

Do relational norms matter in hotel outsourcing relationships? Lesson learned from hotel sectors

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Abstract

The study examines relational norms in outsourcing relationships. The study analyzes some factors that determine the use of relational norms, such as outsourcing benefits and the competitive strategy (cost leadership and differentiation). In addition, it analyzes the influence of the use of relational norms on the outsourcing success. Based on a sample of 127 outsourcing relationships in two tourist destinations, a PLS structural model was used to test the hypotheses. The findings show that the outsourcing benefits and competitive strategy determine the use of relational norms. They also show that there is a positive relationship between relational norms and outsourcing success. Some differences were found between the two destinations analyzed.

Key words: relational norms, outsourcing, competitive strategy, performance, hotels

1. Introduction

Increased competition and greater tourist demands have led an increasing number of hotels to outsource their activities to suppliers in order to improve performance, reduce costs, and concentrate on their core competences (Bolat and Yilmaz, 2009; Lamminmaki, 2011). Thus, relationships between hotels and suppliers have gained importance, particularly in terms of managing outsourcing relationships. The relationships between firms (buyers-suppliers) are becoming more strategic. Consequently, a cautious approach is necessary, and better management of the partnerships is crucial (Schoenherr, 2010). Outsourcing is defined as the act of obtaining semi-finished products or services from an outside company if these services were previously performed in-house (Dolgui and Proth, 2013). The outsourcing relationships must be managed by using mechanisms that make it possible to improve the outsourcing performance, as well as keeping the service standard as it were not supplied externally.

Researchers classify outsourcing relationships into transactional and relational exchange types (Ellram, 1990). Whereas transactional exchanges have a short-term cost reduction objective, analyzed through transaction cost economics (TCE), relational exchanges emphasize long-term collaboration for sustained performance improvement and based on

the relational exchange theory (Narasimhan *et al.*, 2008). The outsourcing relationship is viewed as a contractual relationship and, according to TCE, the outsourcing success is determined by transaction attributes (Wang, 2002). In addition, relational governance emerges from the shared values and processes established in the relationship (Vandaele *et al.*, 2007), and inter-firm activities can be managed using relational elements or norms (Weitz and Jap, 1995; Zhang *et al.*, 2003; Vandaele *et al.*, 2007). The importance of the relational exchange through relational norms has increased academically and professionally (Lai *et al.*, 2012; Yang *et al.*, 2016). In this study, relational governance is operationalized through the relational norms. It is widely recognized that relational mechanisms in interorganizational cooperation include relational norms (Heide and John, 1992; Griffith and Myers, 2005; Liu *et al.*, 2009). A basic characteristic of relational norms is their prescriptive behaviors by considering the relationship as a whole and limiting behaviors that favor the goals of the individual parties (Griffith and Myers, 2005). TCE is judged for its failure to consider relational norms (Zhang *et al.*, 2003). Relational norms fill gaps in explicit contractual and formal agreements (Lusch and Brown, 1996).

The two theories are complementary. Whereas the TCE, based mainly on efficiency, makes it possible to determine whether or not to outsource (Zhang *et al.*, 2018), relational exchange theory proposes mechanisms that allow the outsourcing relationships to be more efficient and higher quality, guided by relational norms that make it possible to improve outsourcing performance. Therefore, first the TCE acts, and after the hotel has decided to outsource, relational exchange theory intervenes, although the latter has been researched less in the area of outsourcing. Therefore, both theories are necessary to better understand the outsourcing strategy.

Given the importance of hotel outsourcing activities, it is necessary to investigate relationship management and find out what behavioral mechanisms influence successful outsourcing. In hotels, few studies have been carried out on transactional mechanisms from the perspective of TCE (De Vita and Tekaya, 2015) and even fewer on relational governance (Leeman and Reynolds, 2012). From this relational perspective, only the determinant factors of supplier retention have been analyzed in the hotel sector.

The relational exchange perspective considers that a dyadic relationship favors successful relationship management that involves establishing and maintaining a mutually profitable relationship with the supplier and getting the partner to demonstrate conforming,

supportive, constructive, cooperative and relational behavior (Sezen and Yilzmaç, 2007). Successful inter-organizational relational management in outsourcing can be a critical source of competitive advantage in hotels (Rodríguez-Díaz and Espino-Rodríguez, 2006). This paper focuses on relational governance strategies based on relational norms as behavioral elements of the relationship. Relational norms have been applied to inter-organizational relationships such as customer-company relationships (Paulin *et al.*, 1997; Paulssen *et al.*, 2016), export channels (Zhang *et al.*, 2003; Navarro-García *et al.*, 2016), and buyer-supplier relationships (Liu *et al.*, 2009). Recent studies have also analyzed outsourcing relationships based on relational norms applied to the logistics sector (Lai *et al.*, 2012; Yang *et al.*, 2016) and to information systems (Rai *et al.*, 2012; Cao *et al.*, 2013). No studies have been found that analyze relational norms in the relationships between suppliers of outsourced activities and the hotel sector, as inter-organizational relationships based on relational norms have been studied less in the services sector (Paulin *et al.*, 1997).

Understanding the factors that facilitate each form of relational behavior and their impact on outsourcing success continues to be an important topic in the hotel sector that has not been investigated. In another vein, researchers fail to recognize the importance of pre-implementation factors that can determine the use of relational norms. There have been studies on the antecedents of relational governance and their impact on performance (Poppo and Zenger, 2002; Styles and Ambler, 2003). However, among the antecedents, relational benefits and the competitive strategy have not been considered, and these factors can determine the use of relational norms. The perceived benefits of outsourcing can motivate the use of relational norms, and the competitive strategy (cost leadership and differentiation strategy) can determine a more relational than transactional type of exchange through the use of relational norms. Thus, the study examines whether the consideration of the benefits of outsourcing determines a high degree of relational norms. This information will make it possible to determine whether managers' knowledge about the benefits of the outsourcing strategy results in a relational exchange that favors success.

The firm's strategy represents a consistent series of activities designed to create a specific form of competitive advantage (Santos-Vijande *et al.*, 2012). The competitive strategy perspective recognizes the importance of an attractive strategic position derived from the firm's strategic activities (Ruiz-Ortega, 2010). These aspects make it interesting to study the competitive strategy as a determinant factor in the relational norms.

These relationships have not been analyzed at an empirical level. There are no studies on hotel services outsourcing that analyze these questions, in spite of the increase in the use of outsourcing by hotels. Therefore, this study analyzes the relational perspective, considering the pre-implementation and post-implementation stages. With regard to the post-implementation stage, the aim is to study the relational norms that influence outsourcing success.

2. Relational exchange theory

The TCE approach by Williamson (1985) is one of the most popular paradigms for investigating hotel outsourcing (Lamminmaki, 2007). Whereas TCE explains governance through the properties of transactions, the relational exchange perspective focuses on the properties of relationships. In general, two types of governance are considered: economic governance strategies such as contracts and relational governance strategies such as relational norms (Haugland and Reve, 1993; Heide and John, 1992). Contractual governance refers to explicit, formal, and usually written contracts (Vandaele *et al.*, 2007). Relational governance or the relational mechanism refers to the degree to which an inter-organizational relationship is governed by social relations and shared norms (Poppo *et al.*, 2008; Zhou and Xu, 2012). Although both types of governance are based on norms that represent behavioral expectations, the assumptions of each type (contractual and relational) are different. Relational governance is defined as the strength of the social norms present in the exchange, known as relationalism, where the emphasis is placed not only on the relationship orientation of the exchange partners, but also on the norms or exchange behaviors (Ferguson *et al.*, 2005; Vandaele *et al.*, 2007). This paper focuses on relational governance strategies based on relational norms. In addition to contracts, managers should give importance to relational norms in order to improve performance and reduce opportunism (Cao and Lumineau, 2015). According to Macneil (1980), explicit written contracts do not include all the content of the exchange because soft governance mechanisms in the form of implicit agreements or relational norms guide exchange relationships.

Relational norms limit the partners' opportunism through shared norms and values (Brown *et al.*, 2000), and they guide reciprocal exchanges and the individual conduct of each party (Liu *et al.*, 2009). Through the development of relational norms, the weakness

of contracts is avoided (Luo, 2007). The transactions between the partners are more effective when the relational mechanisms play an important role (Liu *et al.*, 2009).

Relational norms involve different dimensions, such as flexibility, solidarity, and information exchange (Heide and John, 1992; Lusch and Brown, 1996; Zhang *et al.*, 2003). Flexibility is conceptualized as the bilateral expectation of the willingness to make changes and adjustments within the context of the exchange relationship. Information exchange is defined as a bilateral expectation that each party (hotel and supplier) will proactively provide useful information to the other party (Heide and John, 1992; Aulakh *et al.*, 1996). Sharing information means that the transactions have better coverage and are less vulnerable to environmental uncertainty and transferred control (Zhang *et al.*, 2003). Solidarity refers to the parties' bilateral expectation that a high value will be placed on the relationship between them (Heide and John, 2002), and it provides behavior directed toward relationship maintenance and better transaction efficiency (Zhang *et al.*, 2003). These three dimensions of relational norms are discrete, although empirical studies define them as higher-order dimensions (Paulssen *et al.*, 2016). Relational norms have to support each other, and they make up a set of related elements (Noordewier *et al.*, 1990). This research considers relational norms as a higher-order concept composed of the three dimensions described above.

3. Conceptual model and hypotheses

The model shown in Figure 1 analyzes the degree of the relationships between the outsourced supplier and the hotel from the perspective of relational governance. This model consists of four hypotheses and involves analyzing the impact of outsourcing management through relational governance on the outsourcing success in the hotel sector, as well as the antecedents that determine the use of relational governance based on relational norms. For this purpose, the model uses the TCE and the competitive strategy perspective to explain the hypotheses that relate the differentiation strategy and the cost leadership strategy to the relational norms. The model also analyzes outsourcing benefits as an antecedent of the use of relational norms. Moreover, the model determines the conditions where the use of the relational exchange mechanism leads to better performance of the outsourced service.

Introduce about here Figure 1.

3.1. Outsourcing benefits and relational norms

Outsourcing in the hotel sector allows hotels to focus on: core activities, flexibility, specialization, promoting rapid expansion, and avoiding capital outlay (Lamminmaki, 2011; Sharma *et al.*, 2015). Outsourcing makes it possible for hotels to access cheaper services and more qualified and experienced personnel (Wan and Su, 2010), and it involves benefits such as cost reduction, flexibility, focusing on core competences, improving service quality, and organizational performance (McIvor, 2005; Bolat and Yilmaz, 2009). The use of outsourcing can also help to reduce costs and improve the hotel's finances (Lam and Ham, 2005). In a dynamic environment, outsourcing allows rapid adaptation if the hotel uses new technologies, service improvements, or innovations (Altin *et al.*, 2018). In order for the outsourcing to be successful, relationships with suppliers must be closer, closed, and deeper, and carried out through strategic alliances (Holcomb and Hitt, 2007). Hotel managers who believe that outsourcing can bring benefits to their hotel will be more willing to develop a relational mechanism based on relational norms that foster the relationship's long-term continuity. Consequently, their relationships will have to be governed by relational mechanisms that foment the value of the relationship, based on an integration approach (Saorín-Iborra *et al.*, 2015). The hotel will make a greater effort to maintain a relationship that strengthens the benefits of the outsourcing, and it will require greater involvement of suppliers in the relationships. This suggests the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1

The perceived benefits of outsourcing are positively related to the use of relational norms in the outsourced service

3.2. Competitive strategy and relational norms

In this study, Porter's (1980, 1985) framework of generic competitive strategies was adopted, with special reference to cost leadership and differentiation strategy. Porter (1985) identifies another "focused" type of strategy, based on the combination of the two. In our study, each hotel may emphasize a certain degree of each of the two strategies.

Both strategies make it possible to acquire a competitive advantage (Spanos et al., 2004, Srivannaboon and Milosevic, 2006; Claver-Cortes et al., 2012), and the external resources can be influenced by the competitive strategy chosen (Laosirihongthong et al., 2014). Thus, a competitive strategy of cost leadership or differentiation can influence the way the outsourcing relationships are governed. Hotels should take their external environment into account when proposing their strategies (Tavitiyaman et al., 2018).

A differentiation strategy allows firms to achieve a competitive advantage by creating a service perceived by clients as unique in ways that are important to them (Acquaah and Yasi-Ardekani, 2008), including new service characteristics, customer service, reliability, and competitive capabilities (Thompson *et al.*, 2005). According to Tavitiyaman et al. (2018), hotels that follow this strategy select different resources that their clients perceive as unique, which means that the hotel can charge higher prices due to the cost involved in offering unique services. For this to occur, it is necessary to have a governing relational framework that allows the hotel to take advantage of the supplier's capabilities. A differentiation strategy involves services that are unique and adapted to the clients, which requires flexibility, information exchange, and support between the client and the hotel to adapt to changes. Dyer and Singh (1998) point out that unique relationships with suppliers are achieved through information exchange and knowledge exchange, which can result in the joint creation of unique services that allow them to compete on the market. In addition, Yeh (2016), analyzing the relationships between manufacturers and their strategic suppliers, show that the buyer firm's orientation toward the client positively influences the relational governance. This differentiation strategy requires higher quality service. Thus, outsourcing relationships that are more flexible, show more solidarity, and share more information will improve the outsourced service in order to better meet the clients' demands (*i.e.*, hotel). Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2

A differentiation strategy is positively related to the development of relational norms.

A cost leadership strategy involves performing a set of actions designed to produce products or provide services at a low cost through standardization and an exhaustive cost analysis of all the processes involved (Spanos *et al.*, 2004). Outsourcing a service may

lead to the appearance of opportunistic behaviors in the relationship that can increase transaction costs. Transaction costs include negotiation, contracting, monitoring, enforcement costs, and the cost of entering into disputes (Holcomb and Hitt, 2007). By reducing uncertainty, the hotel is able to outsource the service with confidence (Lamminmaki, 2007). Transaction costs can decline due to buyers' reduced inclination toward opportunism when relational norms are used. Flexibility, adapting to the environment and changes, and greater solidarity in avoiding price increases will make it possible to reduce the costs of providing the service to the buyer-firm. In addition, these norms allow greater security, and the transaction costs will be lower because there will be less need for monitoring and fewer disputes about contracts. A cost leadership strategy requires solidary suppliers (Wagner, 2006).

The relational profits that arise from effective governance (Dyer and Singh, 1998) contribute an extra benefit to the relationship, which can help the buyer firm to reduce costs and follow a cost leadership strategy. Good information sharing can help to reduce uncertainty and improve cost reduction capabilities (Liker and Choi, 2004). In this regard, Huo *et al.* (2014) point out that process integration, for example, through relational norms, is more effective in firms with a cost leadership strategy. One form of integration involves managing the relationships with relational mechanisms through relational norms, where trust and commitment by top management are necessary to strengthen relationships with suppliers. A cost leadership strategy requires low costs, and so it is more likely that hotels' outsourcing relationships will share more information, show more solidarity, and be more flexible, allowing them to reduce their transaction costs and, therefore, be more efficient. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3

A cost leadership strategy is positively related to the development of relational norms.

3.3. Relational norms and outsourcing success

As mentioned above, contractual mechanisms can be incomplete in managing outsourcing relationships, resulting in the appearance of opportunism, especially when a hotel leaves an activity in the hands of an external supplier. The use of relational norms can improve the relationship's performance because it mitigates the threat of opportunistic behavior in exchange relationships (Yang *et al.*, 2016). Relational norms

favor the conformity and commitment of the supplier, and they dissuade the hotel from looking for new suppliers (Donada & Nogatchewsky, 2009). Given that there are many outsourcing objectives, the performance of an outsourced activity must be analyzed from multiple dimensions, such as financial and strategic outcomes and overall satisfaction with the supplier (Saunders *et al.*, 1997; Ren *et al.*, 2010).

Relational norms allow client firms to achieve higher operational efficiency with symmetrical information and a reciprocal and flexible relationship (Yang *et al.*, 2016). The greater the ability to meet each other's needs, the higher the level of performance of the outsourced service activity. A sense of solidarity makes it possible for the supplier and the client to jointly solve both individual and common problems and consider the relationship as a whole (Lusch and Brown, 1996). By working together on the relationship, it is possible to achieve high levels of outsourcing performance. Flexibility means that the parties modify their operations and adapt more rapidly to environmental changes. The faster they can respond to these changes when unforeseeable contingencies emerge, the better the relationship's performance will be (Gençtürk and Aulakh, 2007).

Through the free exchange of information, flexibility is maintained, and by acting with solidarity, supplier and hotel can achieve higher levels of performance in their relationship. All of this reduces uncertainty and strengthens the necessary cooperation to achieve shared goals, making it possible to improve the performance of the outsourced service. Muller and Martinsuo (2015) show that high levels of relational norms are related to project success in IT projects. Liu *et al.* (2009) confirm that relational norms improve relationship performance in buyer-supplier dyads. Moreover, Yang *et al.* (2016) show that relational norms positively influence operational performance and satisfaction in the area of logistics outsourcing services. If the outsourcing relationships are carried out under the protection of relational norms, that is, with a high level of solidarity, flexibility, and shared information, opportunistic behavior is reduced. This favors the cost saving that occurs through outsourcing, achieving better prices for the hotel due to economies of scale (Lamminmaki, 2011; Promsivapallop *et al.*, 2015), which makes the outsourcing more effective and leads to better financial performance. These associations based on relational norms make it possible to better access resources and capabilities and achieve better quality, flexibility, and access to basic competencies. In other words, better outsourcing strategic performance can be obtained. From this perspective, hotels will feel that suppliers make an effort to improve the expectations, and the relationships will be more

gratifying, with greater overall satisfaction (Lai *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, the relational norms will allow the relationships to be more successful from the perspective of financial performance, strategic performance, and overall satisfaction. The relational norms create more confidence between the hotel and the suppliers, which makes it possible to promote success and manage failures (Leeman and Reynolds, 2012). According to Donada and Nogatchewsky (2009), the existence of relational norms in outsourcing relationships is an indicator of harmony between the interested parties, so that reducing the risk of opportunistic behaviors leads to more satisfactory relationships. Based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4

Relational norms are positively associated with outsourcing success

Given the analysis of three dimensions of performance or outsourcing success, this hypothesis is divided into three sub-hypotheses.

Hypothesis 4a

Relational norms are positively associated with the financial performance of the outsourced service

Hypothesis 4b

Relational norms are positively associated with the strategic performance of the outsourced service

Hypothesis 4c

Relational norms are positively associated with the overall satisfaction of the outsourced service

4. Methodology

4.1. Data collection

The empirical data were gathered from both Scotland and Taiwan. The yearly average occupancy rate in the Scottish Hotel sector is 70%, with an average room rate of USD 126 per room per night. The yearly average occupancy rate in the International Tourist Hotel sector in Taiwan is 73.7%, with an average room rate of USD 120 per room per

night. The Taiwan and Scotland hotel industries share similar occupancy levels and average room rates in the official tourism bureau statistical report, which provides a good foundation for comparing outsourcing activities and related issues in the two jurisdictions. The choice of those two regions is justified by the need to compare two regions in order to obtain greater validity of the results presented. To do so, the two regions selected should be different from cultural, economic, and social points of view. The two regions are distinct and have different religions and philosophies. Whereas Eastern culture is more collectivist and oriented toward group goals or group norms, Western culture is more individualist and focused on personal success. (Abe *et al.*, 1996; Wong and Ahuvia, 1998). In addition, Eastern regions accept a hierarchy of authority more easily than Western economies (Buttey and Wong, 1999). Moreover, the relationships in Eastern economies are more long-term than in Western economies (Hostefe, 1991). Both areas rely on the export-oriented economy, with different strengths in various industries. Scotland has more natural resources and exports more agricultural products, and Taiwan has a strong share in semi-conductor and relevant high-tech industries. Thus, covering the Asian and European contexts, i.e. Western and Eastern worlds, gives this research greater substance in exploring outsourcing practices in hospitality (Fuller, 2005; Mackie, 2016; Lee, 2017).

A list of 3- to 5-star hotels in both regions was identified. To obtain a high level of representativity, the questionnaire was mailed to the entire population with the purpose of achieving a high response rate. In Scotland, the questionnaires were sent to the hotels' general managers in 2 mailings, and 82 responses were received. For the hotels in Taiwan, the original questionnaire was translated into the local language (Mandarin) and mailed to the general managers (GM) of all the targeted hotels in Taiwan. The questionnaires were also sent out in 2 mailings, and 45 responses were received. In both destinations, we included the whole population in order to obtain the greatest number of surveys possible, and so our study does not have a probabilistic design. Thus, a database of a total of 127 responses was elaborated. The 127 valid questionnaires constituted a response rate of 25.62% for Scotland and 64.29% for Taiwan. This indicates an overall rate response of 32.55%.

4.2. Measurement of variables

In the research model, all the variables were measured as first-order factors with reflective indicators, except relational norms, which were measured as second-order factors. This approach involves choosing between molar and molecular factors. If a change in one of the dimensions does not necessarily result in analogous changes in other dimensions, then a molar model is more suitable (Chin and Gopal, 1995). Otherwise, a molecular model is more appropriate. For example, increasing the information sharing in an outsourcing relationship does not imply a similar change in solidarity or flexibility, and therefore a molar model is recommended. In line with other studies, relational norms were defined as a higher-order construct (Heide and John, 1992). Moreover, the items in each dimension were optimally weighted and combined using the PLS algorithm to create a latent variable score. All the variables were measured with multi-item scales of managerial perceptions related to the use of relational norms, competitive strategy (cost leadership and differentiation strategy), perceived benefits of outsourcing, and outsourcing success (see Appendix). Before respondents answered questions about the constructs of relational norms and the successful performance of the service outsourcing, we asked the respondents with outsourced activities to choose which activity has the highest level of outsourcing and answer the questions with that activity in mind.

Perceived outsourcing benefits

Perceived outsourcing benefits are related to improved access to services that are more highly qualified, with more experience and lower costs than if they were performed internally. After a review of the main studies that analyze strategic and tactical benefits of outsourcing, a scale was developed (Ford and Farmer, 1986; Saunders *et al.*, 1997; Bustinza *et al.*, 2010). The respondents were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of 10 statements on a 7-point Likert type scale, where 1 represented strong disagreement and 7 expressed strong agreement with the statements (See Appendix).

Competitive strategy

Competitive strategy was operationalized as a scale based on previous studies (Gilley and Rasheed, 2000). Cost leadership and differentiation strategies were measured by 3 and 5 items, respectively. The items referring to cost leadership indicate the hotel's orientation toward cost leadership through a cost-reduction approach, whereas the items that measure

the differentiation strategy indicate the hotel's focus on quality, innovation, and customer satisfaction (See Appendix).

Relational norms

The relational norms were measured as a second-order factor consisting of the dimensions of information exchange, flexibility, and solidarity (Heide and John, 1992; Lusch and Brown, 1996).

Information exchange. Information exchange was measured using three items (See Appendix). These items assess how much the parties (hotel and supplier) help each other by providing information, exchanging formal and informal information on a frequent basis, and keeping each other informed

Flexibility. Flexibility was measured using four items that reflect how flexible the supplier is in response to changes requested by the hotel, different circumstances, suggestions about performing the activity, and changes caused by any unexpected problems (See Appendix).

Solidarity. Solidarity was measured using three items (See Appendix). These items reflect how problems are dealt with, the parties' commitment to improvement, and the extent to which the supplier tries to help when a problem arises.

Outsourcing success

Three measures in three different dimensions were used to measure outsourcing success (strategic performance, financial performance, and overall satisfaction) (Saunders *et al.*, 1997). An 11-item scale, based on the studies by Saunders *et al.* (1997), Grover *et al.* (1996), Lee (2001) and Ee *et al.* (2013), was created to measure the outsourcing success (See appendix).

Strategic performance. Strategic performance was measured using three items. These items reflect the degree to which the hotel can access new skills and capabilities, improve flexibility, and focus on core competencies through activity outsourcing.

Financial performance. Financial performance was measured with three questions that reflect to what extent the outsourcing of the service has helped to reduce costs and investments, improve financial results, and increase the hotel's performance.

Overall satisfaction. Overall satisfaction is used individually and as one of the measures of relationship success between the seller (supplier) and buyer (hotel) (Smith and Barclay, 1997), and it was measured using five items. Respondents assessed issues such as whether the service providers are a good company to do business with, whether they would recommend that other hotels do business with their current suppliers, whether the suppliers provide adequate service, and whether the hotel is generally satisfied with the outsourcing results.

5. Analysis and results

This study uses partial least squares (PLS) analysis, a variance-based technique (Roldan & Sánchez-Franco, 2012). Compared to covariance-based structured modelling approaches, the PLS approach imposes minimal sample size restrictions and does not require the underlying data to be multivariate normal (Chin *et al.*, 2003). One of the main advantages of PLS is that it uses a least squares estimation procedure, which provides the ability to represent both formative and reflective latent constructs (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2006). Formative indicators are appropriate when the indicators help to create the construct directly, whereas reflective indicators are determined by the construct, and there is a high correlation among them. PLS also shows the representation of second-order factors. These factors can be molar second-order factors when their constructs are formed from formative first-order factors, and molecular second-order factors are constructs derived from reflective first-order factors (Chin and Gopal, 2005). The choice depends on whether first-order factors are viewed as causes or effects, namely, formative or reflective latent constructs. The research model in this study uses first-order factors with reflective indicators and a molar second-order factor made up of three formative dimensions to operationalize relational norms. Researchers adopt the two-stage approach when analyzing a PLS model. The first stage consists of the assessment of the measurement model, and the second stage involves the assessment of the structural model and the analysis of the relationship between the constructs as specified by the research model. PLS is also more appropriate for the development of theory and for research topics where

few studies exist (Barclay *et al.*, 1995), as in our case, especially in the relationships between the competitive strategy and relational norms. Tourism researchers have recognized that it is useful in constructing theory and in exploratory studies (Campo-Cerro *et al.*, 2017; Ali *et al.*, 2018). In addition, our model is not complex and uses scales with few items, so that the PLS can ensure the robustness of the results (Qureshi and Compeau, 2009). Likewise, the PLS allows the use of reflective and formative constructs (Becker *et al.*, 2012).

5.1 Measurement model

The measurement model in PLS is assessed in terms of individual item reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. For the formative constructs -molar second-order factors- we assessed content, indicator, and construct validity, as well as the multicollinearity of the indicators (Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2008). Individual reliability was evaluated by examining the factor loading. Carmines and Zeller (1979) recommend factor loadings of all the constructs equal to or above 0.707. Table 1 shows that the individual item loadings of all the constructs are about 0.7, except for some items. However, some researchers (Chin, 1998b) consider that this rule should be less strict because the inclusion of indicators with lower loadings allows useful information to be extracted. In these cases, items with factor loadings of 0.5 or 0.6 may be added. Moreover, the factor loadings of these items do not affect the compound reliability or the variance extracted or the discriminant validity, as we explain below. The construct reliability measures represent measures of internal consistency for reflective indicators. In our case, this is applicable to all the variables, except relational norms. The compound reliability measure evaluates construct reliability. They are all above the 0.7 cut-off (See Table 1).

Introduce Table 1 about here

The evaluation of convergent validity requires the analysis of the average variance extracted (AVE), which provides the value of variance that a construct obtains from its

indicators in relation to the amount of variance due to measurement error. The AVE should exceed 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results support convergent validity because they are actually very close to 0.5 (the lowest is 0.48). Other studies also use values below 0.5 (Zott and Amit, 2008; Claver-Cortes *et al.*, 2012). The study then evaluated the discriminant validity of the constructs. Following Fornell and Lacker (1981) and Roldan and Sanchez-Franco (2012), the square roots of the AVE values were consistently greater than all the correlations (See Table 2). Accordingly, within the study, all the constructs support the adequate discriminant validity of the scales.

Introduce Table 2 about here

In the case of constructs measured by molar second-order factors -relational norms-, the interpretation of reliability should be based on weights (Chin, 1998a). The weights are used to evaluate how each indicator contributes to its respective dimension. The three dimensions of relational norms have positive weights (0.33 information, 0.30 solidarity, and 0.45 flexibility), shown in Figure 2. Potential multicollinearity between formative measures is a concern (Mathieson *et al.*, 2001). This study carried out a collinearity test using SPSS 23.0 for Windows. To examine the effect of multicollinearity, VIFs (variance inflation factors) were used in this study. VIFs (values) associated with each construct ranged from 2.87 to 4.19, as shown in Table 1, all substantially below the common cut-off point of 5 to 10 (Hair *et al.*, 2010), showing that multicollinearity was not a problem in this second-factor molar.

Introduce Figure 2 about here

5.2 Structural model

No proper overall goodness-of-fit measure exists for models assessed using PLS (Hulland, 1999). The measurement of the structural model entails examining the variance explained (R^2) in the dependent variables and the Q^2 (redundancy) test for predictive relevance (Roldan and Sanchez-Franco, 2012). Consistent with Chin (1998a), bootstrapping (5000 samples) was used to generate standard errors and t-statistics. The path coefficients (β) for the research model indicate the relative strength of the relationships between the constructs.

Figure 3 and Table 3 show that the R^2 values of the model's endogenous variables exceed the recommend minimum value. Falk and Miller (1992) recommend a minimum value of 0.1. The study shows the predictive relevance of the model, following the Stone-Geisser Q^2 . A Q^2 greater than 0 implies that the model has predictive relevance. According to the results in table 3 and Figure 3, the Q^2 is above the value of 0, supporting the model's predictive relevance.

Introduce Table 3 about here

Hypothesis 1, which predicted a positive relationship between perceived outsourcing benefits and relational norms, was supported ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$). The analysis also confirms Hypotheses 2 and 3, which predicted a positive relationship between the competitive strategy (differentiation strategy and cost leadership) and relational norms, were supported ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$ and $\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$). Results also showed the importance of relational norms in outsourcing success. The findings support a positive relationship between relational norms and the various performance measures that contribute to outsourcing success. Specifically, relational norms have a positive influence on financial performance ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$), strategic performance ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$), and overall satisfaction ($\beta = 0.66$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, hypotheses 4a, 4b and 4c are validated.

Introduce Figure 3 about here

Finally, the differences between the samples of the two regions were examined using a parametric analysis through a test with $m+n+2$ degrees of freedom (m = Taiwan sample size and n =Scotland sample size). This test uses the path coefficients (B) and the standard error (SE) of the 6 structural paths calculated by PLS for both regions. The following expression was used (Chin, 2004; Loureiro and González, 2008):

$$t = \frac{\beta_{Taiwan} - \beta_{Scotland}}{Sp \times \sqrt{\left(\frac{1}{m} + \frac{1}{n}\right)}}$$

$$Sp = \sqrt{\frac{(m-1)^2}{(m+n-2)} \times SE_{Taiwan}^2 + \frac{(n-1)^2}{(m+n-2)} \times SE_{Scotland}^2}$$

Table 4 shows the R² for each of the dependent variables for the two countries. It can be observed that the R² are greater for Taiwan than for Scotland, so that the Taiwan model has greater predictive capacity. However, as we will see below, some relationships do not have the expected direction in the case of Taiwan. In the region of Taiwan, the relational norms have a greater impact on outsourcing performance than they do in Scotland. However, in Taiwan, there is a negative relationship, contrary to what was predicted.

Introduce Table 4 about here

As Table 5 shows, most of the hypotheses were supported for both regions. However, the t-test results show a significant difference between the two regions in the relationship between relational norms and financial performance (t=-4.50). Results showed a significant positive relationship between relational norms and financial performance in Scotland (β=0.30, p<0.001), whereas in Taiwan this relationship is significant and negative (B=-0.44, p<0.001). This difference between the β is significant at a significance level of p<0.001. Furthermore, the relationship between the cost leadership strategy and relational norms was not statistically significant in Taiwan (β=-0.007, p<0.001), but it was in Scotland (β=0.20, p<0.001). Moreover, there is a significant difference between the two β at a level of p<0.05 (See Table 4).

Introduce Table 5 about here

6. Discussion

The goals of this study were to examine the factors that influenced the development of relational norms in outsourced hotel services, and the effect the relational norms had on hotels' outsourcing success. The factors analyzed were the outsourcing benefits and the competitive strategy. With regard to the antecedents of the use of the relational mechanism, the results show that there is a positive relationship between the perceived benefits of outsourcing and the use of relational norms. The perceived benefit is one of

the main factors motivating the use of relational norms. The development of relational norms is determined by greater knowledge about and acceptance of outsourcing benefits. These findings are comparable to those found by Ren *et al.* (2010), who do not use relational norms, but they do show the existence of a positive relationship between the perceived benefits of outsourcing and the formation of partnership quality. The results show that a higher perception of the benefits of outsourcing means that the outsourcing strategy is more important to the hotel, and so it develops relational norms. This result indicates that managers will try to select suppliers that allow them to develop a closer relationship based on flexibility, solidarity, and the exchange of information, in order to take advantage of all the outsourcing benefits. The findings indicate that there are no differences in the two regions analyzed in terms of the results of Hypothesis 1, which gives this hypothesis greater validity.

The results of the study also show that the competitive strategy is another antecedent of the use of relational norms. The findings reveal that there is a positive relationship between a differentiation strategy and the relational norms. A differentiation strategy is compatible with relational norms because they can both strengthen the competitive advantage. The results are consistent and comparable with those obtained in the study by Yeh (2016), which demonstrates a positive relationship between the customer orientation of the buyer firm and the more strategic supplier.

The overall findings suggest a positive relationship between the cost leadership strategy and the use of relational norms. This result indicates that the hotels' need to offer quality service at a low cost means that relationships with suppliers must be flexible, for example, in adjusting the prices of the outsourced service. The development of relational norms in the relationships between the hotel and the suppliers also favors a reduction in transaction costs that allows the hotel to reduce its costs. Thus, an increase in the information exchange reduces uncertainty and improves cost reduction (Holcomb and Hitt, 2007).

In addition, the forms of competition can require a combination of strategies to achieve a sustained competitive advantage (Spanos *et al.*, 2004; Li and Li, 2008; Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2016). Thus, relational norms in outsourcing relationships allow hotels to offer higher quality and lower prices, consistent with the hybrid of the two strategies. Both competitive strategies predict the same thing, but based on different assumptions. A cost leadership

strategy can support a differentiation strategy, so that the relationships with suppliers allow the hotel to reduce costs while offering greater added value to its end clients.

However, if the results are analyzed separately by region, they are not homogeneous. In Scotland, as in the analysis of the whole sample together, a positive relationship is found between the cost leadership strategy and relational norms. However, this relationship is not significant if we only consider Taiwan. Although both strategies can be used by hotels, forming a hybrid, it is possible that one strategy would be fostered more than the other by the hotels analyzed. In Taiwan, the cost leadership strategy does not predict the use of relational norms, which could indicate that the Taiwanese hotels foment a certain strategy more, rather than a combination of them. Thus, Lassar and Kerr (1996) point out that companies that follow a cost leadership strategy need fewer behavior controls and have fewer stipulated restrictions with their distributors, which could be applicable to the hotel's relationship with the supplier of the outsourced service. Moreover, a cost leadership strategy does not determine the level of outsourcing of an activity, which could mean that the type of relationship does not allow the development of a relationship governed by a relational mechanism.

Regarding the consequences of the use of a relational mechanism, the results indicate that there is a positive relationship between the use of relational norms and outsourcing success. The results are consistent with those found in most of the literature analyzing relational norms and performance. Liu *et al.* (2009) show that the use of relational norms improves the relationship performance in buyer- supplier dyads. The results show a stronger relationship with overall satisfaction than with financial and strategic performance, which suggests that the degree of satisfaction is quite high when there is a framework of relational norms. Thus, Yang *et al.* (2016) show that the use of relational norms increases satisfaction with the supplier, corroborating that if the relations between the parties are more intimate and there is a strong commitment, the outsourcing success will be greater (Ee *et al.*, 2013).

The fulfillment of this relationship in the framework analyzed indicates that hotels and their suppliers can develop unique competences by integrating the outsourced activity with the in-house development of other activities where the hotel can develop core competences. As Jap (2001) points out, these competences may involve different levels

of efficiency derived from access to external resources that can create higher market value. This outsourcing success manifested through the three types of performance analyzed can generate higher returns due to the use of relational norms.

The study shows that better relationships with suppliers or buyers can generate better outsourcing performance, creating a stable environment that allows the hotel to deal with hotel competitiveness. Thus, the relational norms are shown to be a key governance mechanism that allows the outsourcing strategies to be more successful. As Poppo and Zenger (2002) indicate, relational governance foments the continuity of the exchange, and both parties trust that they will have more than acceptable results. In this regard, hotels that have less union with their suppliers in aspects of solidarity, flexibility, and shared information will have relationships that are more likely to fail. Outsourcing success was measured in three dimensions, financial performance, strategic performance, and overall satisfaction.

Therefore, the results indicate that a greater use of relational governance through relational norms leads to cost reductions and increases in hotel performance, as well as fewer investments. Likewise, greater intensity in the use of relational norms will allow better strategic performance related to accessing new skills and capabilities, greater flexibility, and improvements in core competencies. Thus, through the use of relational norms, hotel owners are more satisfied with suppliers, which will give greater stability to the relationship, making it possible to take advantage of the improvements and investments made by the supplier over time.

Comparing the relationship between relational norms and outsourcing success in both regions (Scotland and Taiwan), there are some differences that warrant explanation. Thus, for example, in Taiwan the relationship between relational norms and financial performance is negative, which explains the fact that the outsourcing is not producing economic benefits in the relationship. This suggests that in Taiwan the reason for outsourcing will not be cost reduction; instead, it responds more to strategic motives. Thus, the objectives established in the outsourcing relationship are more related to improving the quality of the outsourced activity by acquiring skills and capabilities, achieving flexibility, and focusing on core services, and less related to cost reduction. As McIvor (2005) points out, buyers and suppliers will set objectives that they want to

achieve by outsourcing an activity. In addition, the effort made in the relationship leads to a greater reduction in the financial result when relational norms are used, probably also due to the type of competitive strategy followed. By contrast, the results for the other two dimensions are similar when compared to Scotland. The results can also be different depending on the type of activity selected by the managers in the study.

6.1. Theoretical and managerial implications

Although researchers show interest in hotel outsourcing, prior contributions do not examine the way the relationships have to be managed to contribute to its success. Thus, because there are no studies that analyze factors that determine the relational norms, such as the outsourcing benefits or the competitive strategy, our approach advances relationalism in outsourcing research by determining its antecedents and by operationalizing relational norms as a higher-order construct. The main findings of this study support relational governance and confirm the relevance of this perspective in outsourcing relationships. The results confirm the importance of two factors not previously analyzed in the literature, the benefits perceived by managers and the competitive strategy. These are key factors in establishing a relational mechanism like relational norms. The study determines that the relational norms have an impact on the outsourcing success, considered from financial, strategic, and overall satisfaction perspectives.

From a practical point of view, this study helps managers to determine the way outsourcing relationships should be managed to obtain success, promoting lasting relationships with an appropriate distribution of risks and rewards. The research findings show that it is important to recognize the outsourcing benefits and the value of developing relational norms. It is important for Taiwanese and Scottish hotel managers to know and understand the issues of outsourcing, as well as the ability to coordinate and manage the outsourcing relationship.

Hotels should invest in developing relationships with suppliers that contribute to the outsourcing success, where there is solidarity, flexibility, and information exchange. Cooperative and adaptive behaviors in the outsourcing relationship create value for hotels

by strengthening their competitive strategy. Managers seeking to implement a competitive strategy should carefully select appropriate suppliers with whom they can collaborate and work, with the aim of achieving a more flexible and solidary relationship with a high level of information exchange. Thus, managers must evaluate whether they have suitable capabilities to develop relational norms with suppliers. In this way, the development of relational norms in outsourcing relationships contributes to the outsourcing performance. This can help to develop relational capabilities leading to better organizational performance that fosters the competitive advantage. The partners strengthen the competitive advantage. If they are involved in high quality, committed relationships, it is likely that they will contribute to increasing sales of final products and services. Therefore, managers must be aware of the importance of developing relational norms with suppliers that can contribute to the outsourcing success.

Furthermore, highly successful outsourcing through the use of relational norms will favor the hotel's intention to acquire external service continually and propose the outsourcing of other activities due to the positive experience. In this way, the hotel could focus on its core competences and improve the services it develops in-house.

6.2. Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations that need to be investigated in future studies. One limitation is that it does not consider transactional mechanisms, which are more informal mechanisms that arise when preparing contracts and that can affect the development of relational norms. Thus, asset specificity and the investment in specific assets by suppliers to develop the activity could moderate or mediate in the relationship between relational norms and outsourcing success. Future research must consider these questions about how these additional mechanisms function, whether individually or jointly, in the outsourcing success. Although this study analyzes some antecedents of relational norms, future studies should consider other variables that determine the use of relational norms. Antecedents such as culture, organizational commitment, leadership, or the firm's resources and capabilities could also influence the development of a more relational framework in the outsourcing relationships. Moreover, the study was carried out from the perspective of the buyer (hotel). A dyadic analysis would increase the validity of the conclusions drawn in this study. In this regard, it would be interesting to see how suppliers

perceive the outsourcing relationship in the development of relational norms. Furthermore, this study is cross-sectional, and a longitudinal study would make it possible to see at what point in time relational norms are developed, for example, to find out whether a certain relationship length is necessary in order to see performance improvements, as well as their evolution. Finally, it is necessary to highlight that the study was analyzed only in the hotel's most outsourced service, whereas a more global analysis of hotel outsourcing would allow researchers to differentiate the type of governance necessary to carry out the outsourcing relationship and its impact on organizational performance.

Appendix

Perceived outsourcing benefits

- B1. Outsourcing allows the hotel to concentrate on its core activities
- B2. Outsourcing enables hotel costs to be reduced
- B3. Outsourcing permits access to more qualified and experienced personnel
- B4. Outsourcing enables resources to be released for other purposes
- B5. Outsourcing means that a cheaper service can be obtained than if it is performed in-house
- B6. Outsourcing means that a higher quality service can be obtained than if it is performed in-house
- B7. Outsourcing facilitates the performance of the hotel's in-house activities
- B8. Companies to which services may be outsourced are able to offer the hotel good services
- B9. Outsourcing permits better hotel performance
- B10. Outsourcing permits the advanced production technique provided by the outsourcing suppliers

Competitive strategy

Cost leadership

- C1. One basic approach of our hotel is cost reduction
- C2. Our hotel has lower prices than its closest competitors
- C3. Our services are standardized to reduce costs

Differentiation strategy

- D1. Our hotel has some services that are differentiated from those of our competitors
- D2. Our hotel offers our guests innovative products and services
- D3. Our hotel accepts high costs to increase customer satisfaction
- D4. Our hotel offers higher quality in its service than its most direct competitors

D5.The hotel services have features added to stress their value

Regarding the services the hotel outsources, that is, services provided by external suppliers, answer the following questions about the one that has the highest level of outsourcing. Respond to the following items referring to the service selected.

Relational norms

Information

- I1.The exchange of information in our relationship with the supplier is frequent and informal
- I2.In our relationship with the supplier, any information that may help the other party is given to that party
- I3.In our relationship with the supplier, the other party is kept informed of any events that may affect that party

Solidarity

- S1.Any problems that arise in the relationship are addressed jointly (by us and the supplier) rather than individually
- S2.Both parties in the relationship are committed to improvements that benefit the relationship as a whole and not only individually
- S3.The service supplier makes efforts to help us when a problem arises

Flexibility

- F1.The service supplier is flexible in responses to changes requested by the hotel
- F2.The service supplier makes the necessary adjustments to meet new circumstances
- F3.The service supplier asks the hotel for suggestions about performing the activity
- F4. In our relationship, the service provider advises us of any unexpected problem as soon as possible

Outsourcing success

Financial performance

- F1.The outsourcing of the service has helped us not to make investments related to that service
- F2.The outsourcing of the service has enabled us to reduce costs
- F3.A significant increase in the hotel's performance can be attributed to the outsourcing of the service

Strategic performance

- S1.The outsourcing of the service has meant that our hotel has access to new skills and capabilities
- S2.The outsourcing of the activity has increased its flexibility
- S3.The outsourcing of the service has given us more time to focus on the core services

Overall satisfaction

- O1. The service supplier is a good company to do business with
- O2.The service supplier provides us with an adequate service to perform the hotel operations efficiently and/or effectively
- O3.In general, we are satisfied with the results obtained by outsourcing this activity
- O4.I would not recommend doing business with this supplier **

O5.If we could, we would stop purchasing from this supplier**

** the items have been re-coded.

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Tables and Figures

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Measurement model evaluation

Factors	Weights	Loading	T	Compound reliability	Average variance extracted AVE	Variance inflation (VIF)
Relational norms <i>(molar-second order factor)</i>						
Information	0.33			0.96	0.88	2.87
I1		0.93	32.43			
I2		0.95	41.50			
I3		0.93	38.13			
Solidarity	0.30			0.88	0.71	2.88
S1		0.82	12.22			
S2		0.87	16.90			
S3		0.84	9.27			
Flexibility	0.45			0.92	0.73	4.19
F1		0.87	22.85			
F2		0.88	22.76			
F3		0.80	25.53			
F4		0.88	24.03			
Antecedents and performance dimensions						
Perceived outsourcing benefits				0.93	0.58	
B1		0.72	6.62			
B2		0.66	6.04			
B3		0.66	4.46			
B4		0.75	6.65			
B5		0.63	4.50			
B6		0.81	8.75			
B7		0.84	8.95			
B8		0.88	8.43			
B9		0.87	8.91			
B10		0.79	6.94			
Cost leadership				0.74	0.49	
C1		0.71	2.75			
C2		0.59	2.17			
C3		0.80	3.70			
Differentiation				0.82	0.48	
D1		0.64	3.08			
D2		0.57	2.29			
D3		0.71	4.20			
D4		0.77	4.41			

Factors	Weights	Loading	T	Compound reliability	Average variance extracted AVE	Variance inflation (VIF)
D5		0.79	4.77			
Financial performance				0.76	0.53	
F1		0.68	2.75			
F2		0.57	2.18			
F3		0.89	5.49			
Strategic performance				0.82	0.61	
E1		0.79	7.58			
E2		0.84	6.40			
E3		0.71	3.39			
Overall satisfaction				0.91	0.67	
O1		0.83	11.77			
O2		0.85	28.43			
O3		0.90	50.16			
O4		0.75	10.33			
O5		0.75	12.13			

Table 2. Square roots of the Average Variances Extracted (AVE) and correlation matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Relational norms	(0.88)						
2.Perceived outsourcing benefits	0.23	(0.75)					
3.Cost leadership	0.22	0.14	(0.70)				
4.Differentiation strategy	0.23	0.22	0.00	(0.69)			
5. Financial performance	0.31	0.42	0.27	0.11	(0.73)		
6. Strategic performance	0.32	0.29	0.11	0.10	0.36	(0.78)	
7.Overall satisfaction	0.66	0.18	0.10	0.02	0.50	0.45	(0.82)

Note. Diagonal elements (value in parenthesis) are the square root of the AVE; off diagonal are the correlations among constructs

Table 3. Structural model

Hypotheses	Structural model		
	Path coefficients	t-value (bootstrap)	(R ² ; Q ²)
Perceived outsourcing benefits → Relational norms	0.16*	1.98	(12%;0.14)
Cost leadership → Relational norms	0.20*	2.26	
Differentiation strategy → Relation norms	0.19**	2.37	
Relational norms → Financial performance	0.31**	3.03	(10%;0.11)
Relational norms → Strategic performance	0.32***	3.77	(10%;0.05)
Relational norms → Overall satisfaction	0.66***	10.08	(44%;0.24)

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***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05 based on t(4999), t(0.05, 4999)=1.6451, t(0.01, 4999)=2.3270, t(0.001, 4999)= 3.091

Table 4. R² of the dependent variables by country

Dependent variables	Taiwan	Scotland
	R ²	R ²
Relational norms	32.5%	12.5%
Financial performance	19.6%	9,0%
Strategic performance	20.6%	16.07%
Overall satisfaction	55.5%	43.70%

Table 5. Multigroup analysis results

Hypothesis	Taiwan	Scotland	Taiwan	Scotland	Sp	Bt-Bs	t test
	Bt	Bs	Standard error	Standard error			
Perceived outsourcing benefits → Relational norms	0.37**	0.16*	0.13	0.08	0.77	0.21	0.22
Cost leadership → Relational norms	-0.007	0.28***	0.15	0.09	0.88	-0.287	-1.74*
Differentiation strategy → Relational norms	0.29*	0.17*	0.16	0.09	0.90	0.12	0.71
Relational norms → Financial performance	-0.44***	0.30***	0.13	0.10	0.88	-0.74	-4.50***
Relational norms → Strategic performance	0.45***	0.40***	0.12	0.10	0.86	0.05	0.31
Relational norms → Overall satisfaction	0.74***	0.66***	0.09	0.08	0.68	0.08	0.51

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05 based on t(4999), t(0.05, 4999)=1.6451, t(0.01, 4999)=2.3270, t(0.001, 4999)= 3.091

Figure 1. Research model

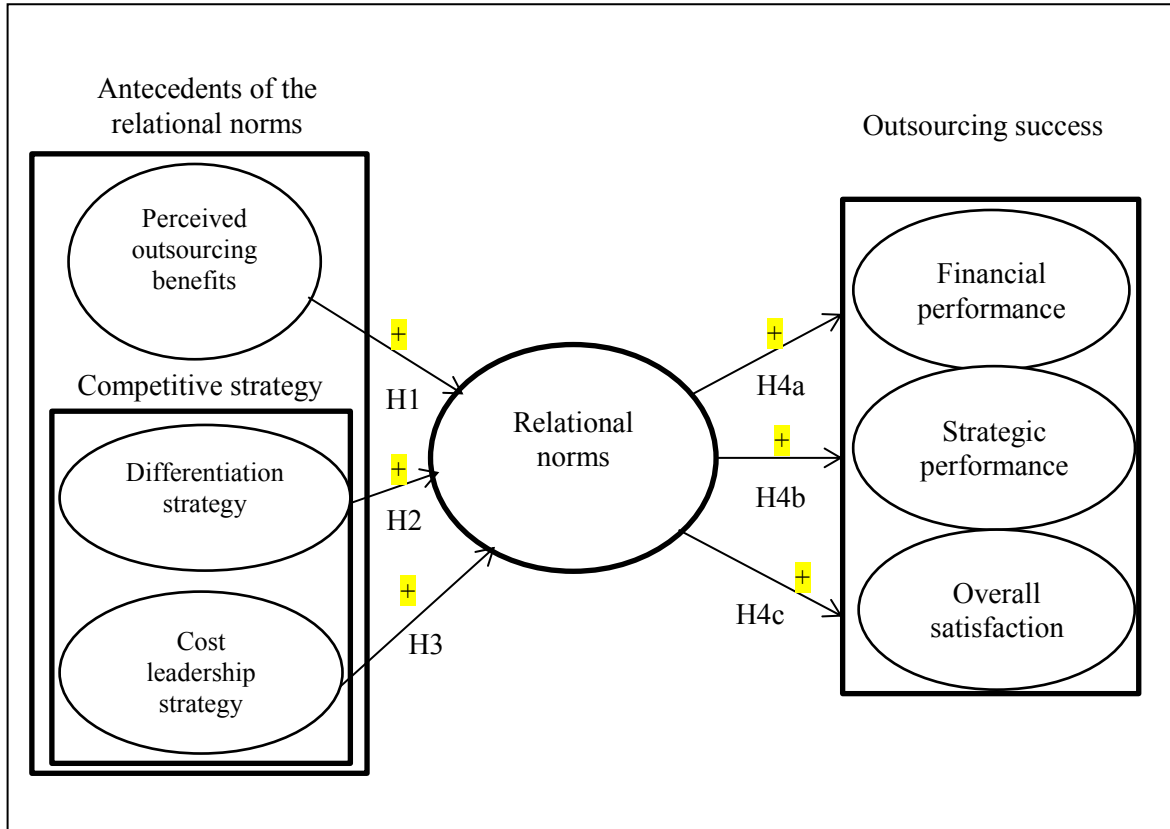


Figure 2. Relational norms

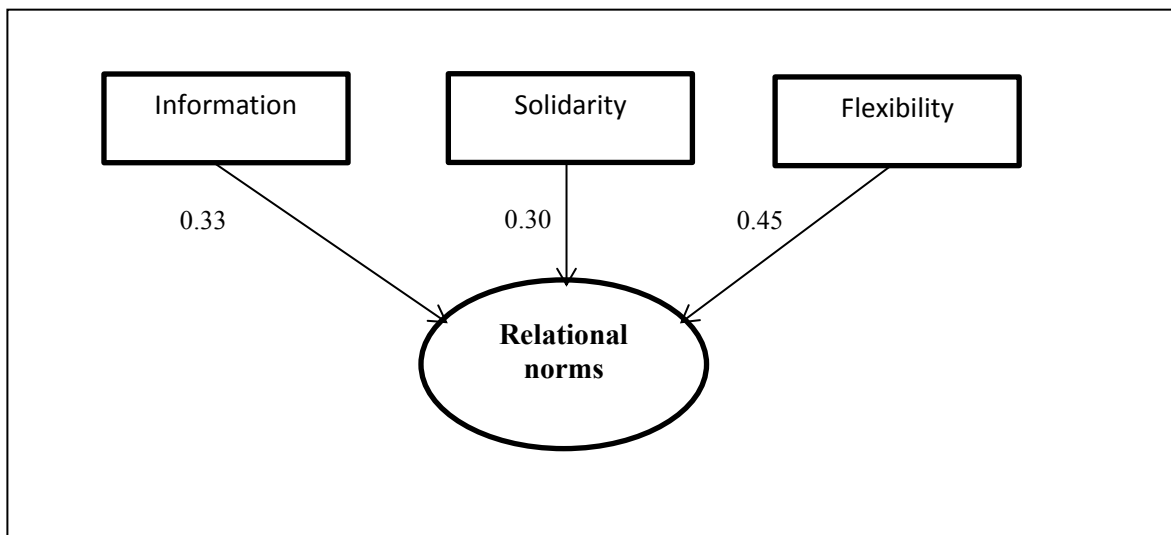
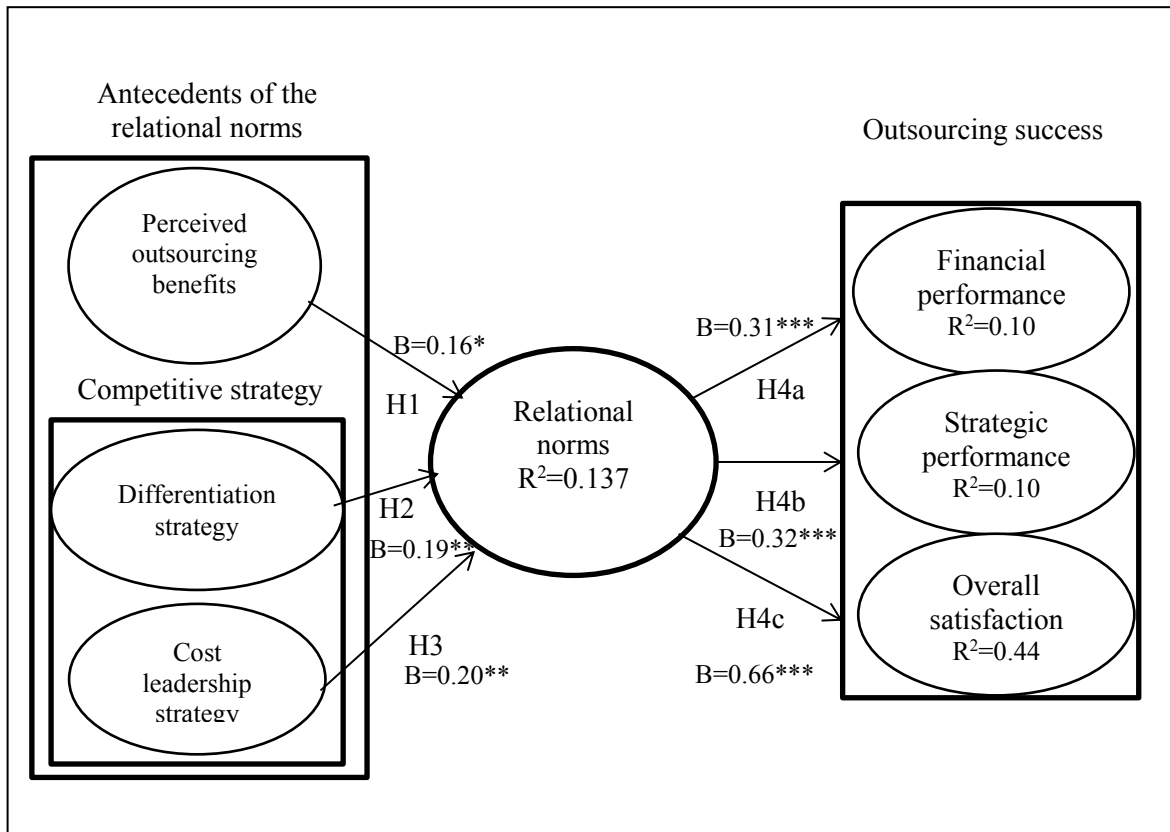


Figure 3. Structural Model



*** $p < 0001$, ** $p < 001$, * $p < 005$