EXPLORING GUANXI ATTRIBUTES IN SUPPLIER SELECTION DECISIONS

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ABSTRACT

The supplier network is noteworthy to any company procurement's success. Companies depending on suppliers to induce the finest quality products at the least cost could be a challenge. Finding the right supplier who can be trusted has ended up like a game of treasure hunt. Effective supplier networks have become essential to compete in today's supply chain environment. The supplier roles are not limited to material management and sourcing management; it can be extended to supplier relationship management. A quantitative approach had been used, and the online survey design was distributed among respondents based on the convenient sampling technique using social media platforms. A total of 400 respondents have retrieved, and analyses used descriptive and inferential analysis. The finding shows a significant relationship between the supplier selection decision and guanxi attributes.

Keywords: Guanxi, Supplier Selection Decision, Trust, Mutual Benefits, and Flexibility.

1. INTRODUCTION

The supplier network is significant to any company procurement's success. Companies depending on suppliers to induce the finest quality products at the least cost could be a challenge. Finding the right supplier who can be trusted has ended up like a game of treasure hunt. Effective supplier networks have become essential to compete in today's supply chain environment. The supplier roles are not limited to material management and sourcing management; it can be extended to supplier relationship management. Raw materials may be defined as material or items used to produce or primary process products (Mikulčić, 2016). Typically include natural resources such as agriculture produces and mining output (Goodenough, Wall & Merriman, 2018). Usually, raw materials will go through a value-added process through manufacturing activities for final production.

Hence, the sourcing strategies are meticulous in getting high-quality material; therefore, a company must be prepared in supplier selection (Chen, Wang & Tan, 2019). Bai et al. stated that suppliers' selection is how businesses define, evaluate, and negotiate with prospective suppliers (2019; Ghadimi et al., 2020). The supplier selection phase is to implement a large amount of the company's financial capital and, instead, the business benefits primarily from working with high-value suppliers. Most studies have found that product failures were derived from parts and components that compromised its quality and standard (Kent, 2016; Toh & Wakatsuki, 2020).

Therefore, the right supplier has a vital part in product-making by contributing ecological-economic benefits to the final product (Kannan, Jabbour & Jabbour, 2014; Luthra et al., 2017). Supplier selection decisions affect an organization's credibility. They have a detrimental effect on the long haul for the organization to compete within the business and expressly and emphatically influence its supportability execution (Brunsson & Olsen, 2018; Gualandris, Golini & Kalchschmidt, 2014). The paper outlines the research objective is to examine the effect of trust on the supplier selection decision, understand the effect of mutual benefits on the supplier selection decision, and analyze the effect of flexibility on the supplier selection decision based on the guanxi perspective.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Supplier Selection Decision
Suppliers are the epitome of a supply chain organization. The selection of best suppliers was an issue that incorporates the evaluation of subjective and quantitative characteristics to select the "crème de la crème" (Rajesh & Ravi, 2015). Moreover, a recent study recommends that shareholders intuitively react to "how is the company product-making" that included sourcing strategies (Busse, Niu, Schleper & Wagner, 2016). Evaluation and selection of suppliers are one of the keys to achieving an efficient and sustainable supply chain.

The selection of suppliers is the most critical step in-network plans and involves the concept of partnership, estimates of production, and logistics (Belkadi et al., 2018). The suppliers' firms need a specialized background to be selected as a sourcing partner. The evaluation and selection of suppliers will subsequently affect almost any subsequent choice in supply system management. Choosing the right supplier reduces cost acquisition, enhances competitiveness, and improves end-user performance by avoiding waste and making quality and appropriate measures to meet end-user needs (Ghadimi et al., 2020).

2.2 Trust
Trust was a concept that has gotten consideration from various areas and sciences. The trust was a critical driver in behavior-based, which was long-term cooperation that showed how the attractiveness of trust and trust between organizations exist in the first place. (Tanskanen & Aminoff, 2015). A trustworthy partnership was critical for identifying specific agreements between the buyer and supplier (Six, 2014). Villena, Choi, and Revilla (2016) explored trust in high-condition buyer-supplier relationships. The ponder appeared that trust has a positive impact on performance metrics like productivity and responsiveness. Most supplier selection ventures are affected by the supply chain partners' aptitudes and believe among the supply chain partners. Setting up a trust will construct the closeness and long-term relationship between partners and suppliers (Konys, 2019).

Increasing the trust level could be a cross-useful preparation that includes feasible assessments, and multiple usable options can be developed. Trustworthiness allows the degree of certainty against the suppliers' actions based on factors such as the duration of prior relationships and the vendor's expertise, power, and intent (Andersson & Tharing, 2017).

2.3 Guanxi Attributes
Guanxi is a Chinese term that implied an interpersonal relationship (Fan,2002). It is a cultural attribute that allows western traders to understand eastern traders, especially in China, doing businesses (Fan, 2002). The guanxi attributes, such as xinren (trust), renqing (mutual benefit), and flexibility, fail to differentiate or examine how each guanxi sub-element influences trade

connections. This lapse comes about in sloppy observational wrangles if guanxi includes a good impact on trade execution, connection viability, fulfillment, and long-term orientation (Berger, Silbiger, Herstein, & Barnes, 2015). Limited study consideration has tended on how guanxi can be utilized to oversee the 'negative side' of trade connections, such as the taking of opportunities as and when its arising, strife, and also vulnerability (Yen & Abosag, 2016), neglecting the effect of guanxi on diminishing the grey area of commerce connections with Chinese partners. To mention such need of study, this ponder inquires to what degree will guanxi attributes, such as xinren (trust), renqing (mutual benefit), and flexibility, can be employed to make the supplier selection decisions.

2.4 Mutual Benefits

Mutual benefit is an agreement or contract that involves both parties, in which both parties will obtain certain forms of advantages. It also helps businesses enhance their operations by offering goods, services, or resources via a person or organization ("Mutual Benefit Definition: Everything You Need to Know," 2020).

In guanxi attributes, mutual benefits are called renting. The first character, 'ren' signifies people, and the next character, which is "qing,' represents the feeling. These two characters define a people willing to share a favorite with empathy (Yen, Abosag, Huang & Nguyen, 2017). Renqing can be defined as the favors exchange, help, and sympathy (Khan, Zolkiewski & Murphy, 2016). Lee, Tang, Yip, and Sharma (2017) stated that renting is a collection of ethical values used by group stakeholders as a mechanism to preserve peace in their social group. Renqing plays the role of establishing between the trade partners a sense of dependency, responsibility, and duty (Xuan & Shuwei, 2017; Wang, Siu & Barnes, 2008). Gift giving, one of the acts of renting, means that it is a commitment to connecting the network of relationships through reciprocal gifts and rewards, creating a mutual bond that continues to be the foundation for guanxi (Allott, 2016; Chen, 2001).

Baumann, Meunier-FitzHugh, and Wilson (2017) concluded that the development of mutually beneficial values can only be accomplished if both theory and practice completely understand all aspects of its life. The study also found that the "reciprocal promises of value" can enable and initiate value creation by leading the cooperation process to incorporate the resources offered in fair exchange and realize mutual benefits. Mutually benefits between buyer and seller can ensure the backup supply during the unpredictable demand (Zeng & Xia, 2014; Zhang et al., 2020).

Mutual benefits have led to the development of several strategic partnerships, such as Peugeot, Citroen (France), Volkswagen (Germany), Kia Motors (South Korea) in Iran, Jordan Land Rover (UK), and Egypt BMW (Germany). These joint ventures are increasingly rising in competition with Iran and other Middle Eastern countries in the automobile sector. The supplier relations in this market are essential for both the carmaker and their components suppliers of creativity and profitability (Mitrega, Forkmann, Zaefarian & Henneberg, 2017).

2.5 Flexibility

Wieteska (2016) stated that the supplier relationship flexibility is an intermediary that helps react to unexpected changes in the supply chain environment. Flexibility in supplier relations is one of the most commonly defined dimensions (Fantazy, Kumar & Kumar, 2009; Wieteska, 2016). Then, Yu, Song & Cadeaux (2017) stated that logistics flexibility is a company's ability to respond promptly to customer requirements regarding delivery, support, and service. However, this flexibility in the Guanxi perspective is more inclined to their network's adaptability in responding to their uncertainties and demands (Erol, Sauser & Mansouri, 2010; Sabatino, 2016; Swanson, Atwood & Calais, 2017). Moreover, their network's flexibility requirement will be abiding if the relationship was already sustained for an extended period.

3. METHODOLOGY
3.1 Research Design

The study applied a quantitative approach to test the objective theory by examining the relationship between variables. This study used a survey design through an online questionnaire via multiple online platforms. The framework consists of a dependent variable and an independent variable. The dependent variable is the supplier selection decision, whereas the independent variable is divided into three: trust, mutual benefits, and flexibility. The framework adapted from Yen (2017) as per figure 1 below:
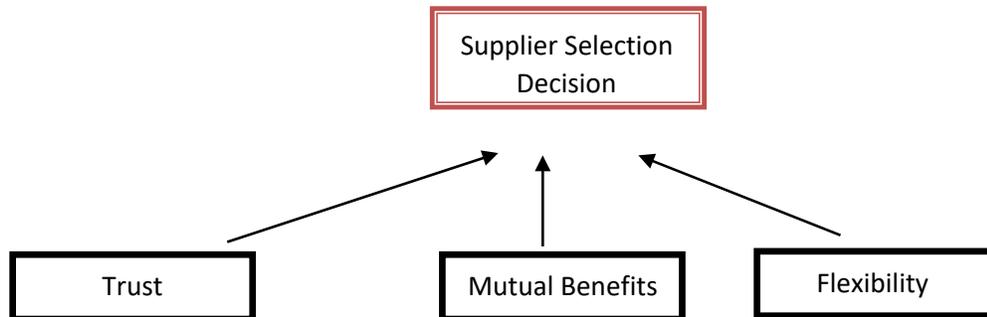

Figure 1. Adapted framework from Yen (2017)

3.2 Sampling Method and Collection Method

Sampling design is a method of collecting data from a subset of a larger group, and the sampling results are then used to estimate the larger group. The sampling technique was a convenient sample in the study, and the data was collected from an online survey. There are 23 questions and 7 demographic profile questions allocated to target respondents in the self- administration questionnaires. The questionnaires are based on a prior empirical investigation. A pilot study of Guanxi understanding in the supplier network management was carried out by distributing it to the 30 firms, specifically working with the company to ensure that targeted respondents understand the questions.

3.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis is used to describe the population sample, and inferential analysis is used to infer the relationship between the influence factors and the phenomenon. To ensure the reliability of unit measurements, a Cronbach alpha had been used. The value is 0.841, which indicates a high level of consistency for the dependent variable (supplier selection decision) and independent variables (trust, mutual benefits, and flexibility. According to Nunnally (1978), when the Cronbach's alpha is below 0.5 is poor, 0.5-0.7 acceptable, 0.7-0.8 good, and
0.8 or above is a very good level.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS
4.1 Demographic Analysis

The demographic background of this particular sample is illustrated in table 1. It is divided into seven attributes: age, state, registered business, race, level of position, number of employees, and

length of relationship with the supplier. The result shows that most business owners are proportioned in their age group, and nearly 49% of the respondents are the premises' owner. Most business owners were having more than a year of relationship with their current supplier, which is around 50% or more among the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic analysis

Demographic analysis *(n=400)*

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage %
Age	19-25 years	129	32.3
	26-35 years	115	28.7
	36-45 years	85	21.3
	46-60 years	71	17.8
State	Kelantan	200	50.0
	Selangor	200	50.0
Race	Malay	263	65.8
	Chinese	108	27.0
	Indian	29	7.2
Position Level	Owner	195	48.8
	Manager	62	15.5
	Executive	36	9.0
	Workers	107	26.8
Number of Employees	0-50	285	71.3
	51-100	40	10.0
	101-200	33	8.3
	201 above	42	10.5
Length of Relationship with Supplier	1-3 years	191	47.8
	4-6 years	122	30.5
	7 years and above	87	21.8
Registered Business	Yes	344	86.0
	No	56	14.0

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Based on table 2, to address the first research objectives, "To examine the effect of trust on supplier selection decisions," the outcome from the Pearson correlation analysis shows that supplier selection decisions and trust are significantly correlated with the significant value of 0.000. Lee & Dawes (2005) stated that trust has a significant relationship in the supplier selection decision. Villena, Choi & Revilla (2016) examined trust in buyer-supplier relationships characterized by high dependencies. The supplier selection decisions and trust have a moderate positive relationship with the coefficient value of 0.689. To address the second research objective, "To examine the effect of mutual benefits on supplier selection decisions," the outcome from the Pearson correlation analysis shows that supplier selection decisions and mutual benefits are significantly correlated with the significant value of 0.000. Yen (2017) stated that mutual benefits' influence is significant for the long relationship between buyer and supplier. Last, to address the third research objective, "To examine the effect of flexibility on supplier selection decisions," the

Pearson correlation analysis outcome shows that supplier selection decisions and flexibility are significantly correlated with the significant value of 0.000. Lin, Chow, et al. (2005) showed that flexibility is significantly correlated with supplier selection strategies in their study. The supplier selection decisions and flexibility have a moderate positive relationship with the coefficient value of 0.460.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Analysis

		DV (Supplier Selection Decisions)	IV (Trust)	IV (Mutual Benefit)	IV (Flexibility)
DV (Supplier Selection Decisions)	Pearson Correlation	1.000	0.689**	0.497**	0.460**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)					

However, to determine the independent variables predicting values with supplier selection decisions in the Guanxi perspective, it is sufficient to use regression to determine the independent variables' significance individually.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Table 3. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. The error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Sig. F Change
1	0.711ᵃ	0.505	0.501	0.36224	0.505	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Trust, Mutual Benefit, Flexibility						
b. Dependent Variable: Supplier Selection Decisions						

Based on Model Summary, the R-squared of 0.505 implies that the three predictor variables explain about 50.5% of the variation's supplier selection decisions. This is consistent with other empirical studies that suggested these variables had a predicting value over supplier selection decisions (Allot, 2016; Anderson & Tharing, 2017; Yu, Song & Cadeaux, 2017).

Table 4. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	52.975	3	17.658	134.573	0.000ᵇ
	Residual	51.962	396	0.131		
	Total	104.938	399			
a. Dependent Variable: Supplier Selection Decisions						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Trust, Mutual Benefit, Flexibility						

Multiple Linear Regression was performed to determine the best set of predictor variables in supplier selection decisions. The ANOVA table revealed that the F-statistics (134.573) is large and the corresponding p-value is highly significant (0.000) or lower than the alpha value of 0.05. This indicates that the estimated linear regression model line's slope is not equal to zero, confirming that there is a linear relationship between supplier selection decisions and the three predictor

variables (trust, mutual benefit, and flexibility).

Table 5. Coefficients

Model		standardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardize Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	0.684	0.198		3.458	0.001
	Trust	0.593	0.042	0.582	14.040	0.000
	Mutual Benefit	0.174	0.066	0.161	2.658	0.008
	Flexibility	0.057	0.066	0.052	0.867	0.387
a. Dependent Variable: Supplier Selection Decisions						

Table 5 above, the researcher found two predictor variables, which are trust (p=0.000 < alpha) and mutual benefit (p=0.008< alpha), were found to be of significance in explaining supplier selection decision. Meanwhile, flexibility is not able to show any significant result (p= 0.387 > alpha). The largest beta coefficient is found in trust (beta=0.582) and followed by mutual benefit (beta=0.161) and flexibility (beta=0.052. This means that trust makes the most substantial contribution to explain the supplier selection decisions. To conclude, the findings are explained in table 6.

Table 6. Summary of Findings

Research Objectives	Sig.	Results	Remarks
To examine the effect of trust on the supplier selection decision	Pearson correlation analysis (p= 0.000) Multiple Linear Regression (p= 0.000)	Supported (Lee & Dawes, 2005)	Lee & Darwes (2005) stated there has a relationship of trust on the supplier selection decision
To examine the effect of mutual benefits on the Supplier selection desicion	Pearson correlation analysis (p= 0.000) Multiple Linear Regression (p= 0.008)	Supported (Yen, 2017)	Mutual benefits have a significant relationship on supplier selection decision (Yen, 2017)

| To examine the effect of flexibility on the supplier selection decision | Pearson correlation analysis (p= 0.000) Multiple Linear Regression (p= 0.387) | The Pearson correlation is supported (Lin, Chow, Madu, Kuei & Pei Yu, 2005). However, the regression is not supported | Lin, Chow, Madu, Kuei & Pei Yu (2005) showed that flexibility is significantly correlated with supplier selection strategies in their study |

5. CONCLUSION

Supplier selection decisions are considered one of the crucial factors in procurement within the supply chain. Using the guanxi perspective to explore this matter is novel in the realm of logistics and supply chain management. The study succeeded in addressing essential attributes such as trust and mutual benefits as predictor factors in supplier selection. This is corresponding with previous literature that showed a similar outcome. Even though flexibility has a strong relation with supplier selection decision hence it is not a predicting variable. The results of this study will benefit business owners or investors in a multi-cultural setting, such as in Malaysia and ASEAN. The findings contribute some new perspective to the supply chain management due to the fact most of the From the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis, we found that the independent variable of flexibility is not significant. There are others attributes that are more appropriate for future researchers may need to make an advance investigate and lock in with diverse guanxi behavior norms, such as Li, Yi, Lian, Chi, which interpreted as a sense of courtesy, sense of equity, sense of keenness and sense of disgrace as the four social bonds polished by Chinese to gage one's guanxi establishment at the personal level.

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