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Effect Of Supplier Trust on Firm Performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State

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ABSTRACT
The performance of a company reflects how well it operates in terms of production, profitability, and customer satisfaction. For a large manufacturing firm like Nestlé Nigeria Plc, performance depends heavily on how efficiently its supply chain functions from sourcing raw materials to producing and distributing finished goods. However, in recent years, Nestlé's Ogun State factory has experienced issues such as delays in raw material delivery, inconsistent product quality, and occasional production slowdowns. The objective of this study was to examine the effect of supplier trust measured through supplier reliability and supplier competence on the firm performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc in Ogun State. The study adopted a survey research design to gather first-hand information from employees across different departments. The population of the study consisted of 512 staff members of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, as obtained from the Human Resource Department. Since the number was manageable, the study used a census method, meaning all staff were included in the research. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed on a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3 software. The results showed that both supplier reliability and supplier competence had a positive and significant effect on firm performance. The study concluded that dependable and capable suppliers contribute greatly to improving Nestlé's productivity, efficiency, and customer satisfaction. It is therefore recommended that Nestlé Nigeria Plc continue to partner with reliable and competent suppliers, invest in supplier development programs, and strengthen communication to sustain long-term performance growth.

Keywords: *Supplier Trust, Supplier Reliability, Supplier Competence, Firm Performance, Nestlé Nigeria Plc.*

INTRODUCTION
Firm performance has remained one of the most discussed issues in business management around the world because it determines how well an organization can compete, grow, and survive in a dynamic market. Globally, many studies have shown that strong supply chain relationships and effective resource management drive better firm performance through higher efficiency, product quality, and innovation (Cao & Zhang, 2011; Fawcett et al., 2015). In today's globalized economy, companies depend on reliable supply networks to ensure that raw materials, components, and services are delivered on time and at the right quality (Akpan et al 2024). When this happens, firms can achieve lower costs, faster production, and higher customer satisfaction all of which are measures of good performance. In Nigeria, manufacturing companies such as Nestlé Nigeria Plc face several challenges in their supply chain operations, including poor infrastructure, irregular supply of raw materials, and trust issues between firms and suppliers. These challenges often affect the company's ability to meet production targets and maintain quality standards in its Ogun State operations.

In this regard, supplier trust has become a major focus in understanding what drives firm performance. Supplier trust simply means the confidence a company has that its suppliers will act honestly, reliably, and competently in their business dealings. According to Johnston et al. (2004), trust helps reduce transaction costs, encourages information sharing, and promotes long-term collaboration between firms and their suppliers. Similarly, Setiawan and Tarigan (2022) explained that supplier trust has both direct and indirect effects on firm performance because it improves cooperation and allows suppliers to be more responsive to buyer needs. When trust is present, firms can work closely with their suppliers to innovate and solve problems quickly, which leads to better product quality and cost efficiency (Gwaltu & Mrisho, 2023).

Among prior studies reviewed, Setiawan and Tarigan (2022) and Tarigan et al. (2020) proposed several variables or proxies of supplier trust including integrity, credibility, honesty, and transparency as the key indicators that define trust within supply chain relationships. However, in this study, two of these proxies' reliability and competence are selected because they are the most widely used and directly linked to firm performance in both theory and practice.

Reliability, as a measure of supplier trust, refers to how consistent and dependable a supplier is in meeting obligations such as delivering quality materials on time and keeping promises. Dwyer et al. (1987) and Fawcett et al. (2015) found that when suppliers are reliable, firms experience fewer delays, reduced production costs, and smoother operations all of which enhance performance. Reliable suppliers help organizations like Nestlé Nigeria Plc avoid production interruptions, ensuring that finished goods reach the market faster and maintain their reputation for quality. In the Nigerian context, where logistics and supply disruptions are common, the reliability of suppliers becomes even more crucial to sustaining firm performance.
Competence, on the other hand, refers to the supplier's technical ability, knowledge, and skill to perform their job effectively. Competent suppliers can deliver high-quality products, use advanced production techniques, and respond quickly to customer needs (Ndaeyo et al 2025). Studies by Johnston et al. (2004) and Setiawan and Tarigan (2022) emphasized that supplier competence is a foundation for trust because buyers are more willing to depend on suppliers who demonstrate strong professional ability. For Nestlé Nigeria Plc, supplier competence is directly related to its production quality and operational efficiency. When suppliers are technically capable and understand Nestlé's standards, the company can maintain product excellence, meet consumer expectations, and strengthen its overall performance in Ogun State.

The performance of a company shows how well it is doing in terms of production, profit, and customer satisfaction. For a big company like Nestlé Nigeria Plc, performance depends a lot on how smoothly its supply chain works that is, how well it gets materials, produces goods, and delivers them to the market. In recent years, however, Nestlé's factory in Ogun State has been facing real problems that show its performance is not as strong as expected. There have been frequent delays in production, shortages of raw materials, and higher production costs that have made it harder for the company to meet demand. Reports also show that some of these issues come from suppliers delivering late or providing materials that don't meet the required standard (Yang, Liu, & Jia, 2022). These disruptions have sometimes led to temporary shortages of Nestlé products in the market and reduced factory output. Although many people blame these issues on poor infrastructure, inflation, or foreign exchange problems, the real cause is still not clearly known.

One possible reason could be the level of trust between Nestlé and its suppliers. In business, trust means having confidence that your partner will keep promises, deliver on time, and be honest in their dealings. Scholars have found that when there is strong trust between a company and its suppliers, they work better together, share information freely, and solve problems quickly all of which improve performance (Johnston et al., 2004; Uca et al., 2017). On the other hand, when there is low trust, suppliers may hide information, delay delivery, or act in their own interest instead of supporting the company's goals, which can lead to poor performance (Setiawan & Tarigan, 2022; Gwaltu & Mrisho, 2023). This suggests that weak supplier trust may be one of the reasons why Nestlé's operations in Ogun State are not performing as efficiently as they should.

Earlier studies have looked at how supplier trust affects company performance, but most of them were done outside Nigeria. For example, Johnston et al. (2004) studied it in the United States, Ancarani et al. (2013) in Europe, and Uca et al. (2017) in Turkey. These studies focused mainly on advanced economies with more stable supply systems. Others, such as Setiawan and Tarigan (2022) and Tarigan et al. (2020), carried out in Indonesia, found that trust can be measured using factors like integrity, honesty, transparency, and credibility. However, their results may not fully apply to Nigeria because of differences in culture, economy, and infrastructure. In Nigeria, the few studies on trust like Adiele and Didia (2021) have focused on small retail businesses rather than big manufacturing firms like Nestlé. Also, most past research used general surveys instead of focusing on a single company or region, which makes their findings too broad to explain Nestlé's specific situation.

In light of the problems observed and the research gaps identified, this study seeks to examine the effect of supplier trust on the firm performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State, with the following specific objectives.

i. To examine the effect of supplier reliability on the performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State.
ii. To assess how supplier competence affects the performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State.

In line with these objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated for testing:

H_{01}: Supplier reliability does not have a significant effect on the performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State.
H_{02}: Supplier competence does not have a significant effect on the performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Firm Performance

Different writers have explained firm performance in different ways, but they all agree that it simply means how well a company achieves its goals and performs its activities. In everyday language, firm performance shows whether a company is doing well in terms of profit, product quality, customer satisfaction, and competitiveness in the market. It reflects how effectively a company uses its people, money, and materials to achieve good results. According to Uca et al. (2017), firm performance is the good result a company gets when it works closely and builds trust with its supply chain partners. When a company and its suppliers cooperate, share information, and solve problems together, they reduce costs, improve quality, and make customers happier. This teamwork makes both sides perform better.

Tarigan et al. (2020) also explained that a company's performance depends a lot on how well it manages its relationship with suppliers. They found that when there is trust between buyers and suppliers, communication becomes smoother, deliveries are faster, and product quality improves. This, in turn, helps the company become stronger and more competitive in the market.

In another study, Yang et al. (2022) said that firm performance is also about being strong and able to recover quickly when problems happen. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies that had trusted relationships with their suppliers were able to share information quickly, respond faster, and recover more easily from supply problems. This shows that trust helps a company remain stable even in tough times.

Similarly, Wahyuningsih (2019) noted that good relationships and trust between suppliers and companies help improve overall performance. When both sides are honest and dependable, companies can work more efficiently, reduce risks, and achieve steady growth over time.
This study adopts the definition of firm performance by Uca et al. (2017), which sees firm performance as the positive results that come from trust and collaboration between a company and its supply chain partners. This definition is most suitable because it matches the goal of this study, which is to examine how supplier trust (especially supplier reliability and competence) affects the performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc in Ogun State. Since Nestlé depends heavily on trusted and capable suppliers to meet its production goals, this definition clearly connects trust with the company's overall success.

Supplier Trust

Different scholars defined supplier trust in slightly different ways, but they all agree that it means having confidence in your business partner's honesty, reliability, and ability to deliver what they promise. According to Johnston et al. (2004), supplier trust is built when suppliers believe that their buyers will act fairly and keep their promises. This feeling of trust makes both sides more willing to cooperate, share information, and solve problems together. When that happens, their partnership works better, and performance improves.

Gwaltu and Mrisho (2023) went further to say that trust is not only about feeling safe in a business relationship; it also helps companies to be more creative. When suppliers trust the firms they work with, they are more likely to suggest new ideas, take risks, and cooperate in ways that improve the whole supply chain's performance.

This study adopts the definition of supplier trust given by Johnston et al. (2004) because it explains trust in a simple and practical way as the belief that a business partner will act fairly, keep promises, and work together to solve problems. This definition fits the purpose of this research since it directly links trust to how well two partners perform when they cooperate.

Supplier Reliability

According to Nguyen et al. (2024), reliability generally means being trustworthy and consistent in performance. In business terms, a reliable supplier is one that provides accurate, error-free deliveries and information that companies can depend on when making important decisions. When suppliers are reliable, it reduces uncertainty, improves production planning, and strengthens customer satisfaction. In their study on the reliability of financial reporting and firm performance, the authors found that reliability builds confidence and helps companies achieve better performance because it ensures that decisions are based on dependable information.

Similarly, Perera et al. (2022) explained that reliability involves the ability to perform tasks correctly and repeatedly without failure. In the context of supplier relationships, reliability is not just about doing something right once it's about doing it right every time. Reliable suppliers provide stability and minimize operational risks, helping firms maintain steady output and avoid costly interruptions.

This study adopts the definition of supplier reliability as the ability of a supplier to consistently deliver products or services that meet agreed quality, quantity, and timing requirements, as supported by Nguyen et al. (2024) and Perera et al. (2022).

Supplier Competence

According to Tarigan et al. (2024), supplier competence is the ability of suppliers to use their people, machines, and technology to meet customer needs efficiently and accurately. In their study, they found that when suppliers are competent, they help improve the company's overall performance because they can produce high-quality products, avoid delays, and control costs. This makes the supply chain stronger and helps the company reach its goals faster.

This study adopts the definition by Tarigan et al. (2024), which explains supplier competence as the supplier's ability to use people, equipment, and technology effectively to meet customer needs in a timely and efficient way. This definition is most suitable because it matches the focus of this research to find out how competent suppliers, along with reliable ones, affect the performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc in Ogun State. Since Nestlé depends on skilled and capable suppliers to maintain its production quality and reputation, this definition fits perfectly with the company's real situation.

Empirical Review

Supplier Reliability and Firm Performance

The study by Perera et al. (2022) focused on how well the tools and indicators used to measure the impact of Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) on the performance of non-state higher education institutions in Sri Lanka actually work. The researchers recognized that universities face many risks such as financial, strategic, and technological challenges and that ERM can help identify and manage these risks. However, some organizations hesitate to fully adopt ERM because it is expensive and it's not always clear whether it truly improves performance. The study used a survey of 170 senior professionals from private universities to test whether the indicators used to measure ERM, and performance were dependable. The results showed that all the indicators had Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70, meaning they were reliable for measuring how ERM affects institutional performance. This study is useful because it provides strong evidence that the tools used to measure the link between ERM and performance in universities are reliable. Its use of statistical reliability testing gives the findings credibility and helps future researchers build on a solid foundation. However, the study's main weakness is that it focuses only on private higher education institutions in Sri Lanka, which limits how widely the findings can be applied to other sectors or countries. Also, the study checks only the reliability of indicators, not whether ERM truly improves performance.

Supplier Competence and Firm Performance

The study by Andayaningsih et al. (2023) examined how the competence of employees affected the performance of the organization at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Muhammadiyah University in Makassar, Indonesia. The researchers collected data from 34 lecturers and staff members using questionnaires and direct observations. They analyzed the data using simple linear regression with the SPSS software to test whether competence had a measurable impact on performance. The results showed that competence had a positive and significant effect on organizational performance, with a regression coefficient of 1.572 and a t-value of 3.078, which was greater than the critical value of 2.036. The significance value of 0.004 (< 0.05) confirmed that the relationship was statistically meaningful. This means that when staff members were more skilled, knowledgeable, and capable, the overall performance of the faculty improved.

Alam (2016) examined how supply chain competency the skills, abilities, and coordination within a company's supply chain affected business performance. The researcher focused on four key parts of supply chain competency: supplier involvement, the length of supplier relationships, use of information technology, and logistics integration. Data were collected from 187 organizations in Brazil, Korea, and India. Using a fuzzy-set analysis, the study tested whether these factors were necessary or sufficient to explain good performance. The findings showed that supply chain competency was both a necessary and sufficient condition for high performance, meaning companies that had strong, wellmanaged, and technology-supported supply chains tended to perform better than those that did not. The study made a strong contribution by showing that supply chain competency played a major role in improving company performance. It used data from multiple countries, which made the results more reliable and widely applicable. The fuzzy-set method was a useful approach because it allowed the researcher to explore complex relationships instead of relying only on simple cause-and-effect reasoning. However, the study focused mainly on manufacturing firms, so its results might not have applied to service-oriented businesses. It also relied on survey data, which might not have reflected actual company performance.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Exchange Theory

The Social Exchange Theory (SET), proposed by George Homans in 1958 and later developed by Peter Blau in 1964, is the most suitable theory for this study. The theory explains that relationships whether between people or organizations are built on mutual benefits. It means that both sides give and receive something valuable, such as trust, honesty, and cooperation. In business, this theory helps explain how companies and their suppliers maintain long-term partnerships through fairness, reliability, and shared benefits.

The theory assumes that every relationship is based on give-and-take, where both sides expect fair treatment and rewards. When one party behaves honestly and keeps promises, the other responds positively, creating trust and cooperation that benefit both sides in the long run.

Many studies have supported this idea. Johnston et al. (2004) found that supplier trust improves cooperation and information sharing, which enhances performance. Tarigan et al. (2020) and Gwaltu and Mrisho (2023) showed that trust and collaboration between firms and suppliers lead to innovation, better product quality, and lower costs. Adiele and Didia (2021) confirmed in Nigeria that trust strengthens long-term supplier relationships and improves marketing results.

However, some researchers argued that trust alone may not always improve performance. Ariesty (2019) found that trust must be supported by good communication and commitment. This shows that trust works best when both sides are equally committed and clear about their goals.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a survey research design because it was the most suitable method for collecting information directly from a large group of people within a short time. The design made it easy to gather first-hand data from employees and managers of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State, about their views on supplier trust and how it affects the company's performance. The survey method was appropriate since it allowed the researcher to obtain detailed opinions and experiences from respondents on issues like supplier reliability and competence, which are better understood through people's real-life experiences.

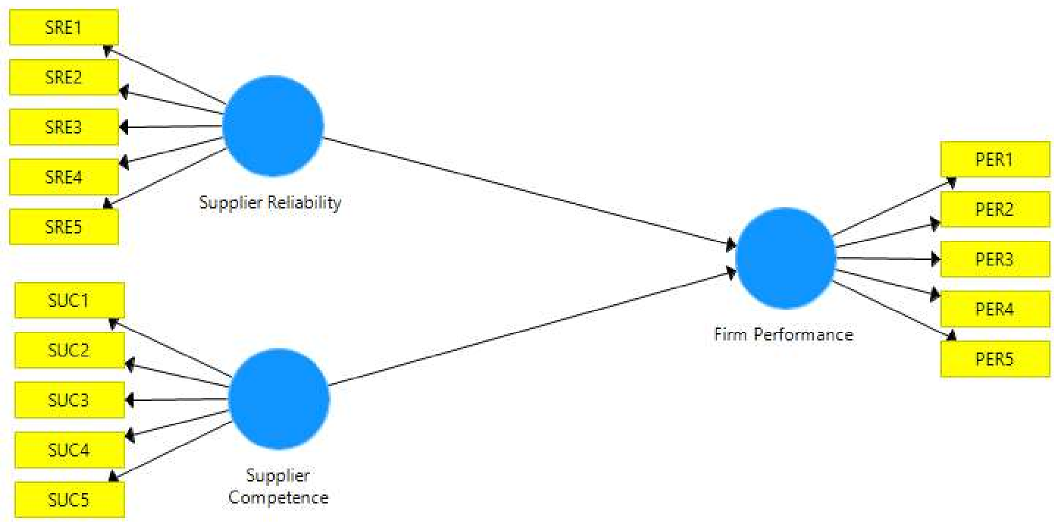
The population for this study consisted of all employees of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State, including both senior and junior staff working in different departments at the company's Agbara factory. According to information obtained from the Human Resource Department, the total number of employees in the Ogun State factory was 512. Because this number was manageable, the study used a census approach, meaning that all 512 employees were included in the research.

The data for this study was gathered using a questionnaire made up of simple and clear questions. The questions were arranged on a five-point scale, where respondents could choose answers from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). To make sure the questions were easy to understand and suitable for the study, experts in supply chain management and business studies looked through them and gave their feedback.

Before starting the main data collection, the questionnaire was tested with 30 workers from another manufacturing company outside Ogun State to check if it was clear and reliable. The test results showed a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70, meaning the questions were consistent and could be trusted to give reliable results.

After collecting the responses, the data was analyzed using a SmartPLS software, which helps to find effect of different factors. This method, known as Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), was chosen because it works well for studies that deal with several related ideas. The analysis first checked if the questions truly measured what they were supposed to (supplier reliability, supplier competence, and firm performance). Then it looked at how supplier trust through reliability and competence influenced the performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc in Ogun State.

Figure 1 Specified Model for the Study



The diagram above shows the study's model, created with SmartPLS 3, in simple terms. It explains how supplier reliability (SRE) and supplier competence (SUC) affect firm performance (PER) at Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State. Supplier reliability means how dependable and consistent suppliers are in delivering the right materials on time, while supplier competence means their skills and ability to meet the company's quality and production needs.

Results and Discussion

Out of the 512 questionnaires given to staff of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State, 482 were returned after data collection. After carefully checking for completeness and accuracy, 460 questionnaires were found valid and used for analysis. This high return rate was considered very good because it provided enough reliable information to understand how supplier trust, measured through reliability and competence, affects the performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc.

Both the measurement model and the structural model were tested using the PLS method to make sure the data collected for this study were accurate and dependable. The measurement model checked how well the questions used in the questionnaire truly measured the main ideas of the study supplier reliability (SRE), supplier competence (SUC), and firm performance (PER). To do this, the study tested reliability (how consistent the questions were) and validity (how well they measured what they were meant to). Reliability was checked using factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, and Composite Reliability (CR), while Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to confirm validity, as suggested by Hair et al. (2022).

Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity Statistics

Indicator	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
PER1	0.700			
PER2	0.685			
PER3	0.777	0.783	0.852	0.536
PER4	0.759			
PER5	0.735			
SUC1	0.746			
SUC2	0.769			

Indicator	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
SUC3	0.785	0.831	0.875	0.583
SUC4	0.756			
SUC5	0.761			
SRE1	0.789			
SRE2	0.811			
SRE3	0.587	0.845	0.889	0.618
SRE4	0.839			
SRE5	0.874			

Source: SmartPLS Output (2025).

Table 1 shows the reliability and validity results for this study. Some questions, like SRE3 (0.587) and PER2 (0.685), had lower scores, which means they were not very strong in explaining the idea they were meant to measure and could be removed. The rest of the questions had scores above 0.7, which means they were good and reliable.
The results also show that the Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability (CR) values for all the main ideas supplier reliability, supplier competence, and firm performance—were all above 0.7. This means that the questions used in the study were consistent and trustworthy. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were also above 0.5, showing that each idea was well represented by its questions.

After confirming the reliability and accuracy of the measurement model, discriminant validity was tested using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015). This test helps to check whether the main variables in the study Supplier Reliability (SRE), Supplier Competence (SUC), and Firm Performance (PER) are truly different from one another. According to Henseler et al. (2015), if the HTMT values are below 0.90, it means that each variable measures a unique concept and there is no overlap between them.

Table 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Firm Performance	Supplier Competence	Supplier Reliability
Firm Performance			
Supplier Competence	0.513		
Supplier Reliability	0.312	0.455	

Source: SmartPLS Output (2025).

Table 2 shows that the HTMT values between all the variables are below 0.90 specifically, 0.513 between Firm Performance and Supplier Competence, 0.312 between Firm Performance and Supplier Reliability, and 0.455 between Supplier Competence and Supplier Reliability. These results mean that each of these three variables represents a different idea in the study.
In simple language, this shows that supplier reliability, supplier competence, and firm performance were not measuring the same thing. Instead, each of them explained a separate part of the story. This confirms that the questions used in the study were well designed and that each construct was clearly understood by respondents.

Table 3: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Statistics

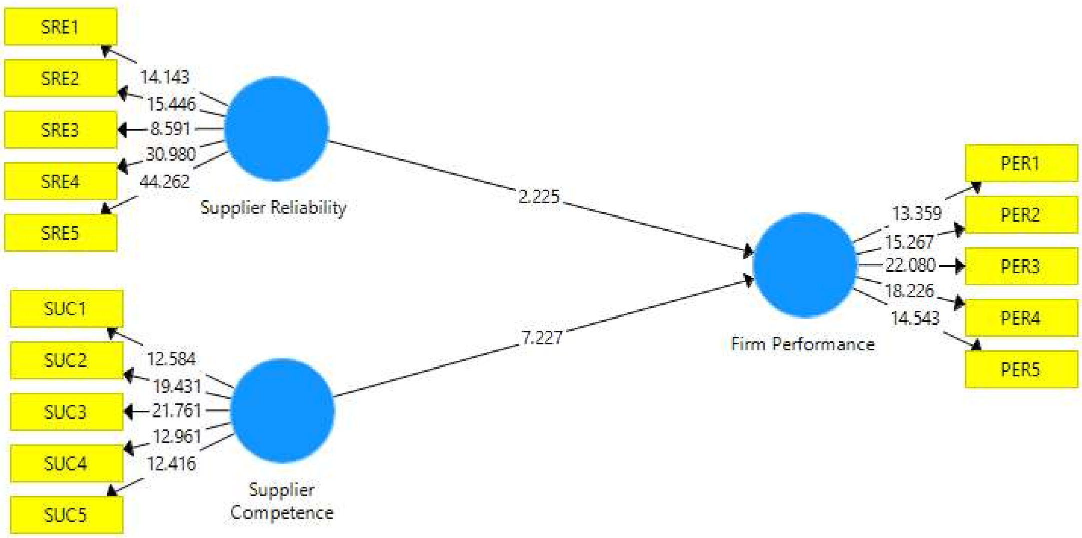
Construct	VIF
Supplier Reliability	1.187
Supplier Competence	1.187

Source: SmartPLS Output (2025).

Table 3 shows the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) results for the two main independent variables Supplier Reliability and Supplier Competence. The VIF values for both constructs are 1.187, which are well below the acceptable limit of 5, as recommended by Hair et al. (2022).

In simple language, this means there is no multicollinearity problem between supplier reliability and supplier competence. In other words, these two factors are not too closely related or measuring the same thing. Each of them brings its own unique contribution to firm performance.

Figure 2
Estimated Path Model of the Study



Source: Mined from Smart PLS Output, 2025

Table 4: Estimated Path Coefficients with p and t values

Path Relationship	Std. Dev.	t-Statistics	p-Values	Decision
Supplier Competence -> Firm Performance	0.055	7.227	0.000	Rejected
Supplier Reliability -> Firm Performance	0.054	2.225	0.027	Rejected

Source: SmartPLS Output (2025).

Table 4 shows the test results for the two relationships in the study how supplier competence and supplier reliability affect firm performance at Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State.

The results show that supplier competence has a positive and statistically significant effect on firm performance ($t = 7.227$, $p = 0.000$). This means that when suppliers are more skilled, knowledgeable, and able to meet company needs efficiently, the company's performance improves. In other words, competent suppliers help Nestlé work more smoothly, produce better-quality products, and meet customer demands faster.

Similarly, supplier reliability also has a positive and statistically significant effect on firm performance ($t = 2.225$, $p = 0.027$). This means that when suppliers are dependable delivering the right materials on time and maintaining consistent quality Nestlé's operations become more stable and productive.

Since both p-values are below 0.05, it shows that the results are statistically significant. Therefore, both null hypotheses (H_{01} and H_{02}) were rejected. This means that supplier competence and supplier reliability each have a meaningful and positive impact on the performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc.

Conclusion
The findings of this study showed that both supplier reliability and supplier competence positively and significantly affect performance of Nestlé Nigeria Plc, Ogun State. This means that the more reliable and competent the suppliers are, the better the company performs. In simple terms, when suppliers deliver quality materials on time and have the right skills to meet Nestlé's production needs, the company operates more smoothly, reduces delays, and achieves higher productivity and profitability.

Recommendations

Since the study found that supplier reliability has a strong positive effect on firm performance, it is recommended that Nestlé Nigeria Plc should maintain and strengthen relationships with suppliers who have proven to be dependable. The company should regularly assess supplier performance, focusing on delivery timelines, material quality, and consistency. Reliable suppliers should be rewarded with continued partnerships and priority contracts. Nestlé should also develop clear communication systems to ensure that suppliers are promptly informed about production needs and delivery schedules. This will help prevent stock shortages and production interruptions.

Furthermore, because supplier competence also showed a significant effect on performance, Nestlé should invest in programs that help suppliers build their technical skills and production capacity. This could include training, technology support, and knowledge sharing on quality control and innovation. By helping suppliers improve their competence, Nestlé can ensure a steady flow of high-quality inputs that support continuous improvement in production.

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