Operational Credibility and Supplier Trust in Industrial Spare-Parts Purchasing: An Exploratory Study of Buyer Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This secondary analysis investigates how perceived inventory readiness, delivery reliability and technical service support are associated with industrial buyers' trust in suppliers (N = 144). A four-factor confirmatory factor analysis of the 28 relevant indicators, heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) checks, common-method sensitivity analyses, HC3-robust multiple regression, collinearity and influence diagnostics, and exploratory ANOVA with effect-size intervals were undertaken. The hypothesized CFA had imperfect fit (CFI = .853; TLI = .838; RMSEA = .078; SRMR = .072), with technical support showing weaker convergent validity (AVE = .350). HTMT estimates ranged from .402 to .766. Inventory readiness (standardized $\beta = .474$, $p < .001$) and delivery reliability ($\beta = .345$, $p < .001$) were associated with trust, whereas technical support was not ($\beta = .027$, $p = .704$). The model explained 54.7% of observed trust variation; predictor VIFs were 1.25–1.65. Seven observations exceeded Cook's $D > 4/N$, but results excluding them preserved the significance of inventory and delivery. Exploratory group comparisons showed small observed η^2 values (.009–.030), with broad bootstrap uncertainty. Single-factor diagnostics do not eliminate common-method concerns. Findings remain exploratory, cross-sectional and subject to incomplete measurement validation.

Keywords: Supplier trust; industrial purchasing; operational credibility; buyer–supplier relationships; supply-chain reliability; India; organizational trust

INTRODUCTION

Critical industrial components are procured in conditions where shortages, delivery failures and ambiguous technical advice can expose firms to production interruptions. Purchasing personnel must often make supplier judgments under incomplete information. Trust is therefore not merely an interpersonal attitude: it is a working assessment of whether a business partner is dependable, transparent and likely to honour commitments in an operating environment where failure has organizational consequences (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Rousseau et al., 1998).

The companion IJLTEMAS-oriented manuscript asks whether four dimensions of supplier readiness independently predict reported purchase intention. The present IJRISS-oriented manuscript reverses the analytical focus without claiming a causal reversal: it investigates the operational correlates of perceived supplier trust, with attention to organizational experience and industry heterogeneity. Its substantive question is how everyday performance signals relate to trust, rather than which factor best predicts purchasing intention. Both analyses use the same survey respondents; this overlap must be declared to editors and does not itself establish that the second article qualifies as independent publication.

Problem Statement And Need For The Study

Supplier trust is widely acknowledged as essential to interorganizational exchange, but discussions can become circular when trust is simultaneously described as the antecedent and consequence of supplier performance. An

empirical distinction is needed between observable or perceived operating capabilities (parts availability, reliable dispatch and technical assistance) and buyer judgments about a supplier's integrity and future dependability. The present study examines how strongly these operational dimensions align with trust perceptions after accounting for their overlap.

In practical terms, managers need to know which perceived aspects of a supplier's operational conduct are most closely aligned with credibility. Evidence relevant to this issue may help organizations design supplier evaluation routines that go beyond personal acquaintance and informal reputation. The data, however, do not measure repeated trust formation, objective delivery records, or realized purchasing behavior, so the discussion remains appropriately associational.

Theoretical Background

Commitment–trust and relational exchange

Morgan and Hunt (1994) identify trust and commitment as mechanisms that sustain productive exchange relationships. Doney and Cannon (1997) argue that buyer trust derives from assessments of credibility and benevolence, while Ganesan (1994) ties dependence and trust to long-term orientation. In an industrial procurement setting, confidence can develop through repeated demonstrations that a supplier communicates accurately and handles difficult obligations without opportunism. This study operationalizes trust as respondents' perceptions of honesty, reputation, dependability and long-term relational conduct.

Organizational signals, uncertainty and exchange governance

Transaction-cost theory regards uncertainty and asset specificity as drivers of safeguards in economic exchange (Williamson, 1985). A buyer may use observed stock availability and schedule adherence as practical evidence of supplier capability when promises are difficult to verify ex ante. The relational view explains why accumulated interorganizational routines may create value beyond the sum of separately owned resources (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Signals of operational reliability may thus covary with judgments of trust without implying that reliable deliveries necessarily cause trust.

Operational capability as experienced evidence

Information sharing, delivery quality and technical capability constitute different forms of evidence available to purchasing professionals. Cachon and Fisher (2000) discuss how information changes inventory decisions; Mentzer et al. (1999) identify customer-facing logistics quality; and Ulaga and Eggert (2006) examine value-based differentiation in business relationships. These perspectives motivate distinguishing operational readiness from the social judgment of credibility.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

Inventory credibility and trust

Cachon and Fisher (2000) demonstrate the value of information sharing in inventory coordination, suggesting that reliable availability information can be evaluated as an indicator of organizational competence. Chopra and Meindl (2016) discuss the trade-offs among inventory, responsiveness and network design. Kraljic (1983) and Zsidisin (2003) conceptualize purchasing and supply risks that grow more acute for critical goods with limited substitutes. A supplier who regularly anticipates shortages and meets emergency parts requests may be viewed as credible because these actions are costly to fake consistently. H1: Perceived inventory readiness is positively associated with buyer trust and reputation ratings.

Delivery dependability and trust

Mentzer et al. (1999) treat reliability and timeliness as central elements of logistics service quality. Parasuraman et al. (1988) emphasize reliability and responsiveness in service assessments, and Christopher (2016) situates such performance within supply-chain coordination. Wagner and Bode (2008) link supply risks

to performance, while Rajesh and Ravi (2015) place resilience among supplier-selection considerations. Dependable delivery can be a visible performance signal, but it may also reflect the same underlying capability as inventory availability. H2: Perceived delivery reliability is positively associated with buyer trust and reputation ratings.

Technical assistance and institutional confidence

Ulaga and Eggert (2006) argue that value in business relationships extends beyond physical products. Cohen et al. (2006) emphasize aftermarket service as a strategic capability, while Anderson and Narus (1990) describe cooperative arrangements in distribution relationships. Technical advice and troubleshooting may make the supplier indispensable, but their informational value may differ across buyer roles and industries. H3: Perceived technical service support is positively associated with buyer trust and reputation ratings.

Organizational setting and variation in trust

Industrial buying is influenced by organizational decision systems and participant roles (Sheth, 1973). Long-term orientation may be affected by dependence and relational context (Ganesan, 1994). Consequently, trust ratings could differ across industrial sectors, professional experience and purchasing expenditure categories. These comparisons are exploratory rather than confirmatory because no sector-balanced sampling frame or preregistered subgroup hypotheses were supplied.

Synthesis and research gap

Prior theory provides plausible accounts of trust as both an antecedent to collaboration and an evaluation of a partner's operating conduct. The present analysis isolates the second interpretation as an empirical question. Unlike the companion purchasing-intention SEM, its dependent variable is the mean of seven trust/reputation items, and its central contribution is to compare inventory, logistics and technical readiness as correlates of that organizational perception, supplemented by subgroup comparisons.

Research Questions And Objectives

RQ1: How strongly are inventory readiness, delivery reliability and technical service support associated with trust/reputation? RQ2: Which operational dimension retains an independent adjusted association with trust? RQ3: Do trust perceptions vary by respondent sector, procurement experience or procurement value? RQ4: What organizational and supplier-governance practices are suggested by these observed associations?

The objectives are to describe the trust construct and its correlations; estimate a three-predictor, heteroskedasticity-robust regression; examine exploratory between-group patterns; and discuss credible relational governance implications while making the data-sharing and measurement limitations explicit.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and respondents

A cross-sectional, respondent-level secondary analysis was performed on the uploaded 144-case survey workbook. Its 35 five-point items cover inventory readiness (IR1–IR7), delivery reliability (DR1–DR7), technical service support (TS1–TS7), trust and reputation (TR1–TR7), and purchase intention (PI1–PI7). Each construct score is the mean of its seven items. The achieved sample includes automotive, tyre, FMCG, food, leather and other-industry respondents. No state identifier exists in the available workbook; regional generalization is therefore unsupported. The planned sample size of 300 in the earlier synopsis was not achieved.

Statistical procedures

Bivariate Pearson correlations describe overlap among constructs. The primary model is ordinary least squares predicting standardized trust scores from standardized IR, DR and TS scores with HC3 heteroskedasticity-

robust standard errors and 95% confidence intervals. The reported R^2 is the observed model explanatory proportion, not a causal contribution. Separate one-way ANOVAs explore mean trust differences across sector, purchasing experience and procurement-value categories. Since these comparisons are unadjusted exploratory tests, null results do not establish equality between groups. Additional measurement and regression diagnostics, estimation methods and bootstrap details are reported in Sections 7.5–7.8.

Measurement and interpretive boundaries

The trust composite exhibited Cronbach's alpha of .884 in the 144 respondents. This establishes internal consistency at the composite level but does not, by itself, prove discriminant validity or a unique latent construct. The source report's earlier four-factor CFA excludes trust/reputation; its CFI, TLI, RMSEA and SRMR cannot be reused as fit statistics for the trust regression. No SEM fit indices apply to this OLS model.

RESULTS

Respondent profile and central tendencies

The sector composition was automotive 35 (24.3%), tyre 35 (24.3%), FMCG 23 (16.0%), food 21 (14.6%), leather 5 (3.5%) and other categories 25 (17.4%). The mean trust score was 3.550 (SD = .564), compared with inventory 3.559 (SD = .667), delivery 3.600 (SD = .593), technical support 3.568 (SD = .507) and intention 3.632 (SD = .642). All were rated on a one-to-five scale.

Correlations

Construct	IR	DR	TS	TR	PI
IR — Inventory	1.000	0.572	0.333	0.680	0.622
DR — Delivery	0.572	1.000	0.433	0.628	0.574
TS — Technical	0.333	0.433	1.000	0.334	0.402
TR — Trust	0.680	0.628	0.334	1.000	0.738
PI — Intention	0.622	0.574	0.402	0.738	1.000

Table 1. Pearson correlations computed from all seven-item composite scales (N = 144). IR–TR (r = .680) and DR–TR (r = .628) were larger than TS–TR (r = .334). Trust also correlated with intention (r = .738), reported here only as contextual evidence; purchase intention is not the dependent variable of the primary model.

Operational correlates of supplier trust

Predictor	Standardized β	Robust 95% CI	p
Inventory readiness	0.474	[0.340, 0.607]	< .001
Delivery reliability	0.345	[0.187, 0.503]	< .001
Technical service support	0.027	[-0.111, 0.165]	0.704

Table 2. HC3-robust standardized OLS, dependent variable trust/reputation; N = 144, R^2 = 0.547, adjusted R^2 = 0.538. Inventory (β = .474) and delivery reliability (β = .345) independently correlated with perceived trust at $p < .001$. Technical support (β = .027) was not significant (p = .704). H1 and H2 receive associational support; H3 does not.

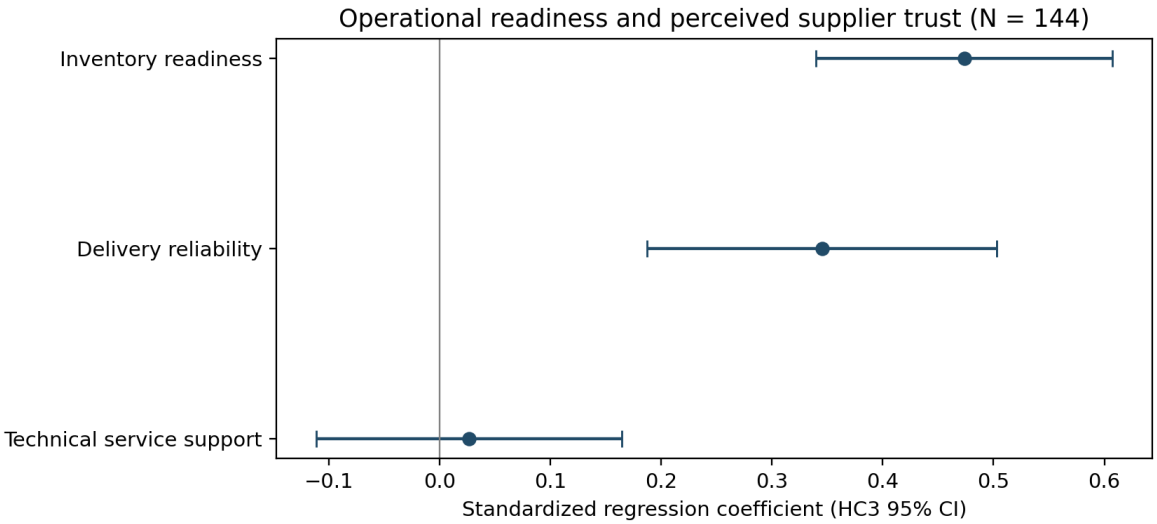


Figure 1. HC3 robust standardized coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. Primary survey, N = 144.

Exploratory comparisons of trust across organizational groups

Grouping variable	Groups	F	p
Industry sector	6	0.857	0.512
Procurement experience	4	0.423	0.737
Annual procurement value	4	0.510	0.676

Table 3. Unadjusted exploratory one-way ANOVAs; no comparison reached $p < .05$. In particular, sector differences should not be interpreted as absent: the leather category includes only five respondents and there is no verified probability sampling frame.

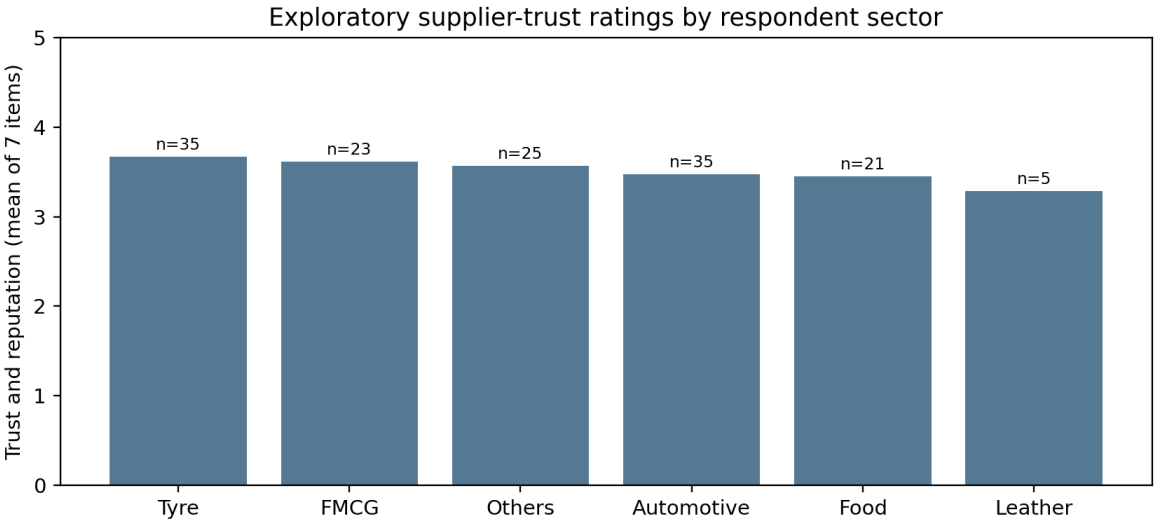


Figure 2. Sector-level mean trust/reputation scores and subgroup sizes; descriptive comparison only.

Additional measurement validation

The four-construct CFA was newly estimated on the original 28 indicators for inventory readiness (IR), delivery reliability (DR), technical service support (TS) and trust/reputation (TR); purchase intention was excluded because the present article models supplier trust as the outcome. A correlated-factor, simple-structure

maximum-likelihood covariance model was fitted to the respondent sample covariance matrix (N = 144). Factors were scaled to unit variance and item residual covariances were constrained to zero. As these are ordinal responses, the ML result is provisional pending an ordinal/polychoric robust-estimator replication. The CFA results below are newly estimated and must not be confused with the four-factor PI–IR–DR–TS CFA in the companion thesis analysis.

Statistic	Four-factor CFA	Interpretation
χ^2 (df)	642.01 (344)	Significant misfit; $p < .001$
CFI / TLI	0.853 / 0.838	Below commonly used .90 benchmarks
RMSEA	0.078	Moderate discrepancy
SRMR	0.072	Below .08 heuristic
Convergent AVE: IR / DR / TS / TR	0.561 / 0.508 / 0.350 / 0.523	TS falls below .50
Composite reliability: IR / DR / TS / TR	0.899 / 0.878 / 0.788 / 0.885	Model-based reliability; conditional on fit

The CFA cannot be characterized as an adequately validated four-factor measurement model: CFI and TLI are below the usual .90 heuristic. Moreover, AVE for technical support is .350. Its moderate composite reliability does not remedy the lack of convergent validity or model misfit. These findings restrict the interpretation of the composite-score regression and make an independent validation sample desirable.

Discriminant validity and common-method sensitivity

Construct pair	HTMT
IR-DR	0.640
IR-TS	0.402
IR-TR	0.766
DR-TS	0.527
DR-TR	0.710
TS-TR	0.406

All six HTMT ratios are below .85, providing preliminary discriminant-validity evidence for the four sets of items. The latent-variable interpretation remains qualified by overall CFA misfit. A separate Fisher-based confidence interval or bootstrapped HTMT inference was not computed, and is not claimed here.

For common-method sensitivity, an unconstrained single-common-factor covariance model was compared against the four-factor conceptual model: one-factor $\chi^2(350) = 1040.97$, CFI = 0.658, TLI = 0.631, RMSEA = 0.117, SRMR = 0.102. The first unrotated principal component captured 36.4% of standardized item variance. These are limited diagnostic screens: relatively poor single-factor fit and a first component below 50% do not establish the absence of common-method bias. No measured method marker, multiple data-source validation, or longitudinal procedural separation was available.

Multicollinearity and influence diagnostics

Predictor	VIF	HC3 standardized β	Robust 95% CI	p
IR	1.506	0.474	[0.340, 0.607]	< .001
DR	1.648	0.345	[0.187, 0.503]	< .001
TS	1.247	0.027	[-0.111, 0.165]	0.704

All VIFs are below 2, suggesting no severe linear multicollinearity. The maximum Cook's D was 0.120; 7 cases exceeded the exploratory 4/N criterion (0.0278). The maximum leverage was 0.091; 9 cases exceeded 2(k+1)/N (k = 3). The maximum absolute DFBETA was 0.561, with 24 respondents crossing |DFBETA| > 2/sqrt(N) for at least one predictor. These are flags for case review, not grounds for automatic record removal.

A sensitivity model excluding the 7 Cook's D-flagged cases (N = 137) yielded standardized-scale coefficients IR = 0.489 (p < .001), DR = 0.322 (p < .001), and TS = 0.104 (p = 0.070). Thus the two main operational associations persisted, while technical-support uncertainty remained. The sensitivity is not a justification to delete cases from the primary model.

Effect sizes and confidence intervals for exploratory ANOVA

We report η^2 = SS_between / SS_total and stratified within-group percentile bootstrap confidence intervals (2,000 resamples, random seed 801) for unadjusted trust-score comparisons. Because η^2 cannot be negative and is positively biased, these intervals are descriptive uncertainty summaries rather than proof of meaningful group differences; percentile bootstrap intervals for near-zero effects can have imperfect coverage.

Grouping variable	F (df)	p	η^2	Bootstrap 95% CI
Industry sector	0.857 (5, 138)	0.512	0.030	[0.014, 0.166]
Procurement experience	0.423 (3, 140)	0.737	0.009	[0.003, 0.085]
Annual procurement value	0.510 (3, 140)	0.676	0.011	[0.002, 0.082]

The observed sector, experience and procurement-value effect sizes are small (approximately 0.9%–3.0% of sample variation). Their upper bootstrap bounds emphasize uncertainty, particularly for industry categories with only five respondents. No equivalence or absence-of-difference conclusion follows from the nonsignificant omnibus F tests.

Interpretation and validation priorities

The revised evidence supports an exploratory organizational association between reliable stock and dispatch perceptions and supplier trust, not a causal or fully validated latent measurement model. Priority checks are (a) ordinal CFA using polychoric correlations and a robust estimator, (b) model modification based on theoretical content rather than solely fit statistics, (c) independent confirmation of discriminant validity and common-method controls, and (d) prospective multisource replication. The measurement-model fit and broad observational sampling restrictions should be acknowledged in the abstract, discussion and conclusion.

DISCUSSION

The strongest adjusted association with perceived supplier trust arose from inventory readiness, followed by delivery reliability. These findings are compatible with a buyer's use of repeated stock availability and on-time dispatch as observable cues when judging whether a supplier is dependable. Both cues concern operational commitments that procurement teams can document and check. This is an interpretation consistent with

relational and transaction-cost theory, not evidence that changing stock or delivery performance would produce a particular increase in trust.

Technical support showed a positive bivariate correlation but little remaining adjusted association. One explanation is shared variance with other operational dimensions; another is that technical assistance may be less salient or less uniformly experienced among respondents. Neither explanation is measured directly. The comparison with the companion article is instructive but limited: the earlier SEM used trust as a predictor of purchase intention, whereas this regression uses trust as its outcome. Cross-sectional data cannot adjudicate causal direction or establish mediation between readiness, trust and intention.

Exploratory ANOVA results do not substantiate differences by industry, experience or annual purchasing value. Unequal group sizes, including a five-respondent sector group, restrict sensitivity. It would be inappropriate to claim that industrial context has no effect on supplier credibility or that the findings are representative of South India as a whole.

Theoretical And Practical Implications

The study contributes a deliberately restricted organizational interpretation: operational reliability is associated with the relational judgment of supplier trust, even though operational and relational concepts must remain analytically distinct. Supplier governance practices can formalize this distinction using verifiable stock-status accuracy, on-time-in-full delivery records, exception communication logs and documented resolution of breakdown-related emergencies. Procurement managers should triangulate trust ratings with transaction records rather than equating favourable perceptions with verified performance.

For industrial associations and supplier-development initiatives, the results motivate training in truthful inventory communication, transparent escalation procedures and dependable logistics hand-offs. Because technical support is not independently significant in this sample, it should neither be disregarded nor presented as a validated trust-building intervention. Measured supplier development should be followed by longitudinal studies of buyer perceptions and actual contracting outcomes.

Limitations, Research Ethics And Relation To The Companion Paper

This is a secondary, exploratory analysis of the same 144 self-reported survey responses used in the companion IJLTEMAS-oriented supplier-readiness/purchase-intention manuscript. The conceptual emphasis, outcome variable, primary regression analysis, and sectoral trust comparisons differ; nevertheless, the two papers share constructs, a sample, and substantive background. The authors must disclose the companion manuscript, its status and overlapping data to both journal editors, cross-reference any published version, and seek editorial guidance before simultaneous or subsequent submission. Textual reframing alone does not ensure sufficient originality for separate publication.

Other limitations include cross-sectional common-method measurement, possible confounding, uncertain response rate and sampling method, missing state identifiers, and the absence of temporal or objective supplier performance data. An OLS model on construct averages is not a substitute for a validated latent-variable trust model. Follow-up research should use verified sector- and state-stratified data, objective operational histories, repeated measurements, and pre-specified causal designs. Ethics approval or exemption and informed-consent documentation must be confirmed by the authors rather than assumed.

CONCLUSION

Among 144 surveyed industrial procurement participants, higher perceived inventory readiness and delivery reliability were independently associated with greater reported supplier trust. Technical assistance was positively correlated with trust but was not significant after adjustment. The study's distinctive contribution is to treat supplier credibility as an organizational evaluation related to practical operating signals rather than replicate purchase-intention prediction. Its findings remain exploratory and cannot support causal or region-wide claims. Additional diagnostics found low predictor multicollinearity and broadly stable results after

removing high-Cook's-D cases; however, the newly estimated four-factor CFA fit was insufficient for an unqualified measurement-validity claim and single-factor screens cannot rule out common-method bias.

Declarations

Conflict of interest: The authors have no conflicts; Funding: There was no funding support;

Data availability: Respondent-level research data are held by the investigators and are not publicly released here. Ethics and informed consent: Authors state that the informed consent was obtained from the respondent and the data was used only for academic purpose. The journal. Corresponding author: Guruprasad S. (Prasadguru80@gmail.com).

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