [56] suggested that discriminant validity observes the extent a construct is different from all the other constructs. Putting differently, it is the extent a particular variable differs from all the other variables. The greater the discriminant validity the more distinctive nature a variable possesses which may not be possessed by other variables [35]. The discriminant validity for present study was determined by taking square roots of the AVE, which must be higher than the correlations between the latent variables. It can be done by comparing the square roots of AVE and the relations between the latent constructs. Therefore, the present study determined the discriminant validity following the criterion recommended by [57].

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	KSRM	**OBE**	**SCO**
KSRM	0.868		
OBE	0.725	0.883	
SCO	0.816	0.736	0.835

With the establishment of a measurement model, the next step is to estimate the structural model for developing an overall relation with a model. Moreover, in a recent study, [58] stated that model validation can be sufficiently assessed through the goodness-of-fit criteria. For instance, while employing PLS path models having reproduced data, it has been argued that goodness-of-fit criteria is unsuitable, as it fails to distinguish among the invalid and valid models [60].

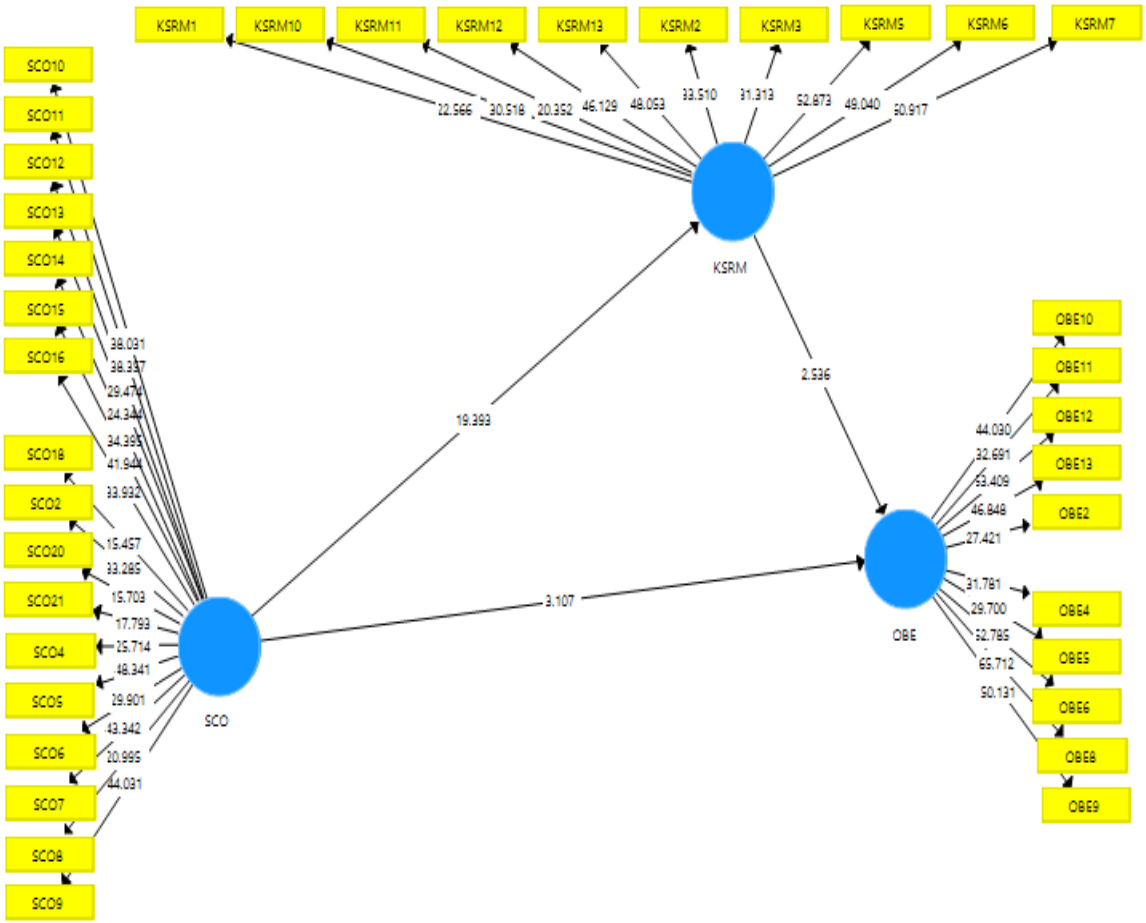

Figure 2. Structural Model

With respect to recent development, a two-step procedure has been adopted by authors for estimating and reporting the PLS-SEM path results, following [48]. Furthermore, the structural model is assessed for the study. Furthermore, a bootstrapping procedure is applied having 5000 bootstrap samples, in order to examine the significant role played by the path coefficients [44;48]. Hypothesis testing is the final step of data analysis. PLS bootstrapping has been used for hypothesis testing. The t-value must be greater than 1.96 and p-value should be lesser than 0.05 as a standard value. The analysis shows that all the hypotheses have values within the range, which leads to the acceptance of hypothesizes**.**

Table 4. Direct Relations

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
KSRM -> OBE	0.373	0.375	0.147	2.536	**0.011**
SCO -> KSRM	0.816	0.818	0.042	19.393	**0.000**
SCO -> OBE	0.736	0.738	0.049	15.121	**0.000**

The results of the mediation KSRM is shown in the table 5. The KSRM appears in significant mediator.

Table 5. Indirect relationship

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
SCO -> KSRM -> OBE	0.304	0.307	0.125	2.440	**0.015**

The ability of endogenous variables to predict is reflected through the value of R2 in the structural model. The accuracy of the forecasted model is measured through it. The combined effect of independent variables on the dependent variables is measured through R2 [61]. The variation in the dependent variable because of the independent variable is explained through coefficient of determination. The value of R2 should be high within the range of 0-1. When the value is 1, it reflects complete predictive accuracy. The value of R2 to be 0.26 is substantial, 0.13 to be moderate and 0.02 to be weak. According to [59] the value of R2 to be 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 for independent variable is considered good, moderate and poor respectively.

Table 6. R-square

	R Square
KSRM	0.665
OBE	0.588

5. Conclusion

The study is intended to carry out to examine the mediating effect of the key supplier relationship management (KSRM) practices in the relationship between the supply chain orientation (SCO) and the organizational buying effectiveness (OBE). The study has used the SEM-PLS as a statistical tool to analyses the data.

The focus of this research is on determining the impact of KSRM and SCO on the purchasing behavior. However, the main purpose of the present study is to examine the influence of SCO and KSRM on purchasing behavior. A strategic role is played by purchasing in the system of supply chain. In this way, it influences the value creation for customers [22]. A conceptual model has been presented in this research for getting a deep insight regarding the association between OBE (organizational buying effectiveness), KSRM, and SCO. The research suggests that KSRM plays the role of a mediator in the relation of OBE and SCO. The findings of the study indicate that the value creation for customers is influenced through these dimensions of OBE in the following aspects: Value-oriented Purchasing: there is need for the purchasing managers to focus on the downstream supply chain side (customer) other than the upstream side during the procurement activities. Lateral involvement: specific knowledge is possessed by the employees of different departments related to the nature of products, which are purchased. Therefore, a deep insight is offered by them in the process of purchasing reflecting the qualities of products to be valuable for the customers. Information Sharing in Purchasing: distinct information is possessed by different employees on customer value. Purchasing effectiveness can be improved through sharing of information. The study, which is among the pioneering studies in the issue, will be helpful for the policy makers and researchers in understanding the issues related to key supplier relationship management (KSRM), supply chain orientation (SCO) and the organizational buying effectiveness. The purchasing process can be made pragmatic and effective with the incorporation of a managerial framework, which monitors the relationships of key suppliers within the supply chain of firm.

OBE has been incorporated in the model as a determinant of purchasing behavior in supply chain. OBE is considered crucial variable. It is based on the point that value creation is directly influenced by the purchasing process. OBE has been taken as a measure of an effective purchasing behavior in the developed model. The bottom-line profitability of a firm is influenced by OBE through its impact on the process of value creation. This research paper is based on six other parts. In the first part, the conceptual model has been developed along with formulation of research hypotheses. In the next part, the research methodology for the study has been proposed including the selection of research method, instrument, sampling, testing of biasness and other measurement problems. The third section is based on research findings after the analysis if structural model. Implications have been proposed for the managers based on findings of research. The study also provides research limitations and areas for future study. According to ref. [20], the models of purchasing performance deal mostly deal with the outcomes of efficiency, which are based on principles of accounting. One of the purchasing issues is efficiency but it requires more clarification for its role in the context of supply chain for value creation. The purpose of effective purchasing is to offer customer value in the supply chain. The purchasing effectiveness has been defined by ref. [37] as an intangible aspect including procurement of value and relations of supplier in terms of service and quality.

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