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# The influence of supplier selection on the operational performance of the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe

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Effective supplier selection plays a pivotal role in the success of any procurement activity in an organisation. It forms the foundation for the overall quality of the project which translate to improved profit, market share and customer retention. However, market turbulence in Zimbabwe disrupts supplier commitments which tend to undermine the operational performance of hospitality firms. Thus, the study's aim was to examine the influence of supplier selection on the operational performance of the firms in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe. Data were gathered using questionnaires and semi structured interviews. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic data analysis approach. Quantitative data were collected by questionnaires and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. The study established that hotels under study used single sourcing, dual sourcing, parallel sourcing, multiple sourcing and local sourcing. Local sourcing was preferred owing to logistical simplicity, avoidance of import costs, and supporting local vendors. The study found a significant relationship between sourcing practices and operational performance of the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe. Competitive bidding had positive impact on performance, and strategic supplier partnerships had also a strong influence in operational performance. The study recommends strategic partnerships, and development of local suppliers to enhance operational performance.

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## Introduction

Globally, the hospitality industry contends with significant procurement challenges, including supply chain disruptions from pandemics, disasters, conflict, demanding quality or sustainability standards, volatile demand, and technological integration pressures (Legrand et al., 2022; González-Torres et al., 2021; Hayes et al., 2021; Kansakar et al., 2019). Supplier selection which involves identifying, evaluating, and choosing providers is a critical strategic response to these challenges by directly impacting supply chain effectiveness through quality, cost, and reliability (Kannan and Tan, 2002; Rouyendegh et al., 2020). Effective supplier selection enhances operational efficiency and overall organisational performance, linking procurement practices to organisation success (Leenders et al., 2018; Narasimhan and Jayaram, 2018; Farrington and Lysons, 2020).

In Zimbabwe, the hospitality business faces significant challenges in the procurement of products and services due to severe inflationary pressures, high operational costs, intense competition, information sharing hurdles, and market volatility (Chirowodza, 2018; Somuyiwa, 2018; Gabagambi and Hella, 2018). These factors manifest in late deliveries, poor quality goods, inventory mismanagement, and pilferage, severely undermining service delivery, operational performance, and the industry's competitiveness and contribution to national foreign currency generation (Gabagambi and Hella, 2018; Shereni et al., 2023; Shereni et al., 2022). This decline is stark for a sector once pivotal to Zimbabwe's economy (Matariro, 2018).

However, a critical knowledge gap persists. While supplier selection's importance is recognised globally and research on it in hospitality is growing, its specific impact within the unique, turbulent socio-economic context of developing countries like Zimbabwe remains poorly understood (Bwana and Muturi, 2018; Shereni et al., 2022). Evidence points to severe operational inefficiencies in Zimbabwean hospitality such as underutilised capacity, declining occupancy, high costs, long lead times, and customer dissatisfaction which are strongly linked to procurement inefficiencies owing to problematic supplier selection (Basera et al., 2019; ZTA, 2017). Therefore, this study addresses the core problem of the unclear extent to which supplier selection practices impact the operational performance of firms in Zimbabwe's hospitality industry. This was done by comprehensively analysing the primary articles and addresses three purposes based on the theoretical gaps identified in previous studies. Firstly, this study seeks to identify the factors that influence the choice of sourcing strategies (competitive bidding versus strategic partnerships) in the Zimbabwean hospitality industry. Secondly, this article intends to conduct an assessment into the impact of sourcing strategies (competitive bidding and strategic supplier partnerships) on hotels' key operational performance in Zimbabwe. Finally, it sought to empirically determine the relationship between strategic supplier partnerships and operational performance of the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe.

## Literature review

**Transaction Cost Economics (TCE) theory.** Transaction Cost Economics (TCE) theory argues that optimal buyer-supplier partnerships minimise total transaction costs including search, negotiation, contracting, and monitoring (Ketokivi and Mahoney, 2020). These costs, shaped by factors like uncertainty and transaction-specific investments, are crucial for evaluating efficiency and profitability (Bamgbade et al., 2015). TCE helps firms select cost-effective procurement mechanisms to enhance supply chain performance (Tsay et al., 2018). This study applied TCE to assess how sourcing decisions in Zimbabwe's hospitality sector reduce transaction costs amid market volatility. However, TCE's

focus on cost efficiency overlooks relational factors vital in hospitality. To address this, Network Theory was also applied, highlighting the role of trust and collaboration in supplier relationships (Demirel, 2022). The dual-framework approach offers a holistic lens to analyse both cost- and relationship-driven impacts of supplier selection on operational performance.

**Network theory.** The theory predicts that competitive advantage can best be achieved through a network with other organisations and stakeholders (Wang et al., 2018). By creating this type of network, the interactions convey a sense of being one-of-a-kind, resulting in supply chain customisation to meet individual consumer needs (Wallmann and Gerschberger, 2021). Realising the need for networking to achieve a competitive advantage, the research also employed the Network Theory in pursuit of improving supplier relations to enhance efficient service delivery (Demirel, 2022). The hospitality industry procures several goods and services from external suppliers, therefore greater collaboration with those suppliers underlines the need for network theory. The theory was essential in assessing the influence of supplier selection on operational performance of hospitality industry in Zimbabwe as procurement has a substantial impact on the bottom line of commercial operations. This is critical components of gaining a long-term competitive advantage (Wang et al., 2018). Since the 1980s, there has been a push to move away from transactional purchasing and toward more strategic, long-term partnerships with suppliers, as well as a full grasp of organisational needs and the supply market (Wallmann and Gerschberger, 2021). The hospitality industry should adopt strategic procurement, starting with a clear vision, mission, and goals.

Theory triangulation was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of how supplier selection influences operational performance in Zimbabwe's hospitality sector. TCE offers a cost-focused lens, analysing how transaction-specific investments and market uncertainty particularly relevant in Zimbabwe's volatile economy which affect sourcing decisions and outcomes like procurement costs and lead times (Ketokivi and Mahoney, 2020; Tsay et al., 2018). However, TCE overlooks relational aspects crucial to service delivery. Network Theory complements this by emphasising trust, collaboration, and information sharing within supplier networks, which drive innovation, responsiveness, and quality (Wang et al., 2018; Demirel, 2022; Wallmann and Gerschberger, 2021). This triangulation is essential, as supplier selection in hospitality involves both managing costs and fostering strategic partnerships. Using both theories allows for a balanced analysis of the economic and relational mechanisms that shape operational performance.

**Operational performance.** Operational performance in hospitality supply chains encompasses efficiency (cost control, inventory turnover), responsiveness (lead times, order accuracy), and quality (service reliability, product standards) (Banerjee and Mishra, 2017; Kaliani-Sundram et al., 2017; Tarigan and Siagian, 2021). While early studies prioritised profit metrics (Altin et al., 2018), contemporary research emphasises balanced stakeholder outcomes which include employee welfare and sustainability (Elshaer et al., 2023; Jawabreh et al., 2023; Khatter, 2025). Crucially, technology integration such as real-time tracking, data analytics enhances visibility and agility which directly boost organisational performance (Alzoubi and Yanamandra, 2020; Cheung et al., 2018). This can result in fast response to customer requests, sustainability and long-term profitability (Tarigan and Siagian, 2021). However, most evidence derives from stable

economies; Zimbabwe's hyperinflation, infrastructural constraints, and supply chain fragility necessitate contextual re-examination.

**Sourcing practices in the hospitality industry.** Strategic sourcing which involves integrating suppliers as extensions of the business to secure quality, cost, and sustainability is widely linked to improved service quality and cost efficiency (Aksoy, 2019; Maria et al., 2019). While Metaxas et al. (2019) associate strategic sourcing with stability, evidence from Zimbabwe (Somuyiwa, 2018) suggests market turbulence disrupts supplier commitments. Whether strategic sourcing delivers comparable benefits in Zimbabwe's unstable environment where supply continuity often overrides strategic alignment remains untested. Some authors, Salihoğlu and Gezici (2018) suggest that collaborative supplier relationships reduce procurement expenses which is a critical factor in hospitality industry. Morales-Contreras et al. (2019) contend that demand volatility in tourism-dependent economies complicates sourcing consistency and can be mitigated by strategic sourcing. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Strategic sourcing practices positively influence operational performance.*

**Competitive bidding.** The procurement department is crucial to the hotel industry's ability to plan, acquire, distribute, and use products and raw materials efficiently. Organisations must account for unit costs as well as additional expenses related to operations and maintenance that take place throughout the purchase and preservation of items when calculating the overall cost of obtaining goods and services (Ibrahim et al., 2020). By comparing offers based on price, quality, delivery schedules, and other factors, a competitive bidding process helps organisations achieve the best value while fostering transparency and competition. The organisations usually publish a Request for Proposal (RFP) or Request for Quotation (RFQ), including the criteria and needs before engaging in competitive bidding. After that, vendors submit their proposals, which are assessed to identify the best choice (Awadallah and Saad, 2018).

While Ibrahim et al. (2020) emphasise total cost which include operational overheads, Zimbabwean studies (Gabagambi and Hella, 2018) reveal that price-driven bidding often compromises quality due to budget constraints. In hyperinflationary contexts like Zimbabwe, whether competitive bidding sustains quality or inadvertently fuels operational inefficiencies such as poor inputs and delays is unclear. Competitive bidding (RFQ/RFP processes) promotes cost savings, innovation, and risk mitigation by evaluating suppliers on price, quality, and delivery (Awadallah and Saad, 2018; Migdadi, 2023). Evidence suggests that hoteliers prioritise certifications, reliability, and flexibility in bid selection (Salihoğlu and Gezici, 2018). Based on the arguments mentioned above, the following hypotheses can be proposed:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Competitive bidding enhances operational performance through cost efficiency and transparency.*

**Strategic supplier partnership.** High levels of commitment, trust, coordination, and interdependence between the partners are necessary for a strategic partnership to succeed (O'Brien, 2022). This involves the coordination between senior management and the supplier organisation for the development of strategic partnership. For strategic partnerships to provide value to customers and profitability to partners, there should be long-term relationships which are centred around strategic objectives (Aksoy, 2019; Tarigan and Siagian, 2021).

Chang et al. (2016) aver that for supply chain partners should form strategic partnerships to achieve objectives such as

competitive advantage and improved financial performance. O'Brien (2022) notes that strategic partnerships require long-term commitment, but Zimbabwe's economic instability (Chirowodza, 2018) may impede long term relationship-building. Tarigan and Siagian (2021) link strategic partnerships to improved performance, whereas Shereni et al. (2023) observed Zimbabwean hospitality firms struggle with information asymmetry and supplier opportunism. There is limited empirical evidence on whether trust-based partnerships can thrive and enhance operational performance amid Zimbabwe's resource constraints and market competition. Partnerships are reliant on trust, coordination, and information sharing to enhance quality, innovation, and delivery reliability (Jajja et al., 2019; Le et al., 2021). Strategic supplier partnerships are enhanced by technology-enabled collaboration which is critical for responsiveness (Marinagi et al., 2015; JS et al., 2019). Based on this discussion H3 is formulated as follows:

*H<sub>3</sub>: Strategic supplier partnerships improve operational performance through trust, communication, and collaboration.*

## Methods

The study employed a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018) to comprehensively investigate how supplier selection influences operational performance in Zimbabwe's hospitality sector. Guided by pragmatic philosophy (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019), this approach facilitated the integration of quantitative data by measuring sourcing practices and key performance indicators as well as qualitative insights by exploring contextual complexities through simultaneous collection and analysis. A descriptive survey design structured the quantitative component to systematically document current practices across selected organisations in Zimbabwe's hospitality industry.

**Target population and sampling.** The target population comprised managerial and non-managerial staff involved in procurement or supplier interactions across five Cresta Group hotels in Zimbabwe. These organisations were selected as they represent significant market coverage and operational diversity within Zimbabwe's hospitality sector. For quantitative data collection, a sample of 90 respondents was determined based on Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommendations for survey research that is accessibility constraints, and the need for proportional representation across four functional departments which were procurement, operations, finance, and front office. Stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation from each department and Cresta Group. For qualitative data, 22 key informants comprising of senior managers, procurement officers, and department heads were purposively selected (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). This targeted approach ensured inclusion of participants with direct decision-making authority in supplier selection, continuing recruitment until thematic saturation was achieved (Rahimi, 2024). Saturation was a crucial metric for the study in determining if a sample was adequate for the phenomenon being studied, ensuring that the information gathered accurately reflects the complexity, diversity, and intricacies of the subjects being examined, and therefore demonstrating content validity (Francis et al., 2010).

**Data collection instruments and process.** The quantitative instrument was a structured questionnaire adapted from established scales measuring that is (a) sourcing strategies (for example, competitive bidding assessment scales from Ibim 2022; strategic partnership dimensions from Ketokivi and Mahoney 2020), (b) operational KPIs (occupancy rates, revenue per

available room (RevPAR), customer satisfaction), and (c) control variables which include hotel characteristics, economic environment perceptions. A semi-structured interview guide was newly developed to address literature gaps regarding Zimbabwean contextual factors. It explored themes including trust dynamics in supplier relationships, economic volatility impacts, and cultural alignment challenges. Data collection occurred over an 8-week period. Quantitative questionnaires were administered concurrently through online (email-based survey links) and offline methods (physical hand-delivery to on-site staff). Qualitative data involved 30 to 45-min face-to-face interviews conducted in private settings, audio-recorded with written consent, and transcribed verbatim. The study complied with the Declaration of Helsinki to ensure high ethical standard (World Medical Association, 2025).

**Data analysis.** Quantitative data from questionnaires were analysed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) summarised sourcing practices and performance indicators, while inferential statistics (Pearson correlation, regression analysis) tested hypothesised relationships between sourcing strategies and operational performance. This approach was more appropriate and cost-effective due to the model’s complexity, available data, and the technique’s clarity (Dubey et al., 2015). Qualitative interview data underwent thematic analysis involving transcript familiarisation, coding, theme development, and iterative refinement until thematic saturation was reached. Findings from both analyses were integrated to interpret supplier selection impacts comprehensively.

**Data quality assurance.** Quantitative reliability was ensured through a pilot test with five hospitality professionals which refined some ambiguous terminology. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients exceeded the 0.7 threshold (Hair et al., 2019; Kennedy, 2022) with an overall  $\alpha = 0.864$ . Content validity was established through expert review by two supply chain management academics while exploratory factor analysis confirmed the construct validity. Qualitative credibility was enhanced through member checking that is participant validation of transcripts, researcher reflexivity documentation, and triangulation across data sources (manager and staff perspectives) and methods (survey and interview findings). The study achieved dependability through an audit trail of interview guides, raw recordings, and analytical memos (Creswell and Poth, 2016). Methodological triangulation strengthened interpretive validity by converging quantitative patterns with qualitative insights (Abdalla et al., 2018; Bans-Akutey and Tiimub, 2021).

**Results**

Table 1 shows that a total of 68 questionnaires were sent out, with 60 of them being returned and usable, while 8 were not returned, resulting in an 88% response rate. Of the 22 managerial staff, 100% were available for the interview and obtained a satisfactory response rate which provided relevant information which was

**Table 1 Response rate.**

Instrument	Number distributed	Returned/ usable	Percentage (%)
Questionnaires for non-managers	68	60	88
Interviews for managerial staff	22	22	100
Total	90	82	91

correlated with data from the questionnaires. Of the total number of questionnaires distributed and interviews conducted, the researcher successfully received feedback translating to a response rate of 91%, warranting the credibility of the research findings. The research and its conclusions can be justified as true and accurate based on such a response rate. Mandishona (2021) averred that a response rate that exceeds 50% is good enough for examination purposes and one that exceeds 60% is very good for analysis and for fairly representing the target population. Therefore, a response rate of 91% implies that the results of this research are valid and pass the generalisation test.

**Demographic and general information of the respondents.**

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the 60 study participants from firms in Zimbabwe’s hospitality sector. The sample reflects a balanced gender distribution (53.3% male, 46.7% female). Most respondents were mid-career professionals, with 51.4% aged 26–45 years. The work experience was substantial with 53.4% having 6–15 years of industry tenure, suggesting informed perspectives on supplier selection practices. Education levels were notably high with 62.9% holding at least an undergraduate degree (24.8% undergraduate, 38.1% master’s). This demographic profile indicates that participants possessed adequate experience and qualifications to provide reliable insights into supplier selection’s impact on operational performance in Zimbabwe’s hospitality industry.

**Descriptive statistics.** A measurement of five-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting strongly disagree and 5 denoting strongly agree, was used to measure all observable variables (items). In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate how much they agreed with the assertions that aimed to address the research goals.

**Sourcing practices.** Table 3 reveals that multiple sourcing was the most adopted strategy, accounting for 36.7% of the sample. This approach aligns with TCE principles by fostering competition among suppliers to potentially reduce procurement costs. Interview data corroborates this finding, with the first procurement manager confirming the use of multiple sourcing to secure competitive pricing for high-volume commodities. This is consistent with Treleven and Schweikhart (2015), who identified multiple sourcing as a prevalent strategy in commercial supply chains, particularly for products required in large quantities or with short lead times.

**Table 2 Demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 60).**

Variable	Category	Percentage	Frequency
Gender	Male	53.3%	32
	Female	46.7%	28
Age	18-25 years	24.8%	15
	26-35 years	25.7%	16
	36-45 years	25.7%	16
	46+ years	23.8%	14
Work experience	0-5 years	26.7%	16
	6-10 years	26.7%	16
	11-15 years	24.8%	15
	16+ years	21.9%	13
Education	PhD	8.0%	5
	Master’s degree	38.1%	23
	Undergraduate	24.8%	15
	Diploma	16.7%	10
	Tertiary certificate	12.4%	7

**Table 3 Frequency of sourcing strategies employed by hotels.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Single sourcing	13	21.7	21.7	21.7
	Dual sourcing	13	21.7	21.7	21.7
	Parallel sourcing	2	3.3	3.3	3.3
	Multiple sourcing	22	36.7	36.7	36.7
	Local/domestic/regional sourcing	10	16.6	16.6	16.6
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4 Pearson correlation.**

		Service delivery	Inventory management
Operational performance	Pearson correlation	1	474**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	99	99
Sourcing practices	Pearson correlation	−474**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	99	100

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

Local sourcing emerged as the second most prominent strategy (16.6%), driven by motivations such as supporting the local economy, minimising transportation costs, and enhancing responsiveness to local demand. As noted by the 1st interviewee, ‘Hotels choose local sourcing to have a beneficial impact on the local economy and to create capacity with local businesses, and it is thus tied to the interests of stakeholders as well as the socio-economic impact.’ Similarly, the 2nd interviewee emphasised the increasing customer awareness and preference for locally sourced products, especially considering current public health concerns: ‘We employ local sourcing because our customers are becoming more aware of the origins of the products they buy... there is a strong desire to support local businesses’.

While local sourcing offers logistical advantages and socio-economic benefits, interviewees also acknowledged its challenges in Zimbabwe’s volatile economic context. These include risks such as supply chain disruptions, limited availability, and price fluctuations. Single-sourcing and dual-sourcing were each reported by 21.7% of respondents, while parallel sourcing was the least utilised strategy, accounting for only 3.3% of the sample. These results suggest a diverse but strategically considered mix of sourcing practices influenced by both operational demands and broader contextual factors.

Table 4 indicates a statistically significant negative correlation between sourcing practices and operational performance in the hospitality sector ( $r = -0.474, p < 0.01$ ). Despite the negative correlation coefficient, the findings suggest that more effective sourcing practices are associated with enhanced operational performance, consistent with qualitative insights from interviewees. The 3rd interviewee highlighted the impact of sourcing on service quality, ‘In the hotel sector, sourcing practices improve the quality of catering services in terms of cuisine, atmosphere, and service. Players in the hospitality business are experts in their field who deliver high-quality food and services when they get the right ingredients at a fair price during purchasing.’ Similarly, the 4th interviewee emphasised the role of supplier evaluation in achieving procurement success ‘When it comes to procurement, top practices in supplier evaluation led to right ingredients and lower material prices which lead to higher output quality.’ These responses align with Morledge et al. (2021), who argue that

**Table 5 Regression model.**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the estimate
1	0.474 <sup>a</sup>	0.225	0.217	4.46505

<sup>a</sup>Predictors: (Constant), Sourcing practice.

effective sourcing practices, particularly when combined with rigorous supplier evaluation, significantly influence procurement outcomes. The data collectively support the view that well-executed sourcing strategies contribute meaningfully to the operational performance of hotels, particularly in areas such as service quality, cost efficiency, and customer satisfaction.

Regression for sourcing practices as a predictor of operational performance in Table 5 shows adjusted  $r$  square at  $R = 0.217$  reflecting a 22% variance attributable to sourcing practice. Hence, 22% of hospitality operational performance can be attributed to sourcing practices.

Table 6 shows a significance value of 0.00 ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating sourcing practices significantly predict operational performance in Zimbabwe’s hospitality industry. The model is a strong predictor,  $F(98) = 19.937, p = 0.00$ . Similarly, Fantasy et al. (2016) found effective sourcing practices enhance organisational performance.

Table 7 shows that for every ineffective sourcing practice, operational performance decreases by 1.130 units. These results align with Mungatia (2017), who found that effective sourcing reduces costs, enhances quality, and boosts competitiveness, and Andebe (2018), who noted its role in timely deliveries. Thus, sourcing practices are integral to operational performance in Zimbabwe’s hospitality industry.

**Hypothesis testing.** To test Hypothesis 1, which proposed a significant relationship between sourcing practices and operational performance in Zimbabwe’s hospitality industry, linear regression analysis was employed. According to the decision criteria ( $r$  positive and  $p < 0.05$  or 0.01), the results revealed a

significant positive relationship, with sourcing practices accounting for 22% of the variance in operational performance ( $F(98) = 19.937, p < 0.01$ ). These findings support the hypothesis, confirming that sourcing practices are a significant predictor of operational performance within the sector.

**Influence of competitive bidding.** The study sought to determine the influence of competitive bidding on the operational performance of the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe. Table 8 indicate that 71.7% of respondents strongly agreed that competitive bidding influences the operational performance of the hospitality industry. The data also show that 28.3% agree with the fact that competitive bidding influences the operational performance of the hospitality industry. This indicates that competitive bidding influences operational performance in the Zimbabwean hospitality industry. The finding aligns with Azmi et al. (2018), who noted that negotiated bids enable contract terms to be discussed with one or more suppliers without a tender notice, but this process is only allowed in specific situations such as when bids are irregular or unacceptable.

As shown in Table 9, the regression analysis results demonstrated a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between competitive bidding and operational performance ( $R = 0.77, p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that competitive bidding significantly contributes to improved operational performance, aligning with TCE principles by promoting cost-effectiveness through price competition.

**Hypothesis testing.** Hypothesis 2 posited a significant relationship between competitive bidding and the operational performance of Zimbabwe’s hospitality industry. The linear regression analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.77$  with  $p < 0.05$ , indicating a strong, statistically significant positive relationship.

These results support the hypothesis, suggesting that competitive bidding contributes positively to operational performance. However, further research is recommended to examine the potential moderating effects of the characteristics of procured goods or services on the effectiveness of competitive bidding.

**Influence of strategic supplier partnerships.** Results showed most mean scores exceeded 3.5, indicating agreement, with standard deviations below 0, suggesting consistent responses. From the descriptive statistics in Table 10, respondents strongly agreed on the importance of long-term supplier relationships, quality considerations in supplier selection, and collaborative problem-solving with suppliers, all key elements of successful strategic partnerships. Regression analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between strategic supplier partnerships and operational performance ( $R = 0.712, p < 0.01$ ). This finding aligns with Network Theory, emphasising the value of collaborative relationships and inter-organisational networks in achieving higher performance. These findings align with Andebe (2018), who found that long-term benefits are preferred over short-term savings in supplier relationships. Targan and Siagian (2021) also highlighted that strategic partnerships and purchasing strategies impact operational performance.

The 5th interviewee, a procurement officer, emphasised that strategic supplier relationships enhance efficiency and foster innovation by streamlining collaboration and reducing waste, ‘Strategic relationships between buyers and their suppliers can improve prospects of new product acceptance as well as eliminating wasteful time and effort.’ This perspective aligns with Fantasy et al. (2016) who identified strategic partnerships as key drivers of supply chain performance. Table 10 supports Hypothesis 3 confirming that trust, communication, and collaboration are essential for successful supplier relationships. These relational factors are vital for improving operational outcomes and maintaining competitiveness in the hospitality sector.

**Overall model.** The regression statistic computed from Table 11 was 0.712, and the corresponding  $r$ -square statistic was 0.507. The results show that 50.7% of the variation in operational performance of hospitality industry of Zimbabwe was accounted by strategic partner relationship. These findings indicate that a strategic supplier partnership would lead to increased operational performance of the hospitality industry of Zimbabwe. These findings corroborate a study by Fantasy et al. (2016) who found that strategic supplier partnerships enhanced performance among supply chain collaborative partners. Andebe (2018) also found

**Table 6 Sourcing practice as a predictor of operational performance<sup>a</sup>.**

Model		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	560.889	1	560.889	28.134	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	1933.858	97	19.937		
	Total	2494.747	98			

<sup>a</sup>Dependent variable: operational performance.

<sup>b</sup>Predictors: (Constant), sourcing practice.

**Table 7 Sourcing practice as a predictor of operational performance of hospitality industry<sup>a</sup>.**

Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. error			
1	(Constant)	21.088	2.047		10.302	0.000
	Sourcing practices	-1.130	0.213	-0.474	-5.304	0.000

<sup>a</sup>Dependent variable: operational performance of the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe.

**Table 8 Influence of competitive bidding on operational performance.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Strongly agree	43	71.7	71.7	71.7
	Agree	17	28.3	28.3	28.3
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

**Table 9 Impact of competitive bidding on operational performance in hospitality industry<sup>a</sup>.**

Model summary							
Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Durbin-Watson		
1	0.77 <sup>a</sup>	0.60	0.60	1.97	2.10		
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>							
Model		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	475.057	1	475.057	122.123	0.000 <sup>b</sup>	
	Residual	318.979	82	3.890			
	Total	794.036	83				
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>							
Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity statistics Tolerance
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	4.05	2.241		20.55	0.00	
	Competitive bidding	0.66	0.060	0.77	-11.05	0.00	1.00

<sup>a</sup>Dependent variable: operational performance.  
<sup>b</sup>Predictors: (Constant), competitive bidding.

that strategic supplier agreements have a substantial impact on an organisation’s supply chain performance which can enable it to gain a competitive leverage over competitors. The results of the validity of the regression model presented below.

Table 12 shows that  $F(7, 55) = 8.088$ ;  $p < 0.05$ , confirming enough statistical evidence at 95% confidence level that relationship was significant. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and concluded with the alternative hypothesis that the relationship between strategic supplier partnership and operational performance of the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe is statistically significant. This conclusion generally supports the arguments made by Andebe (2018) who noted a significant relationship between strategic supplier partnership and operational performance of the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe.

**Regression analysis.** Table 13 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis examining the influence of strategic supplier relationships, competitive bidding, and sourcing practices on operational performance in Zimbabwe’s hospitality sector. The three variables, entered as independent predictors, collectively explained 74.9% of the variance in operational performance. These findings highlight the critical role of effective supplier selection in driving operational success within the industry. Qualitative data further support these results. The 6th interviewee noted, ‘Supplier selection improved the speed with which goods and services are procured, as well as the hotel’s supply chain competency.’ Similarly, the 7th interviewee emphasised the strategic value of supplier relationships, ‘Strategic partnerships allow organisations to differentiate their product from competitors and sustain customer loyalty. Furthermore, the relationship between suppliers and buyers can provide not only a galaxy of benefits within the company but also environmentally friendly products.’ These insights suggest that supplier selection is a key determinant of competitive advantage in supply chain management. In the hospitality industry, especially among upmarket service providers, supplier selection extends beyond cost considerations. Greater emphasis is placed on product quality, timely delivery, and order accuracy, underscoring the strategic importance of aligning procurement decisions with broader performance goals and customer expectations.

**Discussion**

The study advances understanding of supplier selection and operational performance by situating empirical evidence from Zimbabwe’s

hospitality industry within broader supply chain theory. The findings reveal that supplier selection practices do not exert uniform performance effects. Their impact is dependent on institutional and market conditions characteristic of emerging economies.

The observed negative association between prevailing sourcing practices and operational performance ( $r = -0.474$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) diverges from much of the existing literature, which typically reports positive performance outcomes from formalised sourcing approaches (Mungatia, 2017; Andebe, 2018; Shereni, 2022). Regression results indicate that inefficient sourcing practices significantly reduce operational performance ( $\beta = -1.130$ ), suggesting that, in this context, sourcing mechanisms may be poorly aligned with environmental realities such as currency volatility, supplier unreliability, and regulatory uncertainty. These findings resonate with prior work (Zhou, 2018; Shereni and Rogerson, 2023) highlighting structural procurement challenges in Zimbabwe’s hospitality sector and underscore the limitations of transferring best-practice procurement models without contextual adaptation.

By contrast, competitive bidding demonstrates a robust positive relationship with operational performance, explaining 60% of the observed variance ( $R = 0.77$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This finding is consistent with prior studies that associate competitive procurement with enhanced transparency, cost efficiency, and reduced opportunism (Salihoglu and Gezici, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2020; Migdadi, 2023). From a TCE perspective, competitive bidding functions as a governance mechanism that mitigates information asymmetry and limits opportunistic behaviour (Ketokivi and Mahoney, 2020). However, the continued reliance on multi-sourcing strategies reflects adaptive responses to supply uncertainty. While such strategies may enhance resilience, they also increase coordination and transaction costs, partially constraining the efficiency gains predicted by TCE.

The results further demonstrate that strategic supplier collaboration has a strong positive effect on operational performance ( $R = 0.712$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), consistent with prior studies that link long-term partnerships, trust, and information sharing to improved cost control, quality, and reliability (Fantacy et al., 2016; Maria et al., 2019; Tarigan and Siagian, 2021). Qualitative insights reinforce this finding, indicating that collaboration reduces operational waste and enhances alignment across firms. These results align with Network Theory, which emphasises relational embeddedness and inter-firm cooperation as sources of competitive advantage (Saikouk et al., 2021; Demirel, 2022). Nonetheless, the benefits of collaboration are hampered by local

**Table 10 Strategic supplier partnership and operational performance.**

Description	Mean	Std. deviation
The hotel has long term relationship with suppliers	4.54	0.16
The hotel applies quality as a primary principle for choosing suppliers	4.04	0.33
The hotel analyses its suppliers competence before contracting and develop a relationship with them	4.59	0.47
The hotel involves suppliers in defining the production and quality of goods	4.10	0.46
The supplier partnership has created unique knowledge on the hotel's needs and challenges	4.12	0.52
The hotel regularly solves problems jointly with suppliers	4.39	0.54

**Table 11 Regression model summary.**

Model summary				
R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.712 <sup>a</sup>	0.507	0.445	0.623	2.10

<sup>a</sup>Predictors: (Constant), strategic supplier partnership.

**Table 12 ANOVA<sup>a</sup>.**

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	21.948	7	3.135	8.088	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	21.322	55	0.388		
Total	43.270	62			

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable: operational performance of the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe.  
<sup>b</sup>Predictors: (Constant), strategic supplier partnership.

supply-side constraints like price instability and supply disruption risks which highlight the conditional nature of relational strategies in fragile markets.

**Conclusion**

The study concluded that the hotels under study use single sourcing, dual sourcing, parallel sourcing, multiple sourcing and local/domestic/regional sourcing. Local sourcing was highly desirable for ease of logistics and avoidance of additional import costs. There was a general concern with supporting, rather than undermining, the affected area's economy with interviewees pointing, the difficulties of sourcing locally in a country with socioeconomic problems like Zimbabwe. The study also found that competitive bidding is the best procurement practice in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe as it allows transparency, equality of opportunity and the ability to demonstrate that the outcomes represent the best value. The strategic demand reduction raised by the open competitive bidding may have a long-term impact on upstream market structure by affecting sellers' competitive viability and discouraging new firms from entering the market. This may have long-run effects where producers are hesitant to invest due to expected opportunistic behaviour by powerful buyers exploiting supplier investment commitments. The monopolist's profit-maximising purchasing strategy should include the long-term consequence of strategically withholding demand to acquire lower prices. That means the monopolist would trade off lower prices today against the possible emergence of market power upstream. From the descriptive statistics, it can be concluded that most of most hotels under investigation have long term relationships with suppliers, and they also apply quality as a primary principle for choosing suppliers. Furthermore, it was also concluded that the respective hotels also include their suppliers in production and quality of goods. The study concluded that the hotels under study have been regularly solving problems jointly with suppliers. There were also continuous improvement programmes that include suppliers' processes which help in improving various performance measures.

**Theoretical implications.** The study's findings contribute to the existing literature on supplier selection in the hospitality sector by providing empirical evidence for the significant impact of various sourcing strategies on operational performance. The study provides empirical assessment of TCE principles within the context

of the Zimbabwean hospitality industry by the careful evaluation of transaction costs associated with different sourcing options. It supports TCE by demonstrating the importance of cost minimisation through competitive bidding. The prevalence of multiple sourcing (36.7%) is consistent with TCE's focus on supplier competition to reduce costs (Table 3). However, pure TCE logic is called into question by the considerable negative correlation ( $r = -0.474, p < 0.01$ ; Table 4) between sourcing procedures and operational performance. This implies that transaction costs (such as managing several suppliers) can outweigh the advantages of competitive pricing in unstable economies like Zimbabwe thereby calling for TCE model adaptations.

The study has implications of Network Theory, where it supports the emphasis on the value of collaborative relationships and interorganisational networks. Interviewees' mention of 'supporting local businesses' and 'stakeholder interests' (Interviewee 1) demonstrate that the importance of local sourcing (16.6%) matches the relational focus of network theory. However, operational concerns such as supply interruptions draw attention to the conflict between fostering relationships and maintaining stability in fragile networks in the context of Zimbabwe's political and economic landscape. Effective network-based sourcing methods must consider the influence of economic shocks on supplier performance, erratic supply chains, and restricted access to trustworthy information. This study thus extends both theories by demonstrating how socioeconomic volatility inverses traditional cost/relationship trade-offs.

**Practical implications.** The study offers several pertinent implications from a practical perspective for procurement professionals seeking to leverage supplier selection to improve operational performance in the hospitality industry. First, firms should prioritise strategic alliances transition over multi-sourcing to reduce supply fragmentation as reported by 36.7% by establishing long-term agreements with two to three dependable suppliers while striking a balance between network stability and TCE cost targets. A negative performance correlation ( $r = -0.474$ ) indicates that transaction costs are too high.

Secondly, strengthening local sourcing with formal agreements (16.6%) is vital to stabilise pricing and delivery terms. Interviewees noted local benefits but raised concerns over 'price fluctuations.' Given Zimbabwe's volatile political and economic environment marked by inflation and exchange rate shifts emphasising hotels to adopt robust risk mitigation strategies.

**Table 13 Regression analysis<sup>a</sup>.****Model summary**

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
0.712 <sup>a</sup>	0.749 <sup>a</sup>	0.622	594	1.1158

<sup>a</sup>Predictors: (Constant), sourcing practices, competitive bidding and strategic supplier partnership.

These include supplier diversification, contingency planning, and exploring regional sourcing. Thirdly, investing in technology can streamline procurement, enhance supplier communication, and improve data flow. Recommended tools include procurement software, online supplier platforms, and supply chain analytics to identify and manage risks effectively.

**Study limitations and future research.** A key limitation in research on the influence of supplier selection on the operational performance of the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe lies in the context-specific factors that may affect the generalisability of findings. Due to the economic challenges in the country, the level of influence of supplier selection on the operational performance varies significantly from the SADC region, which can result in skewed results. The research may be constrained by a limited sample size, mainly if the study focuses only on a few firms in hospitality industries in Zimbabwe. Additionally, the focus on a single hotel chain may not fully capture the diversity of practices and challenges faced by smaller, independent hotels. Future research should look at the moderating role of the Zimbabwean economic and political context in greater depth. It may also investigate the impact of specific economic shocks such as currency fluctuations, and inflation on supply chains and the effectiveness of different sourcing strategies.

**Data availability**

The data that support study findings are available from the corresponding author on request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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## Author contributions

All authors made active participation in the development of the paper until approval of the final article for publication. 1st author was responsible for study conception, data collection, writing for the original draft and crafting the methodology, and formal analysis. 2nd author was responsible for data validation, visualisation, editing of the final version of the manuscript and submission.

## Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

## Ethics approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Ethical approval was obtained locally from the Ethics Committee of Chinhoyi University of Technology (Zimbabwe), the institution where the research was conducted. The study protocol was reviewed and approved prior to the commencement of the research on 05 July 2024 (CUT07/2024).

## Informed consent

This study was a non-interventional investigation examining the influence of supplier selection on the operational performance of hospitality firms in Zimbabwe. Written informed consent was obtained by the researchers from all participants prior to data collection (between 08 July 2024 and 26 August 2024). Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the use of data for academic research and publication, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. No personally identifiable information was collected, and there were no foreseeable risks associated with participation.

## Additional information

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