

Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices as Determinant of Buyer–Supplier Relationship

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices and Buyer–Supplier Relationship (BSR) among purchasing personnel in Metro Cebu, Philippines, and determined whether SSSP predicted BSR. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed, with data collected in 2026 from 106 purchasing managers and non-managers. A structured questionnaire consisting of six indicators for SSSP and four indicators for BSR was administered using a seven-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the levels of the two constructs, while simple linear regression was employed to examine the predictive relationship between SSSP and BSR. The results showed that SSSP was rated at a very high level with product-based supplier criteria receiving the highest rating among the SSSP indicators. BSR was likewise rated very high, with the importance of maintaining relationships with major suppliers receiving the highest rating. Regression results showed that SSSP significantly and positively predicted. The findings indicate that sustainability-oriented supplier selection practices were associated with stronger buyer–supplier relationships. The study provides empirical evidence that sustainable supplier selection may extend beyond supplier evaluation and serve as part of broader supplier relationship management.

Keywords: sustainable supplier selection, buyer–supplier relationship, sustainable procurement

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable supplier selection has evolved from a conventional purchasing activity focused on price, quality and delivery into a strategic process incorporating economic, environmental and social considerations. This shift reflects the growing recognition that supplier practices influence organizational sustainability, resilience and long-term competitiveness (Karakoç et al., 2024; Mirzaee & Ashtab, 2024).

Recent research has advanced the methodological foundations of sustainable supplier selection through multi-criteria evaluation and decision-making models. Studies have examined the integration of economic, environmental and social criteria (Chen & Chung, 2023; Karakoç et al., 2024) and the influence of decision makers' perceptions on supplier-selection outcomes (Turk, 2022). However, this literature has largely emphasized supplier identification, ranking and selection, with less attention to the relational consequences of these decisions.

Supplier selection, however, represents not only an evaluation decision but also a basis for subsequent interorganizational interaction. Sustainable supplier management increasingly encompasses supplier development, continued investment and long-term engagement (Bajpai et al., 2023; Bai et al., 2024). Recent studies further connect sustainable supplier selection with supplier relationship management, emphasizing supplier segmentation, development and sustainability-oriented collaboration (Li et al., 2024; Hao et al., 2022). Relational capabilities—including trust, communication, information sharing, mutual respect and

collaborative problem-solving—also appear important in translating sustainable procurement practices into organizational outcomes (Changalima, 2024; Mallet et al., 2022; Alghababsheh & Galleary, 2022).

Despite these developments, the literature remains fragmented. Existing studies have predominantly examined supplier-selection models, decision-support techniques, sustainability criteria and supplier performance, while buyer–supplier relationships have often been treated as a criterion, contextual factor or mechanism rather than as a principal outcome of sustainable supplier selection (Changalima, 2024; Masudin et al., 2023). Consequently, empirical evidence on whether sustainable supplier-selection practices directly predict buyer–supplier relationship remains limited. A further gap concerns the geographical context. Sustainable supplier-selection research has largely examined settings outside the Philippines (Karakoç et al., 2024), while Changalima (2024) called for validation across different countries and organizational contexts. Evidence from Metro Cebu can therefore extend the literature by examining sustainable supplier selection within a Philippine procurement setting. This study accordingly examined Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices as a determinant of Buyer–Supplier Relationship among selected purchasing managers and non-managers in Metro Cebu. It aimed to assess the levels of Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices and Buyer–Supplier Relationship and determine the predictive effect of Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices on Buyer–Supplier Relationship.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Supplier selection has evolved from a focus on cost, quality, delivery and supplier capability toward a broader evaluation of economic, environmental and social criteria. This multidimensional approach reflects the triple bottom line perspective and the growing recognition that supplier practices influence organizational sustainability and competitiveness (Elkington, 1997; Chen & Chung, 2023; Karakoç et al., 2024). Recent studies have developed increasingly sophisticated multi-criteria approaches to address the complexity of sustainable supplier evaluation (Chen & Chung, 2023; Karakoç et al., 2024). However, the literature has largely concentrated on identifying, ranking and selecting suppliers, with comparatively less attention to the relational outcomes that may follow the selection decision. Sustainable supplier selection can influence longer-term sourcing arrangements through supplier development, investment and switching decisions (Bajpai et al., 2023; Bai et al., 2024). Purchasing personnel are also central to this process because their judgments and decisions influence supplier evaluation and selection (Salem et al., 2023; Turk, 2022). Thus, sustainable supplier selection can be understood not only as a procurement decision but also as a potential foundation for subsequent buyer–supplier interaction.

Buyer–Supplier Relationship encompasses continuing interorganizational interactions involving communication, information exchange, coordination, problem-solving and mutually beneficial objectives. These relational processes are particularly relevant to sustainable procurement because environmental and social requirements often require continued cooperation and supplier development (Hao et al., 2022). Trust, communication and information sharing are important to relationship quality, while relational capability involving mutual respect and collaborative problem-solving can facilitate coordination between buyers and suppliers (Mallet et al., 2022; Changalima, 2024). Long-term orientation, relationship closeness and commitment further characterize sustainable supplier relationships (Saugo et al., 2025). However, sustainability initiatives do not necessarily produce positive relational outcomes. Excessive costs, monitoring requirements and perceptions of unfairness may create relational tensions (Alghababsheh & Galleary, 2022). Thus, the way sustainability requirements are incorporated into supplier management may be important to the quality and continuity of buyer–supplier relationships.

The connection between SSSP and BSR can be explained by the role of supplier selection in establishing expectations for subsequent interorganizational engagement. When buyers incorporate sustainability criteria into supplier evaluation, they communicate expectations concerning supplier responsibility, performance and longer-term compatibility. Suppliers that meet these expectations may be more suitable for continued engagement, supplier development and strategic collaboration. Existing research provides support for this broader relationship. Sustainable supplier selection has been linked to supplier development, strategic partnerships and longer-term sourcing decisions (Bajpai et al., 2023; Karakoç et al., 2024), while Li et al. (2024) integrated sustainability criteria into supplier relationship management, suggesting that supplier

evaluation and relationship management are increasingly interconnected. Research at the buyer–supplier dyad also indicates that supplier sustainability practices can influence outcomes experienced by buying organizations (Hao et al., 2022).

Relational capability provides a further explanation for the potential relationship between SSSP and BSR. Chandalima (2024) found that communication, trust, information sharing, mutual respect and collaborative problem-solving strengthened the relationship between sustainable supplier selection and lead-time performance. Similarly, Saugo et al. (2025) incorporated trust, communication, relationship closeness and long-term orientation into sustainable supplier segmentation. These findings suggest that sustainability-oriented supplier selection operates within a broader relational environment rather than as an isolated purchasing activity. Nevertheless, previous studies have more often treated buyer–supplier relationships as a criterion, moderator or mechanism than as the principal outcome of sustainable supplier selection. This limitation represents an important empirical gap. Existing research has primarily examined supplier-selection models, supplier segmentation, supplier performance and procurement outcomes, while comparatively limited evidence directly tests whether SSSP predicts BSR (Karakoç et al., 2024; Chandalima, 2024; Saugo et al., 2025). A contextual gap is also evident because sustainable supplier-selection research has been concentrated largely outside the Philippines (Karakoç et al., 2024), while further validation across national and organizational contexts has been recommended (Chandalima, 2024). Examining purchasing personnel in Metro Cebu therefore provides an opportunity to assess whether the relationship identified in the broader literature is also evident in a Philippine procurement context.

The preceding literature suggests that sustainable supplier selection may have implications beyond the identification and evaluation of suitable suppliers. By establishing sustainability expectations at the selection stage, organizations may create a basis for continued supplier engagement, development and collaboration. The literature on buyer–supplier relationships further indicates that trust, communication, information sharing, commitment and collaboration are important relational conditions within sustainable procurement (Hao et al., 2022; Mallet et al., 2022; Chandalima, 2024). Evidence linking sustainable supplier management with relationship management and customer–supplier outcomes provides further support for this connection (Li et al., 2024; Trinh & Zhao, 2024). Taken together, these findings suggest that organizations implementing stronger sustainability-oriented supplier selection practices may be more likely to establish and maintain stronger buyer–supplier relationships. The present study therefore proposes that Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices significantly and positively predict Buyer–Supplier Relationship.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected during 2026, with the study using a single period of observation to examine the perceptions of purchasing personnel regarding Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices and Buyer–Supplier Relationship. A quantitative design was appropriate because the study sought to measure the constructs systematically and statistically examine the proposed relationship between them. The study was descriptive in its initial analytical stage and predictive in its subsequent stage. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the levels of the study variables, while regression analysis was employed to determine whether Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices significantly predicted Buyer–Supplier Relationship. Because the study used cross-sectional, non-experimental data, the regression coefficients are interpreted as statistical associations and predictive relationships rather than definitive causal effects.

Respondents and data collection

The respondents were purchasing personnel from organizations in Metro Cebu. The final dataset consisted of 106 usable responses, comprising purchasing managers and non-managers. Purchasing personnel were considered appropriate respondents because they are directly involved in supplier evaluation, supplier selection and supplier interaction. Previous research similarly emphasizes the role of purchasing personnel in supplier-selection decision-making (Turk, 2022; Salem et al., 2023). Data were collected through a structured

survey administered during 2026. Completed questionnaires were screened for completeness and subsequently encoded for statistical analysis.

Measurement of Variables

The study employed a structured questionnaire adapted from established measures of sustainable supplier selection and buyer–supplier relationships. SSSP was measured using six indicators (SSS1–SSS6) covering environmental, product-based, social, safety, supplier-facility assessment, and sustainability-commitment considerations. BSR was measured using four indicators (BSR1–BSR4) reflecting supplier reliance, the importance of maintaining major-supplier relationships, relational commitment, and efforts to maintain supplier relationships. The items were assessed using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Higher scores indicated stronger sustainable supplier-selection practices and stronger buyer–supplier relationships. Meanwhile, the resulting construct scores were interpreted using the following mean ranges: 1.00–1.85 = very low; 1.86–2.70 = low; 2.71–3.55 = moderately low; 3.56–4.40 = moderate; 4.41–5.25 = moderately high; 5.26–6.10 = high; and 6.11–7.00 = very high.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using jamovi. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize the respondents' characteristics and determine the levels of Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices (SSSP) and Buyer–Supplier Relationship (BSR).

A simple linear regression analysis was performed to determine whether SSSP significantly predicted BSR. SSSP was specified as the independent variable, while BSR was specified as the dependent variable. The regression model was expressed as:

$$BSR_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SSSP_i + \epsilon_i$$

where BSR represents Buyer–Supplier Relationship, SSSP represents Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices, β_0 represents the intercept, β_1 represents the regression coefficient for SSSP, and ϵ represents the error term. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level. The regression coefficient (B), standard error (SE), t-statistic, p-value, and coefficient of determination (R^2) were examined to assess the predictive relationship between SSSP and BSR. A statistically significant positive regression coefficient was interpreted as evidence that higher levels of SSSP were associated with stronger BSR.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographics	Category	n = 106	%
Age	18–29 years (Gen Z)	30	28.30%
	30–45 years (Millennials/Gen Y)	36	33.96%
	46–61 years (Gen X)	39	36.79%
	62–80 years (Baby Boomers)	1	0.94%
Sex	Female	76	71.70%
	Male	28	26.42%
	Prefer not to say	2	1.89%
Marital status	Married	55	51.89%
	Single	47	44.34%
	Widowed	2	1.89%

	Legally separated	2	1.89%
Job level	Non-manager	90	84.91%
	Manager	16	15.09%

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 106 respondents. In terms of age, the largest group comprised Gen X respondents aged 46–61 years ($n = 39$, 36.79%), followed by Millennials/Gen Y aged 30–45 years ($n = 36$, 33.96%) and Gen Z respondents aged 18–29 years ($n = 30$, 28.30%). Only one respondent (0.94%) belonged to the Baby Boomer group. This distribution indicates that the sample was predominantly composed of respondents from Gen X and Millennials/Gen Y, who collectively accounted for 70.75% of the sample. Regarding sex, female respondents constituted the majority ($n = 76$, 71.70%), while males accounted for 26.42% ($n = 28$). Two respondents (1.89%) preferred not to disclose their sex. In terms of marital status, married respondents represented the largest group ($n = 55$, 51.89%), followed closely by single respondents ($n = 47$, 44.34%). Widowed and legally separated respondents each accounted for 1.89% of the sample. With respect to job level, the sample was predominantly composed of non-managerial purchasing personnel ($n = 90$, 84.91%), while managers represented 15.09% ($n = 16$). This distribution indicates that the findings primarily reflect the perspectives of non-managerial purchasing personnel, although managerial perspectives were also represented.

Table 2 Level of Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices and Buyer–Supplier Relationship

Indicators	Survey Statement	M	SD	Interpretation
Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices				
SSS1	We check whether candidate suppliers meet our predetermined environmental criteria.	6.34	0.567	Very high
SSS2	We check whether candidate suppliers meet our predetermined product-based criteria.	6.37	0.504	Very high
SSS3	We check whether candidate suppliers meet our predetermined social criteria.	6.24	0.641	Very high
SSS4	We visit candidate suppliers' factories to assess their facilities and technology levels.	6.04	0.904	High
SSS5	We seek suppliers based on their reasonability toward safety.	6.31	0.607	Very high
SSS6	We seek suppliers based on their commitment to sustainability by balancing environmental, social, and economic perspectives.	6.29	0.617	Very high
		6.26	0.512	Very high
Buyer–Supplier Relationship				
BSR1	We rely on suppliers and view them as an extension of our company.	6.12	0.777	Very high
BSR2	Maintaining relationships with major suppliers is very important.	6.44	0.691	Very high
BSR3	We are highly committed to our relationship with major suppliers.	6.33	0.713	Very high
BSR4	Our firm exerts maximum effort to maintain supplier relationships.	6.30	0.783	Very high
		6.30	0.652	Very high

Note. Mean range interpretation: 1.00–1.85 = very low; 1.86–2.70 = low; 2.71–3.55 = moderately low; 3.56–4.40 = moderate; 4.41–5.25 = moderately high; 5.26–6.10 = high; and 6.11–7.00 = very high.

Table 2 indicates that both Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices (SSSP) and Buyer–Supplier Relationship (BSR) were rated at very high levels. SSSP obtained an overall mean of 6.26 (SD = 0.512), while BSR recorded a mean of 6.30 (SD = 0.652). The results suggest that the organizations represented by the respondents generally incorporated sustainability considerations into supplier selection while placing substantial importance on maintaining supplier relationships.

Among the SSSP indicators, the highest-rated practice was the assessment of candidate suppliers against predetermined product-based criteria (SSS2; $M = 6.37$, $SD = 0.504$), followed by safety considerations (SSS5; $M = 6.31$, $SD = 0.607$) and suppliers' commitment to balancing environmental, social and economic considerations (SSS6; $M = 6.29$, $SD = 0.617$). These results support the view that sustainable supplier selection extends beyond conventional supplier requirements to incorporate broader environmental, social and economic considerations (Chen & Chung, 2023; Karakoç et al., 2024). The high rating for SSS6 is particularly consistent with the sustainability-oriented supplier-selection literature, which emphasizes the integration of multiple sustainability dimensions in supplier evaluation (Bai et al., 2024; Fan & Kang, 2023).

The lowest SSSP rating was observed for visiting candidate suppliers' factories to assess their facilities and technology levels (SSS4; $M = 6.04$, $SD = 0.904$). Although this remained within the high category, its relatively larger standard deviation suggests greater variation across organizations in the use of direct, on-site supplier assessment. This may indicate that organizations rely more consistently on established selection criteria than on physical supplier-site assessment, an issue relevant to the broader literature on comprehensive supplier evaluation (Karakoç et al., 2024; Salem et al., 2023).

For BSR, all indicators were rated very high. The highest-rated item was the importance of maintaining relationships with major suppliers (BSR2; $M = 6.44$, $SD = 0.691$), followed by commitment to major-supplier relationships (BSR3; $M = 6.33$, $SD = 0.713$). This pattern indicates a strong relational orientation characterized by relationship continuity and commitment. Such findings are consistent with studies emphasizing trust, communication, collaboration and long-term orientation as important elements of buyer–supplier relationships (Hao et al., 2022; Mallet et al., 2022; Alghababsheh & Gallear, 2022). The findings also correspond with recent research highlighting the importance of supplier relationship management in sustainable supply-chain practices (Li et al., 2024).

Table 3 Linear Regression Predicting Buyer–Supplier Relationship

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	Interpretation	Decision
Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices	0.626	0.121	5.155	< .001	Significant	Supported

Note. $R = .529$, $R^2 = .279$, $N = 106$. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error.

Table 3 presents the regression analysis examining the predictive effect of SSSP on BSR. The results indicate that SSSP significantly and positively predicted BSR, $B = 0.626$, $SE = 0.121$, $t = 5.155$, $p < .001$. The model explained 27.9% of the variance in BSR ($R^2 = .279$). Thus, H1 was supported.

This finding is consistent with the relational perspective of sustainable supply-chain management, which emphasizes that supplier-selection practices can provide a foundation for trust, commitment, communication, collaboration and longer-term buyer–supplier engagement (Alghababsheh & Gallear, 2022; Hao et al., 2022; Mallet et al., 2022). It also supports recent evidence linking sustainable supplier management with supplier relationship management (Li et al., 2024) and supplier sustainability practices with customer–supplier relationships (Trinh & Zhao, 2024). Thus, the result suggests that sustainable supplier selection is not limited to identifying suppliers that satisfy environmental, social and economic criteria; it may also contribute to the development and maintenance of stronger buyer–supplier relationships.

The finding is particularly relevant in light of the very high levels of both SSSP and BSR reported in Table 2. While the descriptive results established that respondents generally perceived both practices and relationships favorably, the regression analysis provides inferential evidence that SSSP was significantly associated with

BSR. This strengthens the study's central argument that sustainability-oriented supplier selection is relevant not only to supplier evaluation but also to the broader management of buyer–supplier relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Sustainable Supplier Selection Practices (SSSP) as a determinant of Buyer–Supplier Relationship (BSR) among purchasing managers and non-managers in Metro Cebu using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey of 106 respondents. The findings showed very high levels of both SSSP and BSR. More importantly, SSSP significantly and positively predicted BSR ($B = 0.626$, $p < .001$), providing empirical support for the study's central proposition. The findings extend the sustainable supplier-selection literature by showing that its relevance extends beyond supplier evaluation and performance to the buyer–supplier relational context. The results suggest that sustainability-oriented supplier selection may contribute to stronger and more sustained supplier relationships, supporting the view that supplier selection and supplier relationship management should not be treated as entirely separate procurement activities.

The study is subject to limitations. Its cross-sectional and buyer-side design limits causal interpretation and does not capture the perspectives of suppliers. In addition, the Metro Cebu setting and the sample of 106 purchasing personnel limit the generalizability of the findings to other Philippine regions, industries and institutional contexts. Future research could employ longitudinal and dyadic buyer–supplier designs to examine how sustainable supplier selection influences relationships over time and from both sides of the exchange relationship. Further studies could also examine relational mechanisms such as trust, communication, collaboration and supplier development, as well as compare different sustainability practices and organizational contexts. These directions would strengthen understanding of the relational consequences of sustainable supplier selection and address the contextual and empirical gaps identified in the literature.

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