

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMPETENCE, SUPPLIER COMMITMENT, CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF OMANI RETAIL INDUSTRY

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Abstract: In the emerging field of academic research on operational performance, studies linking information technology competence, supplier commitment, and consumer satisfaction to operational performance are gaining interest due to the importance of connecting these constructs. This study proposes an updated conceptual framework that links information technology competence, supplier commitment, and consumer satisfaction to the operational performance of the retail industry in Oman. Literature reviews from previous studies on operational performance in various sectors, such as telecommunications, luxury fashion, accommodation, and cosmetics, from many countries suggest that many factors influence operational performance. The retail industry has grown significantly and globally in the past few years. It has become significant for consumers due to the large supply of goods and ensuring the quality of what is consumed and used. Suppliers, information technology, and consumers must do their part to provide improved operational performance. Any failure or decline in operational performance has a significant impact on consumer demand and delivery of goods, as well as maintaining the continuity of the retail sector. Hence, this study is envisioned to provide original work in the theoretical development of linking information technology competence, supplier commitment, and consumer satisfaction to operational performance, which will benefit academicians and practitioners alike.

Keywords: Retail industry, Consumer demand, Competitive business, Operational efficiency

1. Introduction

The retail industry is one of the fastest-growing, changing, and dynamic industries in the world today. Therefore, in today's competitive business environments, the retail sector is facing severe pressure in the global markets. Hence, it resorts to implementing strategies that focus on enhancing operational performance and generating high profits to maintain its viability in the long term. Retail trading in Oman has seen many risks, such as uncontrolled inventory management, mismanagement, and loss of reputation, which are critical issues in retail operations that can lead to business collapse and discontinuity (Timotius et al., 2022). Domenek et al. (2022) specified that operational staff who work in retail sectors and are actively interested in management leaders have a significant role in reaching a good return. Therefore, today's rapidly changing business market relies on technology and benefits from this strategic alignment. Consequently, the retail industry in Oman is going through a transitional phase, and the report issued by Alpen Capital stated that the retail sector in the GCC countries recorded a growth of 15.7% annually, generating revenues of \$296.8 billion. Retail sales in the GCC are expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of

5.7% between 2022 and 2026 to reach \$370 billion. Oman's 6.1% is expected to grow above the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) compound annual growth.

Furthermore, several researchers, such as Amin (2021), argued that one of the factors that aid the retail industry in improving and saving its operational performance by encouraging and supporting several practices that lead to continuous improvement in operational performance. Thus, the operational process always remains integrated in all sectors, and this is what the retail industry signifies as it ensures that it continues and achieves its goals in the long term. Previous research has focused on the retail sector, where the evaluation of retail operational performance has been studied for many years, exemplified by online retail and multi-channel retail (Yao et al., 2020). Some methods of evaluating organizational performance are financial benefits, profitability, and organisational learning, where the burden of achieving performance within the company falls on the operational sections of the organisation (Abudakar et al., 2019). Additionally, Organisations with a clear vision use information technology to develop products and services that address work environment issues and improve the financial and non-financial performance of the organisation (Antoni et al., 2020). However, most retail sectors worldwide focus on taking advantage of information technology strategies that help develop operational performance and lead to continuous improvement in overall performance. Operational performance measures a firm's performance against standard or prescribed indicators of effectiveness, efficiency, and environmental responsibility. This performance includes managing core activities that transform essential resources into deliverable services. The main objective of operational performance is to improve retail sector efficiency and support growth strategies.

According to Dieste et al. (2021), good results for any firm relate to operational efficiency, and financial and profitability performance are important factors for measuring company performance. In a previous study, Al-Surmi et al. (2021) believed that even with the indications that business performance will be at the same level, the significant correlation among these mentioned strategies will significantly impact business performance. Therefore, no organisation can survive in a competitive environment without effective operational performance. In addition, P. Paulino (2022) highlighted that performance measures in organisations are diverse, such as operational, marketing, financial, and business operations performance, so they significantly affect the performance and continuity of the work of any company. Moreover, nearly five years ago, some issues appeared in the emerging retail sectors in Oman that affected their earnings, including those of elderly employees who were affected by the inability to do so. Hence, it is still difficult to continue growing along with the evolution of the business world for several sectors. In consequence, with the increasing demand for retail industries, attention to customer satisfaction and needs in this area, as well as enhancing operational performance, necessitates researching to understand this sector better and provide solutions to solve the issue of poor financial and non-financial performance of retail sectors, and find conducts to make them more efficient and highly quality.

Furthermore, for Oman to advance in this sector and compete with developed countries, it is necessary to have initiatives from the Omani private sector to train and qualify Omanis for the retail industry. Consequently, the Ministry of Commerce and the Regulatory

Organization may have a clear vision of the explanations for the failure of many of the emerging retail sectors in Oman. Many research studies have been conducted to address these issues. Therefore, the present study will enrich scientific research, particularly in Oman and other countries worldwide. Al-Surmi et al. (2021) argued that despite the indications of a closer link between those strategies and the factors mentioned above and their impact on the operational level, it could be reflected in the business performance. Likewise, managers are not convinced of the need to rely on modern technology, which usually forms a source of concern as the vision regarding how new technologies will adapt is unclear. Substantially, this study will fill a research gap that addresses improving the business operational performance as a primary issue influenced by information technology competence, supplier commitment, and consumer satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

In reality, the world retail sector continues to develop and gain huge earnings while the Gulf countries still face many difficulties and obstacles in catching up with them. Thus, the retail industries in Oman are also facing the same issues that slow down their growth and performance. Some barriers have hampered the continuation of business to improve operational performance in the sectors, leading to a decrease in financial and non-financial operational performance and lower income (Ramachandran & Ali AL Yahmadi, 2019). However, the resource-based view (RBV) theory motivates the improve the retail sector's performance. The available resources and technology must be better exploited and harnessed, increasing the sector's revenues and profits, thus making employees carry out their work with the best skill and experience. According to Safari and Saleh (2020), the RBV approach is based on key determinants such as managerial, organisational, and control factors, and innovation is considered a key factor for many organisations to facilitate their processes in improving performance and achieving success. Agus Zainul Arifin (2020) argued that the company's resources must be committed to improving the company's performance.

According to Tan and Olaore (2021), developing better plans to ensure the survival of the organisation's outstanding performance depends on the management and its responsibility for the strategic planning of that organisation. Hence, the performance of the retail industry is affected by many elements, including information technology, which usually leads to the innovation of products and services. In addition, consumer satisfaction activates the relationship between supplier commitment and institutional performance, and operational performance is considered an essential factor in these relationships. Its positive impact on the sector's overall performance appears through improving the financial and non-financial business performance.

2.1 Retail Industry Sustainability

Performance growth now depends more on innovative products and services, not only as a collaboration between departments, units, and teams but as progression to sustaining who-knows-what and sharing the know-how to foster growth (Olan et al., 2022). Therefore, sustainability achieves a lot for the retail sector if it is implemented in the right way. Although no significant differences were detected between supermarkets and discount stores

regarding the ease of reading sustainability reports, supermarkets performed much better in translating store-level sustainability of discounters (Dagiliene et al., 2022). Therefore, this study suggests that information technology competence, supplier commitment, and consumer satisfaction play diverse roles in contributing to the performance and sustainability of the retail sector.

The retail industry is the range of this research due to the emerging retail sector in Oman that contributes to raising the national economy index and then highlights the importance of government participation as it plays a vital role in enhancing the sustainability of any new businesses and supporting growth strategies for the advancement of country's economy. Moreover, retail sectors in all countries can recognise and study the market through the expertise of those responsible for evaluating the acquired operational performance and its effectiveness in competing, thus determining the company's competitive advantage. Agus Zainul Arifin (2020) argued that the mission of the resource available to the organisation values total commitment to performance improvement, which facilitates the company's competencies to design high-quality business processes that generate competitive advantage and focus on improving customer value. The organisation most open to collaboration with other organisations relies on high activity in development, thus competitor-focused and high performance (Stachova et al., 2019).

2.2 Information Technology Competence and Operational Performance

According to Imran et al. (2019), information technology (IT) provides facilities that make it safer and more private to conduct electronic payments and increase customer satisfaction. That is considered an essential factor for the continued performance of the retail sector. Moreover, modern corporate management involves sharing information exchange and structural cooperation, including exchanging important information such as inventory supervision, forecasting, and delivery techniques (Basheer et al., 2019). One of the things that allow firms to improve their achievements in the field of information technology is to increase their reliance on consolidating their organisational culture, which in turn makes them superior to competitors (Adabere et al., 2021). De Giovanni (2022) suggested rethinking omnichannel to increase performance and competitiveness. Technology has been proven to significantly impact sales performance, cost savings, environment, and inventory. The efficiency of IT relies on how the recipient perceives these activities, influences the competence they apply to progress operational performance, and increases staff satisfaction. Thus, organisations truck when goods and services are provided to meet customer needs by exploiting new strategies to which digital technologies contribute by improving production, services, and performance (Bacca-Acosta et al., 2023).

The global retail sector considers information technology to be one of the most essential elements that support the supply chain and is an influential part in improving the performance of organizations (Sundram et al., 2020). Karami and Tang (2019) demonstrate that the ability of information technology to communicate to enhance the operational performance of retail sectors and positively influence the organization's capabilities, growth, and survival, then develop the firm's ability to communicate, learn experientially, exploit commercial opportunities, and persevere in the face of different situations in foreign markets.

Likewise, technology enables processes to be tracked and simplified, data flow maintained, and employee records managed. Officials in the retail sector think a lot about technology that increases the efficiency of products and services to enable businesses to grow and be sustainable. The relationship between information technology competence and operational performance can be observed when it meets all stakeholders' expectations and the goods presented are consistent with consumer satisfaction and congruent with the opinions of business partners and consumers. In addition to enhancing the organisation's ability to formulate and achieve its goals in the long term. Hence, the suggested hypothesis was built as follows:

- H1. Information Technology Competence has a significant positive effect on Operational Performance.

2.3 Supplier Commitment and Operational Performance

Commitment is regarded as an essential component of a relationship. Commitment is the belief that a relationship with a partner in an exchange is highly significant and requires maximum effort to maintain. The committed party believes in the long-lasting nature of the relationship for the foreseeable future (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, a lasting commitment is necessary for the long-term growth of enterprises between the customer firm and the supply firm. Commitment is a complex concept encompassing affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Kamisah et al., 2019). A study conducted by Kamisah and Mokhtar (2019) found a strong correlation between Halal supply chain commitment and business performance, including supply chain performance, financial performance, and customer satisfaction, demonstrates that Malaysian Halal food manufacturers can enhance their business performance by fostering a robust relationship with all partners in the supply chain through a shared commitment.

The supplier places great importance on the connection and is committed to maintaining it, anticipating increased value and benefits for the organisation. Suppliers commit to putting out their best efforts to maintain an ongoing relationship based on the notion that this relationship is essential (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Employing this technique is beneficial for managing opportunism and fostering cooperation in buyer-supplier relationships, which can positively impact innovation in financial and operational performance (Shin et al., 2019). Therefore, commitment is advantageous for a relationship, as a dedicated provider fulfils or surpasses the purchasing firm's requirements. Based on the above arguments, the proposed hypothesis was constructed as follows:

- H2. Supplier Commitment has a significant positive effect on Operational Performance.

2.4 Information Technology Competence and Consumer Satisfaction

In the present era, most clients use technology to make their purchases. Consequently, businesses must develop technology to maintain proximity to their customers and offer additional benefits to their clients on the Internet (Sleiman et al., 2021). According to Klier et al. (2016), introducing technology caused a shift in marketing from relationship

marketing to marketing that focuses on interactions through technology. The study done on four- and five-star hotels with selected senior managers by Narayanan (2022) highlights the importance of information technology in ensuring visitor satisfaction in the modern day. It offers hotel managers and supervisors valuable techniques to attain excellent client satisfaction. The emerging technology has significantly impacted the dynamics between enterprises and customers, leading to a shift towards technology-based interactions rather than traditional methods (Sleiman et al., 2021).

Information technology revolutionised company operations. Employing information technology allows businesses to enhance employee productivity. Imran et al. (2019) found a direct relationship between IT and customer satisfaction in e-logistics, presenting a strong positive relationship. Businesses rely on operational technology over personnel when the technology demonstrates superior production output. Nevertheless, emerging technology aids in diminishing human faults and saving time. Nonetheless, the forthcoming problem for information technologies is comprehending the client to fulfil their needs and desires. Hence, the hypothesis was formulated as follows:

H3. Information Technology Competence has a significant positive effect on Customer Satisfaction.

2.5 Supplier Commitment and Customer Satisfaction

Prior research has mainly examined the effects of supplier commitment on buyer-supplier relationships over an extended time (Patrucco et al., 2020). Hence, commitment is an essential prerequisite for the development of buyer-supplier relationships. Consequently, the degree of economic contentment with suppliers is crucial in strengthening trust, subsequently impacting commitment. According to Mpinganjira et al. (2017), commitments are essential factors that strongly influence non-economic satisfaction. Their findings indicate that managers must exhibit honesty and trustworthiness while interacting with business channel members. When there is significant uncertainty, it can be precarious for a company to make long-term commitments to a single supplier (Buvik & Grønhaug, 2000). For suppliers to make a meaningful contribution, managers must possess a comprehensive understanding and genuine appreciation of their role as facilitators of their buyers' business success.

Geyskens et al. (1998) argue that satisfaction results from a relationship's commitment. It is supported by Mungra and Yadav's (2020) study from the manufacturer's perspective. Coote et al. (2003) define commitment as an enduring inclination to maintain the relationship. Precise specifications and active participation in diverse business operations are advantageous for the supplier to meet the manufacturer's expectations, resulting in satisfaction in an inter-organizational relationship. Consistent with previous research, commitment results in contentment in reciprocal partnerships (Farrelly & Quester, 2005). The following hypothesis is proposed:

H4. Supplier Commitment has a significant positive effect on Customer Satisfaction.

2.6 Customer Satisfaction and Operational Performance

Making customer happiness a priority to improve business success is a common approach in the business world. Nevertheless, more than 25 years of empirical research conducted by academic scholars has yielded occasionally conflicting data (Otto et al., 2020). Therefore, studying the relationship between customer satisfaction and operational performance could enhance academic clarity and a better understanding among managers. Otto et al. (2020) asserted that customer satisfaction is considered in the literature as a valuable asset for businesses, which helps in effectively managing resources and improving firm performance.

Many enterprises suffer due to poor management planning and failure to consider consumer satisfaction, which affects the lack of continuity of these companies. Consumers' satisfaction holds significant importance as it directly influences their purchasing behaviour. Satisfying experiences encourage repeat purchases, while dissatisfaction discourages future transactions. Hence, retail stores constantly make frequent changes to evolve consumer demographics to meet the diverse demands of changing local requirements (Madhani, 2020). Besides, retail manufacturers are interested in increasing customer satisfaction by ensuring reliability and on-time delivery of products, as the retail industry is more inclined to deal with issues (Okwu & Tartibu, 2020). Therefore, further research is necessary to investigate the correlation between customer satisfaction and operational performance, and the subsequent hypothesis is put forward:

H5. Customer Satisfaction has a significant positive effect on Operational Performance.

2.7 Mediating Effect of Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction is critical in understanding current customers' resilience or attracting new customers. The growth of consumer happiness has significant ramifications, including fostering a harmonious connection between companies and consumers (Lie et al., 2019). Customer satisfaction refers to the degree to which a product's perceived performance aligns with the buyer's expectations. Okwu and Tartibu (2020) suggest that to enhance sustainability goals and improve competitiveness, management should carefully choose the most suitable supplier in the retail industry, which will offer them comprehensive insights. Enhancements in performance are achieved by implementing cutting-edge technology and efficient information management. Additionally, the existing supply networks are expanded to establish connections with supplier networks on a global scale (Olan et al., 2022). Likewise, the suppliers can increase or decrease the pricing of their products and have the chance to directly impact the effectiveness of performance and enhance the quality of the goods and services they offer. Therefore, to enhance performance among suppliers and consumers, it is imperative to establish collaborative strategies throughout the supply chain across all manufacturing sectors. It is crucial in predicting regional success (Shahbaz et al., 2018).

Previous studies by Martínez-Falcó et al. (2024), Zhao et al. (2021), Kataria and Saini (2020), and Lie et al. (2019) found that consumer satisfaction plays a mediating variable. A study by Martínez-Falcó et al. (2024) indicates that consumer satisfaction mediates the

corporate social responsibility-sustainable performance (CSR–SP) link. Consumer satisfaction also mediates the impact of consumer-based brand equity aspects (Kataria & Saini, 2020). However, a lack of previous studies has addressed the mediating role of consumer satisfaction on the relationship between information technology competence, supplier commitment, and operational performance, specifically in the retail sector. To address this study deficiency and drawing from the literature review, the subsequent hypotheses are posited:

H7a. Consumer satisfaction mediates the relationship between information technology competence and operational performance.

H7b. Consumer satisfaction mediates the relationship between supplier commitment and operational performance.

3. Research Methodology

This study will employ a quantitative design research method. The population for this study will be the retail business in Oman. The data of this study will be analysed using the structural equation modelling partial least square (SEM-PLS). The details of the data collection procedure are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Data collection procedure

Target Population	Retail Company in Oman
Sampling	Retail Management
Method of sampling	Convenience Sampling
Research Technique	Quantitative Technique
Data collection method	Distribution of the questionnaire

A four-section questionnaire will be designed to collect data from the Omani retail industry. Section A will ask about operational performance. Section B will be related to information technology competency. Section C will ask about supplier commitment, and Section D will ask about consumer satisfaction. Last but not least, section E will ask about the demographic profile of the respondents. Seven-point Likert scales will be employed for these items, ranging from (1= very strongly disagree to 7 = very strongly agree). Prior to commencing the data collection process, this study will administer reliability and validity tests. To enhance dependability, the researcher will adhere to four criteria: (1) configuring all constructs, (2) enhancing measurement levels, (3) employing indicators, and (4) conducting pilot studies. According to the guideline established by Sekaran and Bougie (2010), a dependability score below 0.6 is considered poor, 0.70 is deemed acceptable, and a score above 0.8 is considered good. Items with scores below 0.70 will be removed or excluded.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to develop a holistic conceptual framework of how information technology competence, supplier commitment, and consumer satisfaction can play a prominent role in enhancing the operational performance of the retail industry in Oman. Following the schematic system, perception uncovers the underlying factors that ought to be within the retail sphere. The crucial factors such as information technology competence,

supplier commitment and consumer satisfaction, were conceptualised for further operational performance in the retail industry.

Furthermore, the current study also considers the effect of information technology competence, consumer satisfaction, and supplier commitment as mediating variables in the relationship between operational performance and the retail sector. The significant relationship between operational performance and information technology competence, supplier commitment, and consumer satisfaction displays that retail sectors in Oman can improve their performance by having good communication with varied suppliers. Likewise, the structure of existing supply networks is expanding to connect with global supplier networks, and performance is advanced through the adoption of advanced technologies and information management (Olan et al., 2022). The relationship between information technology competence, consumer satisfaction, supplier commitment, and the retail industry were significant. Consumer satisfaction, supplier commitment, and information technology competence are hypothesised to significantly influence retail sector performance, supported by previous studies conducted by Tan and Olaore (2021) and Muhsin Thaji et al. (2022).

In the retail industry, operations in any region are considered continuous performance improvement to maintain sustainable and competitive value. This study showed that all four contexts in the framework, such as information technology competence, consumer satisfaction, supplier commitment, and operational performance, have an essential relationship with developing retail industry performance. Moreover, the literature review led the researchers to conclude the factors affecting the retail industry's operational performance. This study will benefit retail sector owners because it focuses on enhancing operational performance and developing consumer goods and services. There is agreement suppliers or consumers and information technology play a significant role in developing operational performance in the Omani retail industry, as improving performance in the retail market faces many challenges to compete. Lastly, since there is limited literature regarding operational performance improvement, academics can expand on these findings in this area of study. Future research can be conducted by analyzing the retail sector segment in other areas. It would also be an excellent idea to conduct a new study on different types of industries. Future research could also investigate the factors driving operational safety in other retail sectors.

This research endeavour has established a holistic conceptual framework. The conceptual framework is structured based on the interplay between demand and supply elements. Consequently, the likelihood of achieving success will be heightened within retail management. This research will explore how the process and its associated interpretations can contribute to developing a universal retail hub, expanding our understanding and possibilities in this area. The future direction of this research aims to explore how these aspects can collectively shape the development of a universal retail hub, taking into account the process and its associated interpretations.

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