

The Impact of the Strategic Supplier Partnership, and Strategic Outsourcing on the Supply Chain Performance: The Mediating Role of Customer Relationship

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Abstract- The main focus of the current study is to examine the impact of the strategic supplier partnership, and strategic outsourcing on the supply chain performance. Additionally, the study has mediating role of the customer relationship in the relationship between the strategic supplier partnership and the organizational performance and in the relationship between the strategic outsourcing and the organizational performance. The study is carried out on the manufacturing firms in the Indonesia. The final sample comprises of the 310 questionnaire and the response rate is turned out to be 65.12 percent. In order to examine effects within the construct and to carry out hypotheses testing, this study employed Partial Least Square (PLS) path modeling, has developed PLS, as a procedure to determine path model involving indirectly measured latent constructs by a set of indicators. It is suitable to apply PLS when there is large number of exogenous latent constructs to estimate a few endogenous constructs. The findings of the current study, view supply chain management as a strategic and operational tool to integrate business operations in building capabilities for customization which promises a sustainable customer satisfaction by effectively manages the total flow of inventory from ultimate supplier to the end user. The findings of the study would also be useful in identifying and developing assistance and consultancy programs needed by automobile firms, especially those that are important for improving their skills and knowledge that they need for competing in the marketplace.

Keywords; *Supplier partnership, Strategic Outsourcing, Customer Relationship, Supply Chain Performance*

1. Background

The textile and apparel industry have been operating in a continuously changing business environment, and are becoming unpredictable, complex, globalized and dynamic in nature. The continuous changes occurring in the business environment have been posing serious threats and challenges for the textile and apparel industry [42-43]. Therefore, firms in textile and apparel industry must integrate effective management practices to endure challenges and exploit potential opportunities [1]. Under highly competitive environment, firms need to compete with other firms in as well as with their supply chains. In order to compete successfully, firms are required to gain some competitive advantage. The findings from the literature highlight the significant role of supply chain management (SCM) in providing required competitive advantage to the firms, to improve the performance of their organization [2]. Moreover, intensive competition and rapid changes require firms to offer high quality services and products to the customers and also develop capabilities to be able to quickly respond to the demands and needs of their customers. The organizational capabilities can be strengthened by integrating effective SCM practices, since these SCM practices may assist firms to sustain organizational performance and competitive advantage and to allocate internal functions of organization to the external parties, like customers and suppliers. Customers in global marketplace are demanding,

better quality, faster delivery, more varieties, and higher reliability. However, the product variety is increasing, product life cycle is shortening, and technological advancements are taking place at a faster pace [3]. Thus, in order to cope with these challenges, strong downstream and upstream integration must be developed by firms, to expand business relationship network by adopting SCM practices [4] have argued that implementing SCM practices offer benefits in the form of operational success, which thus enhances the competitive advantage of organization. Consequently, SCM is recognized as one of the successful management tools and effective business practices for the firms to sustain development, prosperity and stability of the business. Adoption of SCM practices also facilitate firms in integrating the distributors, manufacturers, customers and suppliers that are associated to the organization. In addition, the adoption of SCM practices enable firms to create cohesive business model for improving the organization's long-term performance [5].

Furthermore, SCM enables information and data sharing, developing new products, making product specifications and potential partners related inquiries, product development, and determine the suppliers and customers' demand expectations. In order to perform such organizational activities, scholars [6] have suggested SCM as an essential element for the success and performance of organizations. However, the significance of SCM practices in organizational performance have also been emphasized in the literature, but there is scarcity of research in this area. Particularly, the prior studies in this area revealed that limited number of researches have investigated the role of SCM practices in Indonesia's textile and apparel industry. Therefore, the present study aims to address this research gap by examining the effect of SCM practices on the textile and apparel firms' performance in Indonesia [7].

This study offers practical managerial contributions: firstly, it offers insights for the textile and apparel firm managers and owners, concerning the significance of SCM practices, i.e. to improve the manufacturing activity and performance of textile and apparel firms. Findings of this research are also expected to be useful in developing and identifying required consultancy and assistance programs by the textile and apparel firms, particularly the ones which

can be helpful in improving the knowledge and skills, which would enable them to compete in the global marketplace.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Supply Chain Management

Supply chain management (SCM) has no universally accepted definition. According to the literature, different scholars have put forward various definitions of SCM concept. Generally, SCM is defined as a business network which enable firms to provide and manage products and services, using the right quantity and quality [8] keeping in view the right product, and customer needs at reasonable price using right sources and technology and covering all the required activities to fulfill the requests and demands of its customers [9]. The product distribution will take place from the organization's original source to the end user. Moreover, SCM refers to the planning and management of activities that are needed to purchase products, establish required resources and carry out logistic and conversion activities. Furthermore, SCM also includes collaboration among suppliers, partners, customers, intermediate channels, and service providers for the successful management of demand and supply. In context to the SCM practices adoption, firms mainly focus on their core activities and strengths to ensure smooth execution of their supply chain activities [10]. Furthermore, various other researches have considered the SCM in context to resource flow, both within and across the organizations. A few researchers [2] also consider supply chain management as an operational or strategic tool for carrying out business operations to develop capabilities for the customization, which in turn ensures customer satisfaction through effective management of the total inventory flow, i.e. from supplier to the customer. Meanwhile, supply chain management is also referred as the management of philosophy [5]. It is also defined as a chain of relationships among various business entities for fostering and promoting strong coordination among them. Therefore, in order to increase the effectiveness of this coordination, firms are required to integrate all the value-added processes and ensure smooth functioning of the supply chain processes. In addition, [11] defined SCM as a linkage among organizations and external partners, such as, carriers,

information system providers, suppliers and third-party companies. The supply chain management (SCM) concept has been extensively recognized as a customer service component. Thus, another significant characteristic of SCM is that the entire SCM process should be taken as a complete system.

If any insufficiency occurs across the SCM, in terms of manufacturing plants, suppliers, customers, and warehouses, the true capabilities in the SCM process must be examined carefully. Since the SCM processes take place in manufacturing and services industry; however, the SCM's managerial complexity may vary from one industry to the other industry. In another study [12] supply chain management is defined as a cycle view that considers information flow and processes as an important component in the operational decision-makings. Hence, an organization needs to develop understanding and knowledge concerning the sequence of SC flows and processes, in order to understand the operational requirement and to be able to fulfill the needs of its customers. According to [13] SCM is a process of integrating suppliers, distributors, customers, manufacturers and retailers as part of business entities. The important features of these integrated entities include, the material and resource flows (servicing, recycling, and products), financial flows (consignment arrangements, payment schedules and credit terms) and information flows (order transmission, tracking and coordinating physical flow). Therefore, while operating an integrated SCM, information is expected to remain continuous and provide benefits to the SCM contributors, to ensure optimum flow of products [14].

2.2 Customer Relationship

Researchers refer customer relationship as a key Supply Chain management (SCM) practice [15]. Literature also indicates the significance and benefits of customer relationship. These benefits include, sustaining customer loyalty, greater customer value, product differentiation and organizational success in SCM practices, which thus leads to the organizational performance improvement [16]. Meanwhile, for developing close and long-term customer relationships, organizations are required to implement supply chain integration (SCI). Developing relationship among customers and organizations help firms to quickly respond to the

needs of their customers. Moreover, having good relationship among customers and organization thus enables to differentiate the product from their competitors, through sustaining customer loyalty and developing valuable customer relationship [17]. As a result, a good relationship will be established with the customers through customer satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, the mass customization and personalized service requirements make customer relationship to be one of the important CSR practices.

2.3 Strategic Supplier Partnership

For maintaining a good firm-supplier relationship, an organization is required to create greater value by developing long term firm-supplier relationship. Thus, in view of [18] strategic supplier partnership is a long-term relationship among suppliers and firms, for incurring ongoing benefits. Strategic supplier partnerships involve the purchasing of goods and services by the firms from the suppliers that can influence the operational capabilities and system of suppliers, which in turn enhance organization's SCM performance and the firm value. Thus, strategic supplier partnership allows effective working among organization and its suppliers, since suppliers are accountable for the success or failure of their provided goods and services. According to [19] suppliers which take part during the early product development process may offer more influential design choices and design assessments to the organization and help them in selecting best tools and mechanisms. Therefore, suppliers can closely and carefully work with organizations' aligned strategies to remove unnecessary time and efforts.

2.4 Strategic Outsourcing

Literature has indicated various definitions on the concept of strategic outsourcing. Generally, strategic outsourcing refers as transferring goods and services to an external service provider defined it as the procurement of organizational goods and services through the sources external to the organization [20]. This transaction takes place in two parts, firstly, transferring responsibility to the third part to perform management and operational parts of organization, secondly, services provision from the suppliers to the organization, for several years, in an attempt to explain the features of strategic sourcing. In another definition, strategic outsourcing is referred as the use

of external resources to carry out tasks which an organization usually handles itself internal to the organization. Thus, in order to achieve competitive advantage over competing organizations, effective planning of the outsourcing is required [3]

Relationship among organization and its partners is observed to determine the effectiveness and successfulness of strategic outsourcing. For strategic outsourcing, the right partners are chosen by observing a certain criterion, i.e. reliability, expertise, and credibility which lead to a stronger bonding between organization and its partners [21]. Strategic outsourcing enables organizations to focus more on their core capabilities, for enhancing the overall performance of organization while leaving the other non-core activities to be focused by external or third parties [22]. He further states that strategic sourcing provides competitive advantage to the organization, in the form of higher skills, better market access, large pool of resources, greater flexibility, skills leading to technology, and lower inventory. Thus, strategic sourcing is one of the sustainable practices adopted by the organizations. [23] also found in their study that organizations which adopted strategic outsourcing operations are satisfied from the strategic outsourcing outcomes. Hence, it is now an integral part of organization's corporate strategy. [24] presented the framework and model of outsourcing to identify organizations' core competence and business. The core competence refers to the understanding of organizations about the skills and internal resources they are required to develop, in order to monitor organization's activities using internal contracts for sustaining the organization's business. In another definition, core competence is the organization's knowledge and understanding about its' business activities, like tactical, strategic, and operations [25]. Outsourcing activities can offer advantages and benefits to organizations, thereby enabling them to carefully scrutinize and explore their outsourcing activities. Consequently, the concept of outsourcing can be concluded as an organizational operation which helps organization to carry out daily activities, like improving credibility and employee productivity, employee morale, reducing cost, creating positive corporate image and increase services and expertise by allowing them to find resources by focusing on their core competence and business [26]. Thus, these resources can be

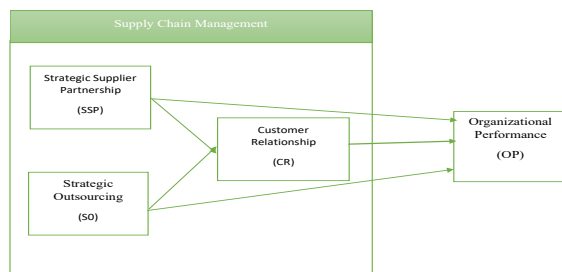
developed by purchasing technologies instead of reproducing them internally, improving service level of the plans by making reliable and consistent information, and reviewing the organization's plans by saving time and money, and becoming more efficient [27].

2.5 Organizational Performance

Supply chain management practices mainly emphasize to reduce costs and enhance organizational cycle performance [28]. It is also consistent with [16] study, in which they stated that from four management priorities, two of the management priorities have reduced their inventory costs and order cycle time to enhance organizational performance. Furthermore, reduction in delivery costs and serving costs were also indicated to be the significant measures for achieving operational objectives. Moreover, in another study [29], it is argued that organization must improve customer loyalty and level of satisfaction to enhance its financial performance, which eventually bring improvement in in the market share growth. In [30] study, it has been revealed that customer satisfaction and loyalty are likely to stimulate the repurchasing of goods, leading to the increase in market share, sales, and profitability. Thus, [31] posit that customer satisfaction would result in customer loyalty which eventually contributes to the organizational profitability. According to [32], satisfied customers may willingly purchase products at premium prices, thereby leading to more profitability. Another study [33] reported that customer loyalty is profitable as compared to making huge investments to attract new customers. [34] defined organizational performance as how well a firm achieves financial goals and market-oriented goals. Reducing cycle time and inventory and increasing organizational productivity are the short-term primary objectives of the supply chain management (SCM) practices, while its primary long-term objectives include, increase in all members profits and market share of SC [35]. However, financial metrics is a tool to evaluate and compare organizational behavior over time.

Prior researches have also reported a positive association among organizational performance and SCM practices. It is suggested that the effectiveness of SCM practices may bring improvement in the organization's competitive advantage and

performance. Besides, [4] also found a direct and significant positive impact of SCM practices on the performance of SME's. Furthermore, [11] have reported that SCM practices, like customer orientation, training, customer leadership and IT adoption significantly influence the organizational performance. Similar evidence was found by [23], who revealed that SCM practices enhance the competitive capabilities of an organization, such as, its customer service, product differentiation, and cost of leadership. Briefly, findings obtained from prior researches suggest that there is a close linkage among SCM practices and organizational performance.



H1: SSP has significant impact on the organizational performance (OP).

H2: SO, has significant impact on the organizational performance (OP).

H3: CR has significant impact on the organizational performance (OP).

H4: SSP has significant impact on the customer relationship (CR).

H5: SO, has significant impact on the customer relationship (CR).

H6: CR mediates the relationship between the SSP and OP.

H7: CR mediates the relationship between the SO and OP.

3. Methodology

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a statistical model which describes the nature of relationship between the variables. In SEM, the structure of the relationships between the multiple variables, indicated through a set of equations are examined. This series of equations explain the association between the theoretical constructs [36]. SEM can assess and efficiently handles measurement errors and also incorporates feedbacks, measurement

errors and correlated measurement errors into the analysis.

SEM can be of two types, the partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM) and covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), where CB-SEM is used for rejecting or validating theories. This is usually done by assessing that how accurately the covariance matrix for the sample data can be estimated by the proposed theoretical model. Contrarily, PLS-SEM is generally employed in exploratory research, for developing theories and for increasing the predictive ability of the model. While examining the model, it also seeks to explain the degree of variance in the dependent variable. However, the difference among these approaches lies in the way these two approaches treat the latent variables in the model.

Therefore, in order to examine effects within the construct and to carry out hypotheses testing, this study employed Partial Least Square (PLS) path modeling. has developed PLS, as a procedure to determine path model involving indirectly measured latent constructs by a set of indicators. It is suitable to apply PLS when there is large number of exogenous latent constructs to estimate a few endogenous constructs [37]. Thus, the Partial Least Square (PLS) approach uses regression analysis to measure the relationships between latent variables and among latent variables and their indicators. In comparison with other co-variance methods, there is no restriction by PLS to use interaction technique while testing.

There are several reasons to adopt PLS path modeling to test the study's proposed set of hypotheses. Several scholars from the marketing and management fields have widely used PLS as an important statistical methodology. During data gathering process, questionnaires were sent to the employees of the manufacturing firms in Indonesia are 476 and received 310 filled questionnaires, with 65.12% survey response rate.

4. Results

PLS-SEM application offers several benefits, such as, PLS-SEM does not make assumptions related to the data and does not require much cost and large sample size to perform data analysis. PLS-SEM can estimate single item constructs, and parameters with no identification issues and can easily perform data analysis through formative and reflective items,

resulting in high statistical power outcome, in comparison to the CB-SEM. Therefore, a two-stage sequential approach is applied in this study to obtain results for the data analysis.

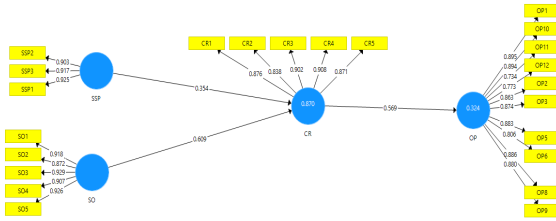


Figure 2. Measurement Model

In PLS-SEM analysis, firstly the measurement model or outer model is evaluated to analyze how well an item load on a hypothetically defined construct. The outer model evaluation involves estimating the unidirectional predictive association among all the latent constructs which are related to the observed indicator in the model. In PLS-SEM, formative and reflective outer models are the two important measures of the indicators, where reflective outer model is assessed by analyzing reliability of all the latent variables, indicator reliability i.e. the individual items reliabilities, construct validity such as, loadings and cross-loadings, internal consistency (composite reliability and Cronbach alpha), convergent validity through obtaining average variance extracted (AVE) and assessing cross-loadings, HTMT criterion or Fornell-Larcker criterion to determine the discriminant validity. In the second stage of PLS-SEM, structural or inner model is evaluated for assessing the model's predictive ability [39]. The criteria for inner model evaluation consist of analyzing the significance of path coefficients (bootstrapping procedure), and the coefficient of determination or R-square values.

Table 1. Outer Loadings

	CR	OP	SO	SSP
CR1	0.876			
CR2	0.838			
CR3	0.902			
CR4	0.908			
CR5	0.871			
OP1		0.895		
OP10		0.894		

OP11		0.734		
OP12		0.773		
OP2		0.863		
OP3		0.874		
OP5		0.883		
OP6		0.806		
OP8		0.886		
OP9		0.880		
SO1			0.918	
SO2			0.872	
SO3			0.929	
SO4			0.907	
SO5			0.926	
SSP2				0.903
SSP3				0.917
SSP1				0.925

According to and, social science researches generally employ Cronbach alpha measure for analyzing the internal consistency. Therefore, in this study, the values for composite reliability were calculated to determine the internal consistency reliability, which must be 0.70 or above to be sufficient. Afterwards, the factors outer loadings were obtained which must be equal or above 0.50 to achieve adequate indicator reliability.

Table 2. Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	(AVE)
CR	0.926	0.927	0.944	0.773
OP	0.957	0.960	0.963	0.723
SO	0.948	0.950	0.960	0.829
SSP	0.902	0.903	0.939	0.837

Researchers [38] define convergent validity as the extent to which the measures of the same constructs are positively correlated, such that, higher convergence or sharing higher proportion of variance by all the indicators of the same construct. For adequate convergent validity, the indicators outer-loadings and average variance extracted are considered, where average variance extracted or AVE explains aggregate of the indicators' squared loadings that are associated to the same construct, and in order to achieve adequate convergent validity, AVE must be equal or above 0.50, which explains that construct

can explain 50% or above variance in its respective indicators.

Besides convergent validity, discriminant validity is an extremely important measure in research, involving latent variables and several indicators or items to illustrate a construct. The discriminant validity measure shows the extent that a construct is quite distinct and unique from other constructs. It ensures whether the latent constructs which measure causal associations in the research are different or distinct and are not estimating same thing, which may lead to the multicollinearity issue [39]. Since, without resolving multicollinearity issue and proceeding to test the hypothesized model may result in useless or misleading interpretation of the model. Therefore, when a particular model construct is completely unique in relation to other constructs, discriminant validity is achieved. For this purpose, two measures are important to be considered, these are; composite reliability and outer loadings. One such way is to observe criterion, which suggests that AVE square roots and latent variables' correlations must be compared [40]. According to, the AVE square roots for all the constructs must be greater in comparison to correlation among other constructs.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	CR	OP	SO	SSP
CR	0.879			
OP	0.569	0.850		
SO	0.816	0.576	0.901	
SSP	0.783	0.501	0.870	0.915

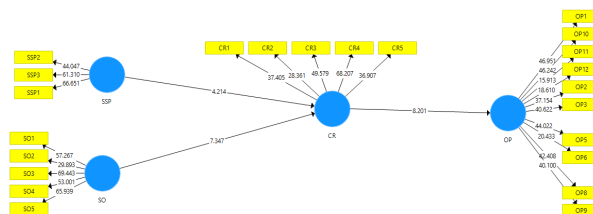


Figure 3. Structural Model

After the assessment of measurement, the next step is the assessment of the structural model. The important criteria for inner model assessment include, collinearity issue, predictive relevance (Q^2), effect sizes, and coefficient of determination (R^2).

Table 4. Direct Relationships

	(O)	(M)	(STDEV)	(O/STDEV)	P Values
CR -> OP	0.569	0.573	0.069	8.201	0.000
SO -> CR	0.609	0.613	0.083	7.347	0.000
SO -> OP	0.347	0.352	0.066	5.237	0.000
SSP -> CR	0.354	0.349	0.084	4.214	0.000
SSP -> OP	0.201	0.200	0.053	3.834	0.000

Using Smart PLS 2.0, bootstrapping method was conducted and discussed in this section. Following and recommendation, 5000 samples were taken for 362 bootstrap cases from the set of data, and without any sign change. This method was performed with a purpose of obtaining t-statistics and standard errors, for hypotheses testing and for assessing the significance of path coefficients [41, 42]. In addition, the model parameters were measured through path-weighting scheme.

Table 5. Mediation

	(O)	(M)	(STDEV)	(O/STDEV)	P Values
SO -> CR -> OP	0.347	0.352	0.066	5.237	0.000
SSP -> CR -> OP	0.201	0.200	0.053	3.834	0.000

Examining R-squared value or coefficient of determination for the endogenous variable is the next step in structural model assessment. While discussing the acceptable range for R-square described $R^2 = 0.67$ as the good, $R^2 = 0.33$ as moderate and $R^2 = 0.19$ as weak values, respectively.

Table 6. R-square

	R Square
CR	0.870
OP	0.324

5. Conclusion

The current study was specifically conducted for analyzing the linkage among the performance of textile and apparel firms and SCM practices. In current study, strategic supplier relations, strategic outsourcing and customer relations were considered to measure the SCM practices, while subjective

measures, like return on investment, profit margin, sales, market share, product and service quality, inventory level, cost saving, delivery, customer satisfaction, forecasting accuracy, return on assets and flexibility are observed for measuring the organizational performance.

There are three objectives in current research, firstly, determining the extent that textile and apparel firms are adopting SCM practices, which is measured by observing strategic supplier relation, strategic sourcing and customer relation. In this context, the findings suggest that those firms which took part in this study are the ones who adopted SCM practices.

Secondly, this study aims to analyze the existing relationship between textile and apparel firms' performance and SCM practices. In context to the second objective, the findings have shown significant association among the participated textile and apparel firms' performance and SCM practices (strategic supplier relation, strategic outsourcing and customer relations). The current study also found supporting evidence for previous researches, concerning the significant positive association among organizational performance and SCM practices. The current research findings were also found to be in accordance to the general consensus in the literature, which suggests a positive relationship between organizational performance and SCM practices. Furthermore, the SCM perspective also seems to be supported by the results of this study, which advocates that effective SCM practices help firms in achieving competitive advantage to sustain organizational performance.

Present study also offered valuable implications for the textile and apparel firms' managers and owners, such as, there must be understanding among textile and apparel firms' owners and managers that there can be more than one ideal SCM practices. In context to this, those SCM practices must be adopted by the textile and apparel firms, which are best suited for the firms' capabilities. In addition, the textile and apparel firms' managers and owners should focus in integrating those SCM practices which may help in achieving competitive advantage, thereby making firm capable of competing in international markets.

The third objective is concerned about investigating the nature of association among organizational performance and customer relationship. Results reveal that organizational

performance significantly influenced by the customer relationship.

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