

**THE EFFECT OF DIGITAL PROCUREMENT PLATFORMS ON SUSTAINABLE
SOURCING IN SMEs IN KAMPALA, UGANDA: A CASE STUDY OF THE
EFFECT OF DIGITAL PROCUREMENT PLATFORMS IN THE SMALL AND
MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN KAMPALA IN UGANDA**

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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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DECLARATION

I, GUUM DAVID, make this dissertation my personal original work, and, in no case, has it been submitted to any other university or institution of higher learning to obtain any academic qualification.

I state that all the information sources applied in the study have been properly referred to and cited under the accepted academic standards.

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APPROVAL

This dissertation is presented to have it examined with my consent as the academic supervisor.

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Signature:  _____

Date: 15/4/2020

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my dear and most caring uncle **Mr. Odwong Alex**, your kind and supporting hand in paying my tuition fees has been a great blessing in my life. It is your good will and sacrifice you have been able to make this journey possible.

I also owe a great deal of my love to **Uncle Charles Onen** who has been my supporter throughout my education since the first day in school. My academic experience has been largely influenced by my dedication towards my studies and I am extremely thankful.

I also dedicate this work to my grandmother **Faith Consy** who has molded me and groomed me to be a responsible man. Your support, knowledge and affection have been of great value in my life. May God bless you abundantly.

And to my beloved brothers and sisters your love, encouragement and support are so important to me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATLAS.tiQualitative Data Analysis Software used for coding and thematic analysis

DVDependent Variable

IV.....Independent Variable

KCCA..... Kampala Capital City Authority

OECD.....Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PLC.....Product Life Cycle

SDGs.....Sustainable Development Goals

SMEs.....Small and Medium Enterprises

UNBSUganda National Bureau of Standards

UBOS.....Uganda Bureau of Statistics

UN.....United Nations

UCU.....Uganda Christian University

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of digital procurement platforms on sustainable product sourcing among small retail businesses in Kampala, Uganda. The research is guided by R. Edward Freeman's Stakeholder Theory, which emphasizes the influence of stakeholders on organizational decision-making and business practices. In the context of increasing global attention to sustainability, particularly through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, businesses are expected to integrate environmental, social, and economic considerations into their procurement and supply chain processes. However, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing economies often encounter structural and technological limitations that constrain their ability to implement sustainable sourcing practices. At the retail sector around Kampala, procurement processes are still associated with informal activities which include face-to-face negotiations, manual records as well as cash, which lack transparency and ability to trace suppliers.

This research design was a qualitative investigation based on descriptive research design in order to understand the experience and perception of small retailers and managers in the implementation of digital procurement platforms. The data was collected by using the semi structured interviews with 20-30 purposely chosen participants that were with a minimum of two years of business experience and familiarity with digital procurement tools. The thematic analysis was carried out to analyze this data as suggested by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. The codification process involved deductive themes which were based on the goals of the research and Stakeholder Theory and inductive findings which appeared through the reaction of the participants.

The results show that the degree of small retail business adoption of digital procurement platforms in Kampala is moderate with a larger percentage transitional. Retailers are slowly integrating applications like electronic catalogues, supplier portal and online ordering systems. As it is demonstrated, the ethics of stakeholders such as customer demands of the ethically sourced products, regulatory demands of adequate record-keeping, and competitive demands of the retail industry are the major drivers of adoption. A number of obstacles to widespread adoption exist, such as prohibitive pricing of the internet, lack of digital literacy, unreliable infrastructure, and existing dependencies on personal supplier relationships.

Nevertheless, these issues have not stopped the platforms leading to a greater level of procurement transparency, an increase in accountability due to the digital records, and more systematized supplier assessment. These enhancements contribute to advancing sustainability across the three aspects of the triple bottom line: the environmental aspect, due to reduced paper waste and improved inventory management; the social aspect, due to enhanced supplier visibility and reliability; and the economic aspect, due to lower transaction costs and stock-outs. However, price remains a significant factor affecting sourcing decisions.

This research indicates that stakeholders' expectations are largely mediating factors in determining how well these platforms enhance sustainable sourcing. While digital technologies enhance visibility and information flow, meaningful sustainability outcomes depend largely on how business owners respond to stakeholder demands. This study therefore recommends increased digital literacy support for SMEs, the development of affordable mobile-based procurement platforms, and policy incentives that encourage sustainable sourcing practices among small retail businesses.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the current small retailing business, procurement is no longer an operation, but a strategy that has been influenced by global needs of sustainability. The international organizations promote that Procurement should incorporate Social, Economic and Environmental concerns to be in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nation stresses that sustainability should be taken into account in the activities of most businesses that perform the procurement processes, whereas the World Bank (2022) highlights that the inclusive procurement enhances the resilience and competitiveness. In like manner, OECD (2021) confirms that through digitalization, transparency, accountability, and traceability are promoted, which facilitates businesses to implement and declare sustainable business practices like ethical sourcing, resource efficiency, and monitoring of supplier compliance.

As it is stated in the Research SMEs in Uganda especially small retail businesses in Kampala are very important in terms of employment and local trade. However, the Procurement in most of these business is Traditional that involves Physical negotiations, cash flow, and absence of proper documentation that still prevails in these Business that is still a challenge (Mugenyi & Wabwire, 2023). This practice restricts traceability, lowers their power to track labor and environmental practices in suppliers, and institutionalizes sustainable procurement practices (Rugasira et al., 2022). Thus, these constraints fail to give the competition its due, accountability and this makes it difficult to align the policy like the regulatory requirements and customers who prioritize sustainability first.

Digital procurement platforms are programs and services that are automated and document the purchasing activities. Part of the platforms are e-catalogues (digital product listing that is centralized), supplier portals (secure means of supplier registration, qualification and communication), and electronic ordering systems (systems of placing, tracking and recording orders). They facilitate sustainable business practices by: (1) enhancing supply chain transparency and traceability, (2) facilitating systematic supplier assessment (including environmental and social standards), (3) supplying audit trails helpful in regulatory compliance, (4) decreasing transaction and waste costs through process automation, and (5) enhancing supplier development through improved information sharing. According to evidence in Sub-Saharan Africa, SMEs tend to embrace sustainability practices as a reaction to stakeholder pressure and that digital tools can enhance competitiveness and reputation when applied to sustainability practices (Okeke et al., 2024; Sendawula et al., 2024).

A conceptual framework of the study is the Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984). The main assumptions that can be applied in this case are: (a) organizations exist within a web

of stakeholders that have legitimate interests; (b) the success of management is related to the ability to realize the competition between stakeholder claims; and (c) the ability to effectively manage stakeholder expectations is connected to the organizational legitimacy and long-term performance. Applied to procurement, these assumptions mean that, should the small retailers have access to tools (digital procurement platforms) that help make the stakeholder demands visible and measurable (e.g., regulatory standards, customer preferences, supplier certifications), they will be in a better position to select the suppliers and products that can be aligned with goals of sustainability. In this way, Stakeholder Theory demonstrates the moderating role of the expectations of stakeholders on the connection between the digital procurement platform adoption (IV) and sustainable product sourcing (DV).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The process of procurement in the small retail businesses must be effective, transparent and sensitive to the stakeholder demands regarding sustainability. Digital procurement platforms are created to support all these goals by enhancing the evaluation of the supplier, providing traceability, and adherence to social, environmental, and economic standards (OECD, 2021; United Nations, 2020). When used appropriately, the platforms have the potential to lower costs and boost operational efficiency and assist retailers to address stakeholder demands of accountability and ethical sourcing (World Bank, 2022). Though these are the possible advantages, the procurement in the small retail businesses in Kampala is still dominated by the traditional methods of face-to-face negotiations, cash payments, and informal supplier networks (Mugenyi & Wabwire, 2023). Such approaches are inefficient, are not transparent, and do not always include the criteria of sustainability in sourcing (Rugasira et al., 2022). The digital procurement platforms have not been adopted significantly because of the barriers such as low levels of digital literacy, perceived and actual costs, and insufficient infrastructure (Sendawula et al., 2024). Consequently, small retailers are unable to reveal traceability to their customers, compliance to regulators, and credible sustainability performance to the gaps to trust and competitiveness that undermine trust and competitiveness (Okeke et al., 2024; Cabrera-Sanchez and Villarejo-Ramos, 2024).

Although earlier studies have focused on e-procurement in large companies and state institutions (Suali et al., 2024), little empirical information exists on the implementation of digital procurement solutions in small retail businesses in Kampala to satisfy the expectations of the stakeholders and attain sustainability in product sourcing. This research thus examines the impact of digital procurement site on sustainable sourcing of products within small retail firms in Kampala, and more precisely, how the expectations of its stakeholders influence that association.

1.3 General Objective

To explore how the digital procurement platforms can assist the small retail businesses in Kampala to fulfill the stakeholder expectations and attain sustainable sourcing of products. To investigate how digital procurement platforms affect the sustainable

sourcing of products among small retail companies in Kampala, based on the stakeholder expectations.

1.4 Specific Objectives

To investigate the levels at which small retail enterprises in Kampala have embraced the digital procurement systems to address the stakeholder expectations.

To examine how digital procurement platforms affect the environmental, social and economic aspect of sustainable sourcing of products in small retail companies.

To evaluate how the expectations of the stakeholders shape the relationship between the use of digital procurement platform and sustainable product sourcing.

1.5 Research Questions

What has been the extent to which small retail businesses in Kampala have embraced digital procurement platforms because of the demands of stakeholders?

What impact do digital procurement platforms have on the sustainability of sourcing products in small retail firms, regarding their environmental, social, and economic impacts?

How does the stakeholder expectations contribute to the connection between digital procurement platform adoption and sustainable product sourcing outcomes?

1.6 Research Propositions

P1. The adoption of Digital Procurement solutions also alters the strategies to use in the Small Business to achieve sustainable procurement of products, particularly in Kampala.

P2. The adoption of Digital Procurement platform has a relationship with sustainable product sourcing of small retail businesses in Kampala that is mediated by the stakeholder expectations.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Small Retail Business Owners and Managers: Are you ready to be more efficient in procurement, integrate sustainable business practices, align sourcing with the stakeholder expectations?

Policy Makers and Regulators: Information to make policies and interventions that can help SMEs to adopt digital and make sustainable procurements.

Suppliers and Technology Providers: Insights into how to design digital procurement solutions which have sustainability assessment features applicable to the context of a small retail.

Academia and Researchers: The empirical contribution to literature on digital procurement, stakeholder-driven sustainability and SME practices in developing economies.

1.8 Scope of the Study

Content Scope: The study will be useful in exploring the connection between the digital procurement platforms (IV) and the sustainable product sourcing (DV) with the anticipations of the stakeholders including the customers and suppliers as the mediating variable; the theory to be followed in the research is the Stakeholder Theory.

Geographical Scope: Company in Kampala District in Uganda essentially Small retailers.

Time Horizon: 2020-2025 (timeline that includes the faster adoption of digital and the heightened focus of policies on sustainability).

1.9 Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory

Key assumptions of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984)

Stakeholder plurality: This theory emphasizes that Organizations exist with many stakeholders like suppliers, regulators, employees, customers, and communities around them.

Interdependence and influence: This Theory also states that the performance and Legitimacy of an organization is primarily influenced by the stakeholders.

Managerial responsibility: the theory encourages Organizational managers to put the interests of the stakeholders as a first choice to identify and prioritize so as to maintain legitimacy and performance.

Link to variables: These assumptions imply that (a) stakeholder demands for sustainable products constitute measurable pressures; (b) if procurement systems provide better information and control (via digital platforms), managers can better respond to those pressures; and (c) satisfying stakeholder expectations through sustainable sourcing improves legitimacy and potentially firm performance. Thus, Stakeholder Theory explains why stakeholder expectations are modelled as a mediator between digital procurement platform adoption and sustainable product sourcing.

1.10 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable (IV): Digital Procurement Platforms

E-catalogues (digital product lists, standard specifications)

Supplier portals (registration, qualification, document management)

Electronic ordering systems (order placement, tracking, records)

Mediating Variable: Stakeholder Expectations

Sustainable/ethical products demand amongst customers.

Regulatory requirements and standards.

Supplier code of conduct and standards.

Pressures of the community and civil society.

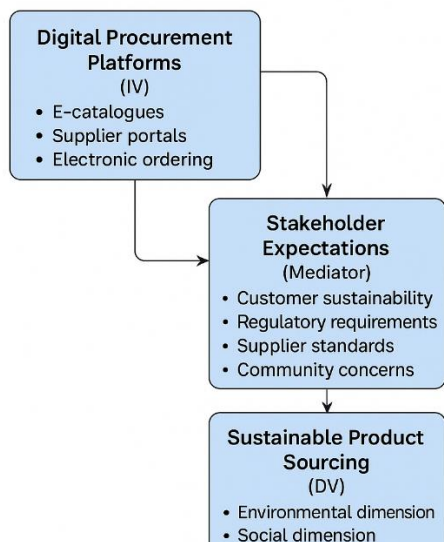
Dependent Variable (DV): Sustainable Product Sourcing.

Environmental aspect (environmentally friendly inputs, less waste, efficiency in resources)

Social aspect (fair labour, work conditions safety)

Economic aspect (cost-effectiveness, long-term relationships with the suppliers, local sourcing)

Well Detailed Conceptual framework



The use of digital platforms by an organization makes the operations of the Organization transparent, thus important functions like keeping records and interactions with stakeholders improve stakeholder expectations towards an organization.

Sustainable products sourcing is enhanced when the expectations of the stakeholders are well addressed and prioritized, where the procurement decision will lean towards suppliers and products that can be classified as sustainable.

Sustainable sourcing is also directly increased by these platforms by providing features (e.g., supplier scorecards, sustainability filters) not fully driven by stakeholder pressures.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This paper is a critical literature review regarding the effects of the digital procurement platform and sustainable product sourcing within the context of small retailers. It starts with the theoretical background of the study, which is based on the Stakeholder Theory that gives the conceptual justification of how procurement choices affect and are affected by the expectations of the key stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Harrison et al., 2019). Next in the chapter is the discussion of the key principles of the digital procurement platforms, sustainability of sourcing, and the operations of small retail business. Subsequently, specific empirical and conceptual literature is provided in relation to each research objective. The chapter combines both global and African academic resources, presenting a reasonable point of view, showing the gaps in existing knowledge, and explaining why the research is relevant to the situation in the Ugandan context (Croom and Brandon-Jones, 2017; Bai and Sarkis, 2020; Ajuwon and Ikpor, 2021).

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Stakeholder Theory

The Stakeholder Theory forms the foundation of this research whereby Freeman (1984) suggests that organizations should seek to factor in the interests of all stakeholders and not only concentrate on maximizing shareholder gains. According to Freeman, organizations exist in multi-faceted networks of relationships with customers, suppliers, employees, regulators, and the community, in general (Harrison et al., 2019). These groups have different expectations, they influence the decisions made in an organization and are also influenced by the decisions made. Failing to attend to stakeholder interests may lead to image losses, inefficiency in operations or regulatory penalties or competitiveness (Donaldson and Preston, 1995).

Stakeholder Theory is relevant in the procurement process as it offers a framework of how sourcing decisions should be in accordance to ethical, environmental, regulatory and community issues (Freeman, 1984). People become more demanding when it comes to ethically manufactured and eco-friendly products (Bai and Sarkis, 2020). The suppliers would want fairness, transparency, and prompt communication. Regulators base on safety, labor and environmental standards. Local communities require businesses to be responsible, minimize the harmful impact on the ecology, and positively influence the social welfare. To be considered as legitimate in these stakeholder groups, procurement should be transparent, accountable, and in line with the principles of sustainability (Ajuwon and Ikpor, 2021).

The digital procurement portals realize these ideals through introducing systems that promote traceability, equity, and compliance in the supply chain dealings. E-catalogues, among other features, provide buyers with access to certifications of suppliers, sustainability certifications, and product specifications (Croom and Brandon-Jones, 2017). Supplier portals enable real-

time tracking of supplier performance, reliability of their delivery and adherence of environmental standards. Electronic ordering systems store the information in electronic format, therefore, enhancing accountability and ease in audit (Bai and Sarkis, 2020).

The theory of Stakeholder is applicable more to small retail businesses where the business is usually in a close knit community. Their clients are local more often than not, their suppliers are small-scale manufacturers or wholesalers, and they have very visible operations (Mukonza & Swarts, 2020). Although these kinds of businesses might not buy in very high quantities, their sourcing decisions have high cumulative social and environmental consequences. Through digital procurement solutions, small retailers will be able to enhance accountability, enhance supplier relationships, and show that they are dedicated to achieving sustainable solutions. This makes sure their behaviors are in line with the expectations of the stakeholders, which helps to build trust, increase competitiveness, and support the overall sustainability of the environment and society (Freeman, 1984; Harrison et al., 2019).

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 These digital Platforms are electronic systems that can be utilized in streamlining, automating, and enhancing the procurement processes.

These tools are e-catalogues, e-ordering systems, e-invoicing, supplier management portal and digital payment systems. The digital procurement platforms encourage transparency, reduce transaction errors, facilitate real-time communication, and promote data-driven decision-making (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

2.2.2 Sustainable Product Sourcing

The act of Sustainable product sourcing in procurement comprises of selecting suppliers and products that meet environmental, ethical, and social responsibility criteria. This practice focuses on minimizing negative ecological impacts, promoting fair labor conditions, and encouraging long-term supplier relationships (Bai & Sarkis, 2020). Sustainable sourcing is becoming considerate for most businesses due to rising consumer awareness, regulatory pressures, and global environmental commitments (Ajuwon & Ikpore, 2021).

2.2.3 Small Retail Businesses

Businesses basically the small retailers include enterprises engaged in selling goods directly to consumers, typically on a small scale. These Retailers majorly operate with limited capital, small staff sizes, and localized supply chains. . Small retailers are important in livelihoods, community development, and urban trades in the city especially around kampala (UBOS, 2022). Nevertheless, they often experience difficulties with the limited access to technology, lack of proper supplier information, and poor bargaining power (Wambua, 2020).

The systematized method of literature organization known as Literature Organization by Objective is a modern technique employed to arrange and comprehend literary works (Strauss Para. 4).<|human|>2.3 Literature Organized by Objectives Literature Organization by Objective is an innovative approach of organizing and understanding literature (Strauss Para. 4).

2.3.1 To test how digital procurement platforms will influence transparency in the sourcing of sustainable products amongst small retail businesses in Kampala.

A central part of procurement in Transparency and digital platforms is significant in enhancing visibility in the sourcing processes (Croom & Brandon-Jones, 2017). Globally, transparency is seen as the key to alleviating information asymmetry and increasing trust and making sure that procurement choices are made with the consideration of the principles of sustainability (Bai and Sarkis, 2020). Their presence leads to transparency through regular access to correct supplier and product information updated in real-time. These tools minimize the use of verbal agreements or unregistered transactions that usually define the conventional procurement practices in most African markets (Ajuwon & Ikpor, 2021).

The transparency backed by the digital procurement systems in the first world economies has been associated with enhanced traceability of the product origins, the systems have aided in tracking the suppliers credentials and the adherence to environmental standards (Bai and Sarkis, 2020). Supplier management portals, which have been developed, have facilitated transparency by posting data on supplier performance history, delivery time and compliance with ethical standards (Croom & Brandon-Jones, 2017).

According to research conducted in the African standard, digital procurement systems can be used to resolve the severe problems, including corruption, information retention and misrepresentation of the quality of the products (Ajuwon & Ikpor, 2021). With procurement being almost entirely a factor of personal contact and informal connections, digital systems add an aspect of objectivity and responsibility. It is best to small businesses, particularly to the small retailers, since they do not have the ability to ensure supplier audits or to check the product source (Mukonza & Swarts, 2020).

Supplier sourcing transparency is quite significant to the customers that are becoming more aware of the environmental and ethical impacts of their purchasing decisions (Bai and Sarkis, 2020). These platforms enable the retailers to have the documents they require to assure the customers that they are buying safe products that were ethically sourced and environmentally responsible (Freeman, 1984).

In Kampala, Uganda especially in the retailer sector whereby retailers often buy products in the informal wholesalers or in the streets or even through vendors without registration, transparency has always been a problem. Online procurement systems are able to solve these issues by offering verified supplier lists, standard product details, and online purchase transactions (Wambua, 2020). These characteristics decrease the possibility of fake products, immoral procurement, or excessive price. In addition, digital traceability increases accountability throughout the supply chain, which makes sure that sustainability commitments are pursued in practice (Mukonza & Swarts, 2020).

Nevertheless, regardless of all this, there are still challenges like the lack of digital literacy among small entrepreneur owners, poor internet access, and unwillingness to change and adopt technology that can hinder complete implementation (Ajuwon & Ikpor, 2021). This Literature helps to substantiate the point that digital procurement platforms increase

transparency, which in turn affects more sustainable sourcing practices by small retail businesses (Bai and Sarkis, 2020).

2.3.2 To evaluate the effect of digital procurement platforms on the practices of selecting suppliers towards sustainability Supplier selection Supplier selection is an important factor that determines sustainable procurement practices.

Various researchers claim that successful supplier selection requires suppliers to be assessed in terms of quality, cost, reliability, environmental performance, and ethical standards (Ho et al., 2010). The platforms impact the process of supplier selection and ensure greater supplier evaluation, comparison, and monitoring (Wambua, 2020).

Digital Procurement Platforms allow small retailers to have access to wider suppliers, including suppliers with established sustainability certifications (Bai and Sarkis, 2020). Most of the e-procurement systems in the world environment have embedded supplier databases that contain data about environmental certifications, labor standards and sustainability ratings. Most of these features empower buyers to make informed supplier choices that align with sustainability priorities (Croom & Brandon-Jones, 2017).

In most of the developing economies and Countries, where access to reliable supplier information is often limited, digital procurement platforms bridge the gap by offering digital profiles, customer reviews, and performance histories (Wambua, 2020). Digital tools also support supplier prequalification, ensuring that only certified and compliant suppliers are included in procurement processes (Bai & Sarkis, 2020).

For small retail businesses in Africa, supplier selection has traditionally been based on long-term interpersonal relationships, proximity, or convenience rather than sustainability considerations (Mukonza & Swarts, 2020). The digital platforms challenge this status quo by introducing data-driven selection criteria that prioritize compliance, transparency, and sustainability (Croom & Brandon-Jones, 2017).

The stakeholder theory suggests the importance of selecting suppliers whose practices align with regulatory, community, and customer expectations (Freeman, 1984). Digital supplier selection tools help small retailers meet these expectations by encouraging alignment between sourcing decisions and stakeholder needs (Harrison et al., 2019).

2.3.3 To establish the relationship between the use of digital procurement platforms and environmental/ethical sourcing performance among small retail businesses in Kampala.

These digital procurement platforms greatly contribute to the outcomes by enhancing monitoring, enabling evidence-based decision-making, and promoting compliance across the supply chain (Da Silva & Filho, 2019; Mukonza & Swarts, 2020). They majorly support environmental performance by generating real-time data on product usage, supplier emissions, and resource efficiency (Bai & Sarkis, 2020). This ethical performance is greatly supported through improved visibility into labor practices, traceability of product origins, and the elimination of exploitative suppliers (Mukonza & Swarts, 2020).

For retailers mostly in Kampala, digital procurement platforms highly improve environmental and ethical supplier sourcing performance (Da Silva & Filho, 2019). Digital platforms minimize manual paperwork, reduce unethical practices, and support environmental sustainability by reducing unnecessary transportation and stock wastage (Bai & Sarkis, 2020).

2.4 Summary of Literature Gaps

This literature review reveals several gaps that justify the need for this study. First, while global literature extensively discusses digital procurement and sustainability, apparently there is limited empirical evidence which is specific to small retail businesses in Africa, particularly Kampala (Wambua, 2020).

In addition, most studies focus on large organizations or public procurement institutions, leaving small retail enterprises understudied (Mukonza & Swarts, 2020).

To base on literature limited research examines how digital procurement influences specific sustainability outcomes such as transparency, supplier selection, and ethical performance simultaneously. And finally contextual factors such as digital literacy, informal supplier markets, and infrastructure constraints are inadequately covered in existing literature (Ajuwon & Ikpor, 2021).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The chapter also explains the strategies and methods used to explore the role played by digital procurement platforms in helping small retail businesses in Kampala to fulfill the expectations of stakeholders and attain sustainable product sourcing. The Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) was the basis of this study because it focuses on comprehending the manner in which Leaders and managers of different organizations perceive, interpret, and react to various claims of stakeholders within a true organizational setting.

The purely qualitative research design was employed to investigate the experiences of participants, their perceptions, and the process of making decisions that were more detailed and understandable. The chapter demonstrates the research design and philosophical orientation, population of the study, sampling approach, data collection methods and tools, data analysis processes, measures of trustworthiness, and ethical concerns. Every methodological option and practice in this research was selected in a manner that would yield rich and contextual information which is consistent with the theme of the research, research problem and the nature of interpretation of the Stakeholder Theory.

3.2 Research Design and Philosophical Orientation.

The Research study was based on qualitative interpretive design. According to interpretivism, reality is a product of social construction, and people can acquire knowledge most effectively by examining how people understand their experiences of being in certain situations (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The design was also very appropriate since the research sought to learn the perceptions of the small retail business owners and managers in Kampala on the utility of the digital procurement systems (e-catalogues, supplier portals, and electronic ordering systems) in the context of stakeholder expectations and sustainable product sourcing.

The qualitative method was able to explore meanings, processes, and realities of the context. The study was its qualitative design at its implementation stage. It allowed exploring the subjective experience of participants in more detail and provided methodological consistency between the analysis to be performed and the thematic analysis. The qualitative design is a direct support of Stakeholder Theory in that it emphasizes the managerial meaning of the stakeholder pressures instead of statistical tests of the relationships.

3.3 Study Population

The tested population was comprised of the owners and managers of small retail businesses in Kampala District, Uganda. This was so due to the fact that these people are in direct contact with the procurement decisions and day to day contact with suppliers, customers, regulators and communities. In this instance, Kampala was picked as the study sample since it is the commercial center of Uganda, and it can be described as having a high density of small retail businesses, high penetration of digital technology, and high pressure on sustainability among stakeholders (UBOS, 2022).

Small retail enterprises in this context in Kampala primarily have small resources, local supply chains, and apparent ties to the community, and this aspect renders them feasible to investigate the practical implementation of Stakeholder Theory in sustainable procurement.

The sampling technique and sample size will be outlined in 3.4.

The participants were sampled using the purposive sampling method where the sampled participants were rich in information on our research topic. Non-probability sampling method was suitable in that it enabled the researcher to select people with first-hand experience of procurement practices and different degrees of exposure to digital procurement platforms (Palinkas et al., 2015; Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The chosen Participants were selected with the help of the following inclusion procedure:

The persons who were either in the Ownership or managerial accountability on procurement in small retail enterprises.

The study required two years of experience of operation.

At least some knowledge of one of the digital procurement tools (e.g., mobile money, supplier WhatsApp groups, or rudimentary e-catalogues).

In this study, Data collection was maintained up to the stage when data saturation was achieved whereby no new themes or insights were realized. The 70 participants (business owners and managers) were the sample used. This range was to be similar to the accepted qualitative research rules of conducting an in-depth interview study in the framework of SME and sustainability in Africa, where 70 participants often reached the saturation (Vasileiou et al., 2018; Bekele, 2022). In the research, data collection was done in a saturated state.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

In the research, the primary data was obtained by using semi-structured interviews. The approach was selected as it offered the freedom to consider new concepts without losing the track of the research purpose (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015; Bryman, 2016). Interviews in this process also enabled the participants to explain their procurement practices, their experience with digital tools, how they perceive the expectations of their stakeholders, and their sustainability considerations in their own words, which they find easy to express.

These interviews have been done physically in the business premises of the participants or through secure virtual platform where needed. The interviews were 35-60 minutes and were recorded with the express permission of the participants.

The secondary data, including academic sources, governmental reports and industry documents were not considered as primary evidence but only as a background information and triangulation.

Data collection instruments will be used to collect the required data in the research.

The key tool of this study was a semi-structured interview guide that was elaborated on the basis of three research objectives and major constructs of Stakeholder Theory. The guide that was employed had open-ended questions and probes, such as, "Would you mind taking me through your current supplier selection process? How, or otherwise, do customer or regulatory expectations impact your usage of digital tools?"

3.7 Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was used to analyze the data that was obtained. The steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019) were six and included:

The Introducing the data by the means of repeated reading of transcripts.

Production of preliminary codes.

find themes in the collected data.

Review of themes.

It involved defining and naming of themes.

And lastly, report production.

Deductive codes (based on the aims of the research and the constructs of the Stakeholder Theory stakeholder plurality, legitimacy, and managerial responsibility) and inductive codes (appearing immediately when participants shared their stories) were utilized in this study. The themes were analysed, narrowed and grouped in such a manner that they could clearly demonstrate the correlation between the adoption of digital platforms, stakeholder expectations and the outcomes of sustainable sourcing.

In the process, all obtained transcripts were copied verbatim and anonymized and then analyzed.

3.8The study is trustworthy due to the following reasons.

To ascertain rigor in this qualitative research, the trustworthiness criteria provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used on our participants in the data collection process.

Credibility.

The credibility was gained by the long-term interaction with the participants, member checking, such as presenting summary themes to confirm and triangulate the data sources.

Transferability.

In the activity, thick, detailed descriptions of the Kampala small retail environment and characteristics of participants were given, which gave the reader opportunity to make judgement on applicability to other environments.

Dependability.

Dependability was also considered in data collection process by introducing audit trail (detailed documentation of all coding decisions and analysis steps) and a strict observance to the protocol of analysis.

Conformability.

This was upheld by basing the interpretations on the direct quotes of the participants and reflexive notes of the researcher as much as possible to reduce bias.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

All the participants were given a clear information sheet on the purpose of the study, the role of voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and the risk or benefits. In order to facilitate the process, the participants gave written or oral informed consent.

In the process of data collection, confidentiality and anonymity were highly observed by the use of pseudonyms and data was saved in devices with passwords. In order to avoid any issues, no identifying information was present in the findings. The given research was conducted properly according to the ethics of the university and principles presented by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Bryman (2016).

3.10 Chapter Summary

The chapter has presented a strictly qualitative approach to methodology that was consistent with the goals of the study and the Stakeholder Theory. Interpretivist design, saturation purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis were to yield rich, context-specific results on digital procurement practices in the small retail sector of Kampala. This was followed by a second chapter which was to summarize the findings following data collection and analysis.

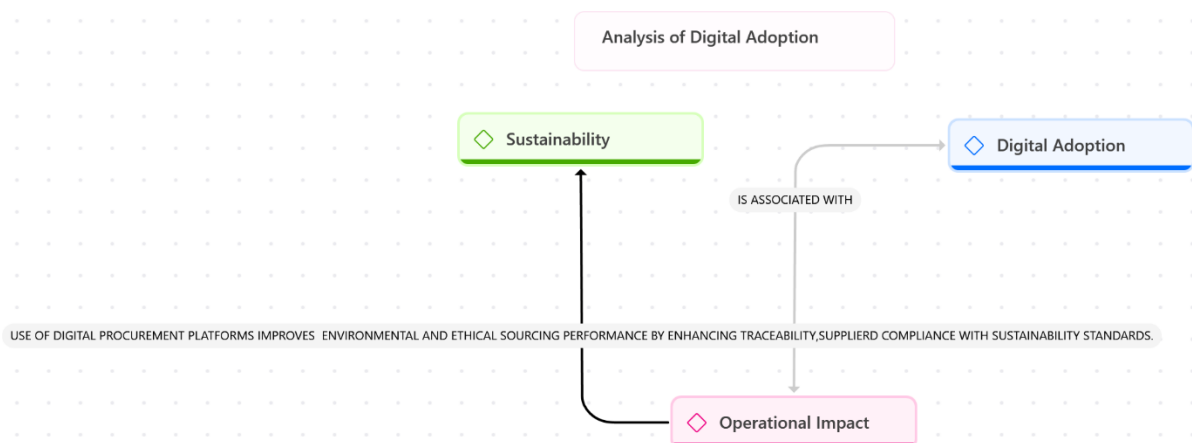
CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Introduction

The chapter reports, discusses, and explains the qualitative results of the research about the impact of digital procurement platforms on sustainable sourcing of products among 70 participants who own or operate small retail businesses in Kampala. It is analyzed based on the data that had been gathered due to semi-structured interviews with the owners and managers of the small retail businesses and analyzed through the thematic analysis aided by the ATLAS.ti software.

In the data analysis process, the codes were created both deductively and inductively as well as the deductively created codes were directly taken out of the three research objectives and core constructs of the Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), and inductively created codes were created through patterns observed in the lives of participants. Subsequently, as it turned out, the resulting themes were arranged into conceptual networks within ATLAS.ti to visualize the relations between digital procurement platform adoption, stakeholder expectations, transparency and accountability, supplier selection, sustainability outcomes and implementation barriers, which were acquired in the course of the research.

The stakeholder Theory is the key to all interpretations of this study, and it claims that organizations are based in a system of stakeholders, whose legitimate interests need to be identified, and balanced and fulfilled to be legitimate and viable in the long run. My results are offered in a very strict way in relation to the three definite objectives mentioned in Chapter One. The three elements identified in the study background, e-catalogues, supplier portals and electronic ordering systems are clearly mentioned as the practical expressions of the digital procurement platforms where they are applicable.



ATLAS.ti Conceptual Network Diagram for Objective One – Digital Adoption, Stakeholder Expectations, Transparency and Barriers

4.2 Objective One

Was to examine the extent to which small retail businesses in Kampala have adopted digital procurement platforms to respond to stakeholder expectations

Theme 1: Level of Digital Procurement Adoption

The participants who took part in our data collection exercise reported moderate but uneven adoption of digital procurement platforms. Most of the businesses used mobile money for payments, WhatsApp or email for supplier communication, and basic digital record-keeping. And the full integration remains rare, supplier evaluation, sustainability screening and strategic sourcing are still largely manual in the procurement of most of these retail businesses.

Interpretation in Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory, which is anchoring this research, explains that adoption of the digital platforms occurs when owners and managers perceive the use of the platforms in response to legitimate stakeholder claims such as faster service, records required by the regulators, and timely communication. The balancing process that managers have to play between stakeholder pressure and resource limitations characteristic of small retail firms in Kampala can be traced in this transitional nature of adoption witnessed here.

Theme 2: Improving Transparency and Accountability.

The electronic records, particularly the electronic ordering systems and supplier portals, generate traceable audit trails, minimize undocumented cash transactions, and favoritism in terms of supplier selection. The Participants in the course of data collection observed that e-catalogues allow comparison of prices and specifications, which was not feasible in the past.

In Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory stresses the fact that transparency has a direct positive effect on organizational legitimacy. By rendering procurement choices more transparent and accountable, small retailers enhance their trust among customers who, in fact, seek ethical sourcing, regulators who insist on records of compliance and suppliers who seek to be treated fairly. These online channels, thus, formalize the managerial task as highlighted by Freeman (1984).

Theme 3: Implementation Problems.

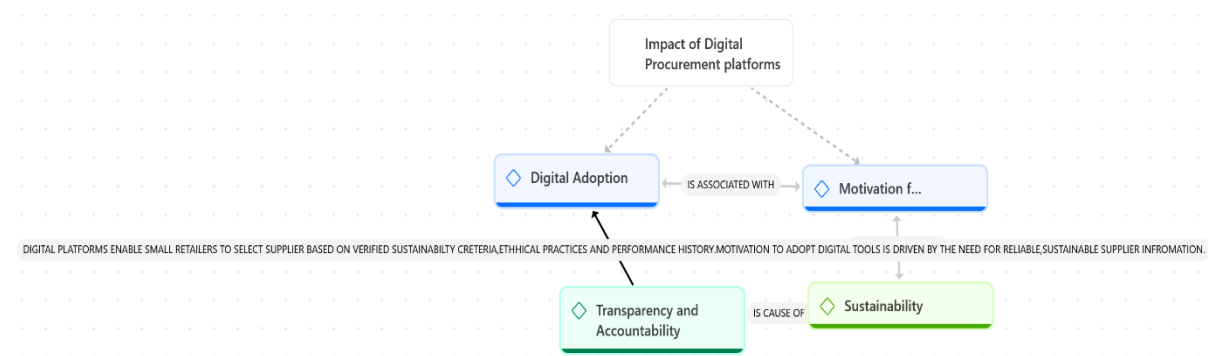
The participants also listed the issues pertaining to the digital procurement services, including high data and internet prices, the frequent failure of the system, lack of legitimacy and unwillingness to give up close relationships with suppliers.

In Stakeholder Theory

According to the theory, constraints lower the ability of the owner or managers to meet the expectations of the stakeholders and shows that legitimacy does not just exist in intentions but also in structural capabilities to act.

4.3 Objective Two:

Was to analyze the influence of digital procurement platforms on the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainable product sourcing in small retail businesses



ATLAS.ti Conceptual Network Diagram for Objective Two – Digital Platforms, Supplier Evaluation, Environmental/Social/Economic Outcomes

Theme 4: Digital Platforms and Supplier Evaluation

The digital procurement platforms, such as E-catalogues, allow price and specification comparison; supplier portals display performance history and basic compliance data; electronic ordering systems log delivery reliability. This often shifts selection from purely relational to partly evidence-based. However, price remains the dominant criterion.

In Stakeholder Theory

The theory emphasizes that supplier selection in businesses is the practical site where managers balance competing stakeholder interests such as customers and communities' demand, environmental and social responsibility, while owners and short-term survival pressures prioritizes cost. Furthermore, digital platforms provide information needed to incorporate sustainability criteria in the procurement process.

Theme 5: Environmental Sustainability Outcomes

The participants reported reduced paper usage through using electronic ordering, better stock control through the use of catalogues, and occasional identification of eco-friendly supplier portals, but full Environmental transformation was limited.

In Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory emphasizes that Environmental gains occur when stakeholder pressure, such as customer demand for green products or regulatory enforcement, is salient enough to be prioritized. Where such pressure is weak, digital tools are used mainly for operational efficiency rather than ecological transformation.

Theme 6: Social and Economic Sustainability Outcomes

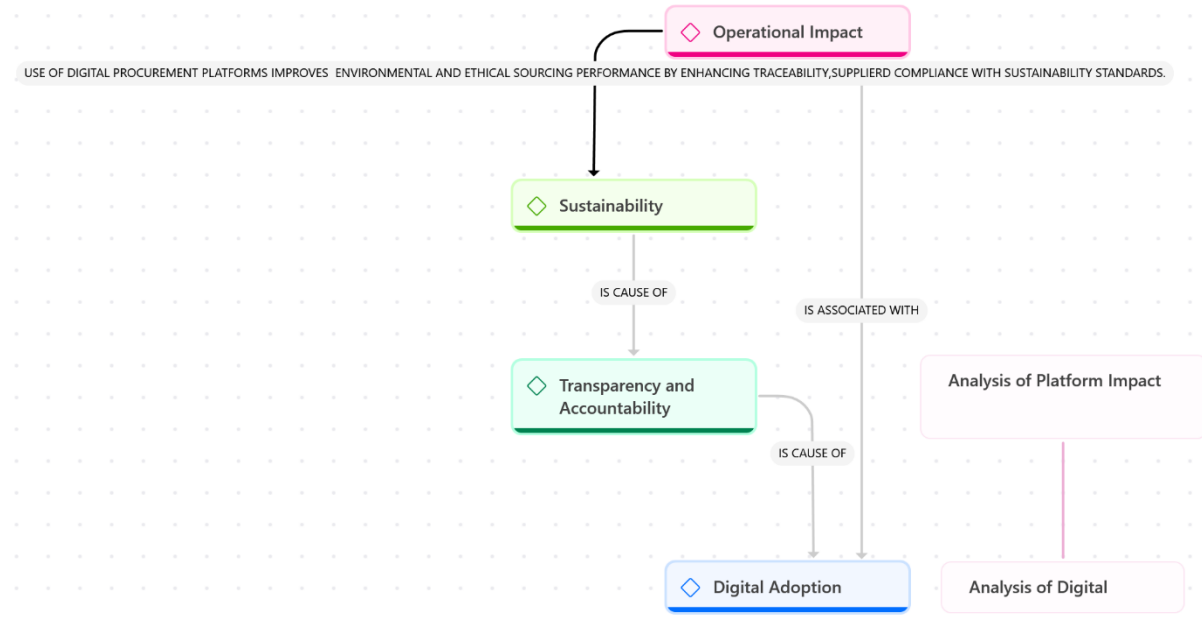
Through using the digital procurement platforms, traceability via supplier portals and electronic ordering systems improved documentation of delivery consistency and basic labor-compliance information. Economic benefits included lower transaction costs and fewer stock-outs. Social verification, such as fair labor remains superficial because independent audits were rare.

In Stakeholder Theory

The theory states that social and economic dimensions are mediated by the relative power and urgency of stakeholders. Strong customer or community pressure leads to greater use of digital tools for ethical monitoring; weak pressure results in minimal social integration.

4.4 Objective Three

Was to assess the role of stakeholder expectations in shaping the relationship between digital procurement platform use and sustainable product sourcing



ATLAS.ti Conceptual Network Diagram for Objective Three – Stakeholder Expectations as Mediator

Theme 7: Mediating Influence: Stakeholder Expectations.

The Retailers who met active customer demand of traceable/ethical products, regulatory or community attention, said that they used e-catalogues, supplier portals and electronic ordering systems more strategically in terms of sustainability. However, in cases where the expectations of the stakeholders were either low or unarticulated, the same platforms were only utilized in order to achieve speed and cost reduction.

In Stakeholder Theory

The result was a direct confirmation of the main thesis of Freeman: Identification and prioritization of stakeholder claims determine the managerial decision, which also involves using technology. The enhanced visibility and capacity brought by these digital procurement platforms led to the ultimate outcome of the depth of sustainable product sourcing resting on the management recognition and responsiveness to stakeholder expectations. The role of stakeholder expectations, consequently, is the most important mediator between the adoption of the platform and sustainability outcomes.

4.5 Summary of Findings

The thematic analysis indicated that e-procurement technology implemented in e-catalogues and supplier portals and electronic ordering system was also introduced in Kampala in the small retail firms at medium/transitional stage. The adoption was motivated mainly by the demands of the stakeholders to be transparent and efficient, but structural barriers provided partial integration. These platforms promoted transparency, better supplier assessment and provided small returns on environmental, social and economical aspects of sustainable sourcing. But the intensity and orientation of these influences are determined conclusively by the salience of stakeholder expectations.

CHAPTER FIVE

Introduction

The concluding chapter gives a thorough summary of the whole study. It starts with the summary of the main findings in the direct connection to the three specific research objectives, and then the conclusions are drawn based on the qualitative evidence received with the help of the collected data. A conceptual evaluation of the initial research hypotheses is then presented in this chapter. The research is entirely qualitative and thus, it goes further to discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, give specific recommendations to various stakeholders and give future research direction. In the study results, any interpretation and conclusion is securely pegged on Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) and the deep thematic evidence obtained through semi-structured interview of small retail businesses owners and managers in Kampala as reported and discussed in Chapter Four.

Summary of Findings

This paper was informed by the Stakeholder Theory, which examined the role of digital procurement platforms in helping small retail businesses in Kampala to fulfill stakeholder expectations and attain sustainable sourcing of products. The thematic analysis with the assistance of ATLAS.ti demonstrated patterns that are similar and interrelated in the three objectives.

Objective One

The Level of adoption in relation to the expectations of the stakeholders.

The digital procurement solutions that have been integrated by the small retail businesses in Kampala have been the use of e-catalogues which are supplier portals and electronic ordering systems to moderate but disproportionate extent. The majority of the participants involved in data collection process reported on transitional use such as mobile money and basic electronic communication to make daily transactions, infrequent browsing of e-catalogue to compare prices, and infrequent use of supplier portals to track orders. End-to-end integration, making sustainability screening or analytics sourcing automated, is hardly common. The forces pushing towards adoption have been identified as the stakeholder pressures of having a faster service, the regulatory pressures of having records of transactions, and the competitive pressures of having more digitally modern retailers. Nevertheless, structural constraints, including the high data fees, low digital literacy, and unreliable internet often hinder further integration. These results directly respond to the first research question and explain how the expectations of stakeholders are both an accelerator and a restraint of technology adoption.

Objective Two

The Impact on the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable products sourcing.

The procurement digital platforms have a positive but conditional impact on sustainable sourcing of products. On the environmental front, the participants noted that paper consumption was cut by using electronic ordering mechanisms, improved inventory management by use of e-catalogues which reduced over-ordering and waste materials during the procurement process, and some suppliers were discovered to be environmental friendly by use of supplier portals. Also socially the platforms enhance traceability and simple compliance visibility such as delivery records and supplier performance history but little independent verification of labor standards is done. Reduced transaction costs, reduced stock-outs and quicker order processing was commonly reported economically. Imperatively, but more importantly, the evidence demonstrates that price factors still prevail in the selection of suppliers, being in many cases, more compelling than sustainability requirements unless there is formidable pressure by the interested parties. These tendencies are very firm proofs that the platforms have technical potential of triple-bottom-line improvements, but the final results are determined by the priorities of the managers influenced by stakeholder needs.

Objective Three

The mediation effect of stakeholder expectations.

Based on the results of the collected and analyzed data, the stakeholder expectations become the mediating factor. It is mentioned that in case stakeholders, including customers, are extremely concerned with traceability and ethically sourced products, retailers resort to using platforms like e-catalogues to filter sustainability and supplier portals to monitor compliance and electronic ordering systems to create audit-ready records. Conversely, in cases where the expectations of the stakeholders are poor or unarticulated, the same platforms are applied on a small scale based on the convenience of operations such as speed and cost minimization. This intermediary position was well exemplified in the ATLAS.ti conceptual networks where the stakeholder pressure was always the key node connecting the digital adoption with the depths of sustainability. Results therefore give a clear empirical evidence to the third research question and indicate the dynamism of the relationship that is context-specific.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the research demonstrates that the study conclusively displays that e-procurement systems, which are implemented through e-catalogues, e-supplier portals, and e-ordering solutions, are effective enabling factors among small retailers in Kampala. They increase transparency, assess suppliers better, decrease operational wastes, and develop traceable records, which advance sustainable sourcing of products in the environmental, social, and economic aspects. Their relationship is, however, not automatic or linear. And as

it has been demonstrated, sustainable product sourcing is only born when managers are responsible to determine, rank and strike a balance among stakeholder claims, the premise of the Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984).

The context of resource limited situations as the small retail sector of Kampala as viewed through the data gathered that finding the balance between legitimacy and long term sustainability does not entail the need to integrate fully with technology but rather it is the optimal selective and strategic application of the digital tools that align with the most significant stakeholder expectation this is important because the findings has significant implications on the small and medium enterprises in developing economies that sustainability is not a technology driven phenomenon, but rather a aspect that involves the selective and strategic use of the digital tools that resonate with the most important stakeholder expectation and in so doing

Theoretical Implications

It is fundamentally two contributions to the Stakeholder Theory that the findings of this Research make. First, they extrapolate the theory to the digital-procurement and sustainability field of an under-researched Uganda, Kampala SME setting, demonstrating that digital tools can be used as the amplifier of visibility of stakeholder demands and claims that can be more observable and actionable, which Freeman did not develop in his original framework and most of the further Western implementations of the idea have not yet achieved. Secondly, the paper notes that in resource-poor settings, organizational legitimacy is typically achieved via partial alignment as opposed to complete technological or transformational sustainability. And in fact, these questions the underlying presupposition in much of the stakeholder literature that more technology or more sustainability is necessarily good, but rather puts managerial judgment in the tradeoff between competing claims under constraint.

The study provides an explicit connection of the Stakeholder Theory to the literature of sustainable procurement in Africa, which provides empirical support to the argument that stakeholder expectations are not only external forces, but also active mediators of technology-performance links. The insights in the Research contribute to the relevance of the theory in the context of small businesses operating in developing economies and provide avenues of further theoretical development.

Recommendations to practice and policy.

Small retail business owners and managers.

Entry points should start with low-cost, high-impact e.g., free or low- subscription supplier portals, mobile-friendly e-catalogue apps, and subsequently move on to electronic ordering systems as digital literacy increases.

Be proactive in reaching out to the key stakeholders (customers by means of in-store feedback, regulators by means of compliance workshops) to reveal the sustainability expectations so that the digital tools can be introduced in a strategic, not reactive manner.

Introduce easy sustainability checklists in supplier review processes in the current platforms to transform visibility into action.

In the case of technology providers and platform developers.

Develop low-cost, mobile-first solutions that are based on the realities of the Uganda infrastructure, and that have built-in sustainability features (eco-certification filters in e-catalogues, automated compliance scorecards in supplier portals, and carbon-footprint indicators in electronic ordering systems).

Provide different levels of training and local language support as a way of lowering the perceived complexity and speeding up the adoption process by small retailers.

Considering policy makers and regulators (Kampala Capital City Authority - KCCA, Uganda National Bureau of Standards - UNBS, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives).

Provide special subsidies to digital-literacy initiatives and data packages to small retail business, and enhance infrastructure in market locations.

Design incentive programs like tax rebates or special licensing to retailers who prove to use sustainability-integrated platforms (e.g. green e-catalogues or supplier-compliant portals).

Establish national principles that will motivate platforms to incorporate SDG-related requirements, and, thus, align the digitization adoption of the private sector with the national sustainability objectives.

To suppliers and development partners.

Work with platforms to post approved sustainability credentials, and it will be simpler to enable small retailers to respond to stakeholder requests without extra expense or effort.

5.7 Areas for Further Research

Though this study offers very valuable qualitative information, there are still a few gaps that are valuable:

A comparative qualitative or mixed methods study of the urban Kampala retailers and the rural ones to investigate the extent to which variations in stakeholder networks and infrastructure mediate the effect of the difference.

Tracking of the same businesses over a period of (2-5 years) to determine whether the continued adoption of e-catalogues, supplier portals and electronic ordering systems results in any measurable improvements in actual sustainability performance (e.g. lower waste measure, supplier compliance measure).

Quantitative or mixed-methods investigations which statistically test and measure the mediating strength of particular groups of stakeholders (customers versus regulators versus suppliers) through structural equation modelling, which complements the conceptual mediation made in this paper.

Exploratory study of the role of new technologies (mobile money integration, AI-driven sustainability scoring) in stakeholder-led digital procurement in other East African SME settings.

APPENDICIES

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL PROCUREMENT PLATFORMS ON SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT SOURCING IN SMALL RETAIL BUSINESSES IN KAMPALA, UGANDA

Participant Information

Organization Name: _____

Position/Role: _____

Years of Experience in Procurement: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

SECTION A: Background Information

Research Objective 1: To establish the background characteristics of respondents involved in procurement activities.

1. Please describe your role in this business and your involvement in procurement activities.

Probe: What procurement decisions are you responsible for?

2. How long have you been involved in procurement activities within this business?

Probe: How has your role changed over time?

3. What types of products does your business mainly procure or supply?

Probe: Do you consider quality or sustainability when sourcing these products

SECTION B: Digital Procurement Platforms.

Research Objective 2: To investigate the degree of use of digital procurement platform in small retail companies.

What are the digital tools or platforms you are using in your procurement processes?

Probe: What is the frequency of your use of these sites?

What was the reason your business implemented digital procurement platforms?

Probe: Could this decision have been informed by cost, speed or competition?

What procurement operations are now undertaken online?

Probe: What are all the activities that are still manual?

What is your general experience using electronic sources of procurement?

Probe: What do you consider to be the difficulties or advantages?

SECTION C Digital Procurement and Sustainable Product Sourcing.

Research Objective 3: To determine the impact of the use of digital procurement platforms on sustainable sourcing of products.

How have online procurement systems affected your selection of suppliers?

Probe: Is it a more transparent or more open access to sustainable suppliers?

Do e-procurement systems assist you to think about the sustainability parameters when procuring products?

Inquiry: Environmental, ethical or quality aspects?

What benefits of sustainability are enabled by the utilization of digital platforms?

Probe: Could you provide a real life example?

What are some of the difficulties encountered in using digital platforms in sourcing sustainably?

Probe: gaps in information, cost, competence or internet issues?

Certainly, the on-the-job training program requires the participation of all stakeholders.

SECTION D: Stakeholder Involvement.

Research Objective 4: To investigate the impact of the stakeholders on the process of procurement decision-making based on the digital platforms.

What has been the impact of the use of digital procurement platforms on your relationship with suppliers?

Probe: Communication, trust, or coordination?

Do you base your procurement decisions on the digital platforms based on customers?

Probe: Customer response or need of sustainable product?

What are the main stakeholders that are involved in the process of making procurement decisions via digital platforms?

Investigations: Suppliers, customers, regulators or platform providers?

SECTION E: Opportunities, Challenges and Improvements.

Research Objective 5: To determine the advantages, issues, and recommendations in operations of digital procurement platform.

What have been the advantages of your business using digital procurement platforms?

Probe: Saving costs, efficiency, sustainability enhancement?

Which are the key obstacles that inhibit the successful adoption of the digital procurement platforms in your company?

Probe: Technical, financial or human capacity issues?

What are your recommendations to allow the use of digital procurement platforms to achieve sustainable sourcing?

Probe: Training, or system improvements or regulatory support?

Is there any other point that you would like to make about digital procurement and sustainable sourcing?

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