

Article

Outsourcing Performance in Hotels: Evaluating Partnership Quality

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Abstract: In this study, a research model investigates the influence of various factors of the outsourcing relationship that condition partnership quality. The factors considered as determinants of outsourcing partnership quality are the strategic benefits and the degree of outsourcing. Partnership quality is based on relationships governed by confidence, commitment, business understanding, shared benefits and risks, and conflict resolution. The model also studies the influence of the partnership quality between the supplier and the hotel on the outsourcing performance, considered from the financial, strategic, and overall satisfaction perspectives. To test the hypotheses, this study used the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique with a sample of managers in an important tourist destination in Spain. The results of the study confirm that the strategic benefits and the degree of outsourcing perceived by the manager are determinant factors of the quality of the outsourcing partnership. In addition, they show that closer relationships with service suppliers imply greater outsourcing performance. Finally, implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: outsourcing; strategic benefits; partnership; performance; hotels

1. Introduction

Outsourcing is currently a widely used strategy by hotels. According to the data, in 2015, 30% of the employees who worked in hotels in Spain were outsourced. In addition, this number is predicted to rise and even double in the coming years [1]. In this regard, there is a need for studies that analyze the interorganizational relationships with outsourcing suppliers to find out whether outsourcing suppliers are helping to improve hotel management. Thus, it is necessary to analyze the current quality of the relationships and the success of the outsourcing. The outsourcing level in a hotel can be defined as the degree to which the hotel's activities and services are provided by external suppliers. It can also be measured as the number of external workers the hotel has. The level of outsourcing will mark the degree of the hotel's dependence on suppliers and outsourced workers. Activities usually outsourced in the hotel sector are mostly those that have a low impact on the competitive advantage [2]. Outsourcing decisions are strategic and make it possible to improve financial performance, flexibility, customer service, and productivity. In addition, it allows the firm to focus on the core business and access the latest technology [3].

Conventionally, outsourcing relationships are viewed as contractual, and based on transaction cost theory; the success of the outsourcing depends on the attributes of the transaction [4]. The recent literature on operations management has pointed out the importance of developing an environment of deeper relationship styles with service providers. Various models have been proposed to explain how these relationships with outsourcing suppliers should develop [5–7]. Outsourcing is rapidly becoming a simple reengineering of support for more in-depth relationship processes or partnerships among organizations that allow better, more sustainable results [8].

Many organizations experience difficulties in forming and managing a successful outsourcing partnership with service suppliers. Thus, for example, in the facilities management sector, many clients and suppliers are not working in advance [9]. In addition, Tamás [10] points out that inappropriate outsourcing can negatively affect operational efficiency. In this regard, Lee [11] indicates that the nature of the outsourcing relationship needs to evolve from a contract between the service supplier and the company that receives the service to a closer relationship or partnership between the two organizations. A partnership is defined as an interorganizational relationship designed to achieve the participants' shared objectives [11].

Researchers believe that when organizations have relationships with other companies, they want to reach a strategic goal where the members seek shared objectives, fight for mutual benefit, and recognize a high level of interdependence [12]. Even though the use of the hotel outsourcing strategy is gaining ground, no studies have been carried out to analyze these questions.

The level of outsourcing perceived by management should influence the type of interorganizational relationships developed. Hotels outsource some of the necessary activities to provide service to the client; thus, in the process of transforming resources into goods and services (outputs), it becomes necessary to manage the relationships as part of the productive system. Because of this increase in the outsourcing of activities, managers' tasks are transformed, and they become managers of interorganizational relationships. Therefore, they not only have to take care of the management of the productive system, but they also must manage the relationships among external suppliers.

Previous studies on outsourcing relationships have used social theories based on trust and commitment to explain the phenomenon of the relationship. Very few analyze the antecedents of interorganizational relationships [7]. Researchers generally do not analyze the importance of the pre-implementation phases, i.e., the conditions that must be present so that the relationship can be more strategic and deeper. The factors that can be considered are the level of outsourcing perceived by the manager of the hotel and the strategic benefits of the outsourcing. Considering the strategic reasons for outsourcing involves contemplating the client-supplier relationships [13]. The influence of the benefits of outsourcing on the quality of the interorganizational relationships can be an indispensable requirement for the outsourcing success [7]. In addition, an increase in the level of outsourcing in hotels should cause the interorganizational relationships to be managed from a relational point of view, where the partnership quality can play a relevant role [5]. Thus, outsourcing can involve strategic risks that can be limited if these aspects are taken into account. This question has not been tested in the empirical literature in the hotel sector, and its study will reveal the potential reach of the interorganizational relationships of managers of hotels with a certain level of outsourcing, analyzing both pre- and post-implementation factors.

The study of these two variables as antecedents makes it possible to test to what degree the hotel is managing its relationships as high quality strategic alliances that contribute to the success of the outsourcing. Hotels with more outsourcing indicate that a larger number of activities and services are handled by their suppliers. Therefore, they should be concerned with maintaining quality associations and closer relationships with suppliers, so that the quality of the product is not compromised. In this regard, the following questions should be posed: Do hotels that perceive a higher level of outsourcing in their hotel have closer relationships or, by contrast, does the outsourcing level have no influence?

Moreover, does considering the strategic benefits of outsourcing determine a high degree of partnership quality? The answer to this question will make it possible to determine whether the managers' knowledge about these benefits of the outsourcing strategy leads to closer relationships that favor success. Without a high level of outsourcing, and without viewing outsourcing as having strategic benefits, the relationships would probably not be as deep, and the success of the outsourcing could be compromised. In this regard, it is important to find out whether managers are heading in the right direction by using more outsourcing in hotels and becoming more dependent on external providers.

The research focuses mainly on the impact of the partnership quality on the outsourcing performance. Previous studies have analyzed the outsourcing relationships of information systems [5,6,14]. In addition, the outsourcing success factors of small and medium-sized companies belonging to different sectors were recently analyzed in the study by Ren et al. [7]. In the banking sector, Ee et al. [15] analyzed the relationship between the quality of the relationship and the outsourcing performance. However, this aspect has not been recognized or studied in hotel outsourcing, and so it is necessary to fill this gap in the literature.

The objectives of this paper are summarized in the following way:

- Analyze the impact of the recognition of the strategic benefits of outsourcing and the level of perceived outsourcing on the partnership quality (pre-implementation factors).
- Analyze how the impact of partnership quality influences the outsourcing performance (post-implementation factors).

2. Theoretical Review and Research Model

This study examines and identifies two determinant factors in the partnership or relationship quality: the strategic benefits of the outsourcing and the degree of outsourcing perceived by the manager in his/her hotel. Then the relationship between the quality of the outsourcing relationships and its impact on the success or result is analyzed. The research model is presented in Figure 1. This model is composed of three hypotheses and involves analyzing the impact of the management of the outsourcing relationships in the hotel sector.

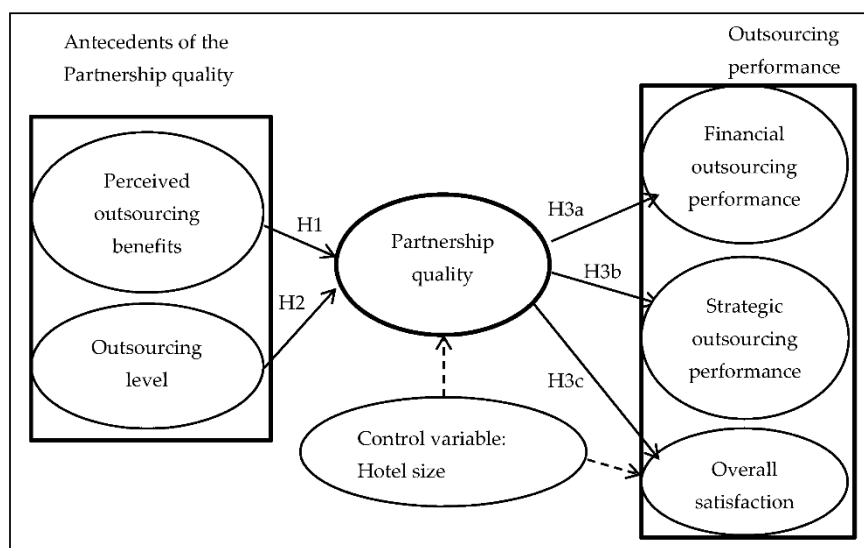


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

The model is based on the premise of analyzing the relationships between the suppliers and the hotel from the social perspective that can affect the behavior of the companies participating in the partnership [16]. Building successful interorganizational relationships can become a problem for hotels. Frequently, companies that want to outsource may lack the knowledge to select their suppliers, and there is also concern about how to manage the outsourcing relationships [17,18].

Relationship marketing and information systems have investigated the relationships between end customers and sellers, buyer and seller, manufacturer and distributor, etc. from different perspectives. Previous research classified the relationships into two types: transactional relationships and partnerships [19]. Transactional relationships develop through formal contracts in which the rules are specified and any infringement by any of the parties is resolved through penalizations or legal proceedings. By contrast, partnerships have shared risks and benefits, the need to view

the relationship without an end date, and the need to establish a range of mechanisms to control and carry out the operations [11]. This relationship style is based on social exchange theory rather than on a purely economic perspective, such as the theory of transaction costs or the theory of agency costs [20–23]. Social exchange theory is used to explain why organizations choose a more closed or narrower relationship. This theory sees the relationship as a dynamic process carried out through specific and sequential interactions where the participants perform the activities with a valuable exchange of resources. These processes evolve over time, and the participants show trust by demanding exchange actions and activities between the organizations with an economic value [11,14]. Social exchange theory is based on the concept of “trust” to explain the interchange of relationships among the participants [24]. In this type of relationship, one organization believes that the other will perform actions that lead to positive results, and not make unexpected decisions that lead to negative results [25]. Trust plays an important role in the development of long-term relationships, and it is the basic concept that separates the two relationship styles. This type of governance is more rational and addresses more delicate questions that are important in buyer-supplier relationships, such as trust, norms, open communication, and information sharing [26].

In another vein, Kedia and Lahiri [27] identify three types of relationships between the supplier-clients in outsourcing: first, the tactical relationships of free competition that are used by organizations mainly to reduce costs and improve quality; second, the strategic relationships that take advantage of the supplier’s accumulated experience and learning to acquire new resources and capabilities; and third, the transformational relationships that make it possible to reduce risks while increasing flexibility and achieving the transformation of the business.

Another prevalent theory that helps to explain outsourcing relationships is the resource dependence theory. This perspective sees the organization as a set of resources (human, financial, capital, technology, land) [28]. Organizations adopt strategies that guarantee access to the critical resources to assure the relationships with the environment and their survival [29,30]. The importance or scarcity of these resources determines the degree of the organization’s dependence regarding other external units. Therefore, a supplier’s resources can be the path to covering the organization’s scarcities or gaps in certain resources.

Hoffmann and Schlosser [31] indicate that five stages are involved in the development of strategic relationships or partnerships: strategical analysis and the decision to form an alliance, searching for and selecting a partner, designing the relationship, implementing and managing the relationship, and ending the relationship. Ren et al. [7] classify these five stages into only two: the pre-implementation stage and the post-implementation stage. Tuten and Urban [32] consider that trust and commitment are not sufficient for the success of the relationship. Previous factors such as strategic benefits and the level of outsourcing can be determinants of the quality of the partnership.

Partnership quality has an influence on long-term stability in client-supplier relationships [33]. However, merely extending a relationship in time does not necessarily mean that the quality of the partnership will be greater [34]. Lee and Kim [6] and Lee [11] propose that a partnership has its own factors that produce quality. These authors identify five factors that make up partnership quality: trust, business understanding, shared benefits and risks, conflict resolution, and commitment. Anderson and Narus [22] indicate that trust, communication, and management cooperation make it possible to achieve high quality interorganizational relationships. Svensson et al. [35] and Han et al. [36] establish that the commitment and trust between organizations has a stronger effect on the quality of the partnership than other attributes such as cooperation and coordination. Blumenberg et al. [37] point out that commitment refers to an implicit promise of continuity in the relationship between the partners.

Considering outsourcing from a strategic point of view implies taking a series of important aspects into account: core competences, activities of the value chain, and supplier-client relationships [13]. The company that acquires the external service can focus on what it really knows how to do, that is, its basic competences [38]. Thus, considering outsourcing from this perspective means recognizing

other benefits apart from cost reduction, such as flexibility, concentrating on basic competences, and improving quality [3,39]. These more strategic motives make it possible to consider more closed and in-depth relationships with suppliers based on trust and carried out through strategic alliances [40]. Thus, hotel managers who consider that outsourcing provides these benefits a priori are more willing to develop a quality partnership based on greater trust, communication, better conflict resolution techniques, and greater business understanding. Rhodes et al. [34] indicate that the reasons for outsourcing related to strategic aspects, such as the focus on core competences, quality, or flexibility, influence the partnership interaction related to communication and conflict resolution. If managers perceive that outsourcing has positive effects for their hotels, they will give greater value to this strategy when negotiating it. This suggests that the behavior of the supplier and the client is based on an integration approach [41], which means that the parties are not only focused on their own interests, as the relationship has a higher quality. For Ren et al. [7], managers who have a strong motivation for outsourcing will make more effort in the outsourcing relationships, taking initiative in the selection of the supplier, the design of the agreements, and the negotiation of contracts, thus benefiting the quality of the supplier-client relationship. These arguments suggest the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. *The strategic benefits perceived by managers are positively related to the partnership quality.*

The second pre-implementation factor considered as a determinant of partnership quality in the present study is the outsourcing level. The research indicates that a certain level of outsourcing in hotels can raise transaction costs [42,43], which can counteract the benefits derived from the outsourcing. Therefore, closer relationships based on mutual trust and commitment can reduce transaction costs [44]. Transaction cost theory argues that maximizing transaction performance and minimizing transaction costs requires the use of relational governance systems [26]. Relationships based on mutual trust, commitment, good conflict resolution techniques, business understanding, and shared benefits and risks can have a positive impact on the results. In this regard, managers will be more likely to develop these types of relationships when the level of outsourcing in the company is higher. By depending more on external suppliers, closer relationships between the hotel and the suppliers will be able to produce a better organizational result and greater outsourcing success. Thus, the level of outsourcing can be another indispensable pre-implementation requirement for partnership quality. A high level of outsourcing can favor the development of relational capabilities [45], which are formed based on good partnership quality distinguished by good communication and trust among the parties. Espino-Rodríguez and Rodríguez-Díaz [45] point out that high levels of outsourcing are associated with the organization's integration capability in the processes between clients and suppliers, and the generation of relational competitiveness through the development of interorganizational routines and cooperation agreements. An increase in the levels of outsourcing is often determined by low performance on the activity [46]. This makes it necessary to strengthen the relationships between hotels and suppliers. Moreover, when there is a higher level of outsourcing, more critical activities for the business are outsourced because, as Dyer and Singh [47] indicate, the critical resources can be developed outside the organization and managed with interorganizational resources. Thus, the partnership quality, measured in terms of trust, communication, and shared risks, can be higher.

Higher levels of outsourcing involve more risks and greater uncertainty for the hotel. Supply chain risk and uncertainty can produce important interruptions throughout the supply chain, which can seriously affect the organization's ability to continue its operations and provide adequate service to its end clients [48]. This situation of risk and uncertainty means organizations can benefit from closer and higher quality relationships with their suppliers. Likewise, a higher level of outsourcing will mean that management is more prepared to manage relationships and the fear of losing competitive advantage and brand differentiation, which will lead it to develop higher quality partnerships. These previous arguments lead us to propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. *A higher level of outsourcing perceived by managers in their hotel is positively related to greater partnership quality.*

The success of the relationships allows organizations to achieve their objectives and build competitive advantage [36]. Thus, the resource-based view of the firm (RBV) argues that when companies have a different result, it is basically due to the heterogeneity of the resources [49,50]. Organizations that are capable of accumulating resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, not replaceable, and difficult to imitate will achieve competitive advantage. As we pointed out above, partnership quality is a resource that can help the company to obtain competitive advantage through the success of the outsourcing. In this regard, partnership quality is a relational resource that can allow competitive advantage to develop through collaboration among companies [51,52]. Outsourcing success refers to the competitive advantage achieved when companies acquire services from external suppliers [11]. Strategic and economic results can be achieved through outsourcing. Given that, in our study, outsourcing is analyzed as a whole, overall satisfaction has also been used, in addition to strategic and financial performance [53], as another important measure of outsourcing success. Financial performance refers to outsourcing's capacity to reduce investments and control costs and increase profits. Strategic performance shows an organization's capacity to focus on its basic competences and obtain greater flexibility due to outsourcing. Finally, overall satisfaction is seen as the degree of fit between the client's requirements (in this case, the hotel) and the result achieved through outsourcing [54].

Previous studies applied to information systems show a significant relationship between partnership quality and outsourcing success [5,6]. According to Grover et al. [5], outsourcing allows both parties to achieve their organizational objectives, develop competitive advantage, and have good relationships with suppliers, all of which are determinants in achieving outsourcing success. In addition, in the small and medium-sized company sector, Ren et al. [7] show that high quality outsourcing relationships in information technologies and systems positively influence outsourcing success from different points of view (strategic, financial, and technological). A greater outsourcing management process can improve the outsourcing performance. Relationships with a competent supplier based on quality are more likely to allow firms to benefit from cost reductions and delivery improvement [55].

According to Hansen et al. [56], flexibility, the supplier's ability to adapt to a change in situation, favors better outsourcing results. Moreover, Srinivasan et al. [48] indicate that close relationships based on trust, cooperation, and shared risks and benefits between supplier and buyer can be beneficial for the supply chain. Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3. *Partnership quality positively influences the hotel's outsourcing performance.*

Greater partnership quality improves the transaction costs [43] that arise when hotels outsource, which favors cost saving, and this is one of the main benefits of outsourcing [57]. High partnership quality reduces opportunistic behavior that occurs in situations of uncertainty [58]. This cost saving is greater because, through partnership quality, control, and negotiation, costs are reduced, producing a positive effect on the financial performance of outsourcing. Moreover, the outsourcing suppliers offer better prices thanks to the economies of scale obtained by offering their services to various clients, which lowers the hotel's costs [59]. However, this benefit will probably only be obtained within the framework of partnership quality because otherwise suppliers may not share these benefits with the hotel, due to opportunistic behavior [60]. Therefore, the following sub-hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3a. *Partnership quality positively influences the hotel's financial outsourcing performance.*

Greater partnership makes it possible to take better advantage of suppliers' resources and capabilities because they are more willing to share the benefits that can be obtained from outsourcing.

High partnership quality produces profitable relationships and provides access to complementary capabilities of external providers [47]. These associations can play a key role in the creation of profits and access to resources and capabilities that the hotel does not have. To obtain good strategic performance through outsourcing, there must be a high degree of association. Outsourcing suppliers can make more sophisticated investments in human capital, thus improving productivity and efficiency [61]. These benefits will only be achieved in a framework of trust, business understanding, shared benefits and risks, conflict resolution, and commitment. If these premises do not exist, it is likely that suppliers will not invest in improving the services the hotel offers. Therefore, the following sub-hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3b. *Partnership quality positively influences the hotel's strategic outsourcing performance.*

The clients, in this case the hotels, will be more satisfied with the outsourcing when there is a greater degree of partnership quality with the service providers. If the outsourcing suppliers develop partnership quality with their clients, they will prevent economic losses by avoiding opportunistic behaviors, and they will try to meet the client's expectations [62]. This means that the client firms, in this case the hotels, will feel that their interactions with the outsourcing providers are more complete and more gratifying. These types of relationships, where there are risks and the parties' expectations coincide, are healthier and lead to an increase in overall satisfaction [63]. Therefore, the following sub-hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3c. *The partnership quality between suppliers and the hotel positively influences the hotel's overall outsourcing satisfaction.*

3. Methodology

3.1. Population and Sample

The Canary Islands make up a consolidated tourist destination in the European setting. They received almost 16 million tourists in 2017 [64]; of this total, the island of Gran Canaria received 4,477,969 tourists [64], making it an ideal setting in which to carry out this research. The present study focused on sun and beach hotel establishments on Gran Canaria with 3, 4 and 5-star categories. In the last period registered (2017), Gran Canaria had a mean tourist stay of 7.46 days and an occupation of 86.58%, according to data registered by the Canary Institute of Statistics [65]. These data show the importance of the hotel activity on Gran Canaria and its contribution to the local and regional economy, so that it presents an ideal field for carrying out investigations in the services sector. Gran Canaria is a sun and sand destination that is in demand all year, although the highest demand is in the winter season, and the number of hotel beds is increasing to adapt to tourists' needs [66]. This study focused on the tourist towns of Gran Canaria of San Bartolomé de Tirajana and Mogán.

After the conciliation and updating of different existing databases, 71 three, four and five-star hotels were identified. To obtain the data, a personal survey was used to approach the general managers and assistant managers of these establishments, who had an overall vision of the hotel and the interorganizational relationships with suppliers. Previously, after explaining the purpose of the study by telephone, an appointment was made with the managers or equivalent to later interview the appropriate person in the hotel.

Of the 71 establishments identified, 63 agreed to participate, which represents a real response rate of 88.73%, guaranteeing the representativity of the destination chosen. Of the 63 participating hotels, 77 surveys were obtained from general managers and assistant general managers. In many hotels, only one survey was obtained because the category of assistant general manager did not exist due to recent changes in hotel management structures. Flatter organigrams and simpler management structures were found.

Of the 77 managers surveyed, 12 belonged to five-star hotels, 42 to four-star hotels, and 23 to three-star hotels. They ranged in age from 35 to 44 years old (37.66%), followed by those between 45 and 54 years old (36.36%). The rest of the managers were between 25 and 34 years old (10.39%) and between 55 and 65 (12.99%), with 2.60% who continued to be active after the age of 65. Therefore, 74.02% of the managers of hotel establishments in Gran Canaria are between 35 and 54 years old, and the majority are men (74.02%). Through the survey, the managers were asked about their perceptions of the degree of outsourcing of the hotel, the strategic benefits of the outsourcing, the quality of the partnership, and the outsourcing performance.

3.2. Measurement of the Variables

In the first place, the questionnaire was elaborated after carrying out a review of the empirical and theoretical literature about how to measure the degree of outsourcing perceived by managers, the strategic benefits of outsourcing, the partnership quality, and the success of the outsourcing, to extract questions for the valid and reliable measurement of each variable. Furthermore, the hotel size, considered as the number of rooms in the hotel, has been used as a control variable in the model. Second, the questionnaire was pre-tested for content validity [67]. To do so, various researchers with experience in the hotel sector and professional managers were surveyed in a first stage to improve the questionnaire.

Degree of hotel outsourcing perceived by the manager. Most outsourcing studies in hotels measure the degree of outsourcing of the activity or the process analyzed [68–71]. However, given the objectives of the research model, it is important to find out the managers' perception of the level of outsourcing in their hotels, that is, whether they perceive that their hotel is very outsourced or not very outsourced, considering the degree of dependence of the hotel departments on external companies, the number of external workers, the volume of service outsourced, etc. To do so, a scale with five statements was created where the managers of the hotels expressed their level of agreement or disagreement on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 7 indicating maximum agreement with the statement (see Appendix A).

Strategic Benefits of outsourcing. The strategic benefits of outsourcing are related to better access to higher quality service and more experience than if the service is performed internally. All aspects related to the competitive advantage are considered in the study, except cost reduction. To elaborate this construct, a theoretical and empirical literature review was carried out on the main strategic advantages outsourcing can provide [59,68,72,73]. For this purpose, a scale was created containing eight items that incorporate information related to the strategic benefits of outsourcing. Interviewees were asked to express their degree of agreement or disagreement on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicates strong disagreement and 7 indicates strong agreement with the statement (see Appendix A).

Partnership quality. This construct was measured using the original scale by Lee and Kim [6] and Lee [11]. This scale has been used in more recent studies, such as the outsourcing study by Ren et al. [7]. The scale identifies five factors that study the interorganizational relationships that make up partnership quality: trust, business understanding, shared benefits and risks, conflict resolution, and commitment. The items were presented on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicates strong disagreement and 7 indicates strong agreement (see Appendix A).

Outsourcing performance. To measure outsourcing performance, three different measures were used (strategic performance, financial performance, and overall satisfaction) [53]. Based on the studies by Saunders et al. [53], Grover et al. [5], Lee [11] and Ee et al. [54], a multidimensional Likert-type scale was created to measure outsourcing success, with scores ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 indicates strong disagreement with the statement and 7 indicates strong agreement. This original scale was adapted to the context of this study.

Strategic performance. The strategic result was measured using three items that reflect the hotel's capacity to access new skills and capabilities, improvements in flexibility, and the ability to focus on the basic competences due to the hotel's outsourcing.

Financial performance. For the financial result, three questions were posed that reflect how the outsourcing has helped to reduce costs and investments, how it has contributed to improving the financial results, and to what degree the outsourcing can be attributed to an increase in the sales of hotel rooms.

Overall satisfaction. Overall satisfaction is also used individually as one of the measures of success or the result of the relationship between the seller (supplier) and the buyer (hotel) [74]. The interviewees rate aspects such as whether the service providers are a good company to do business with, if they would recommend the current suppliers to other hotels, if the suppliers give adequate service, and whether the hotel is satisfied with the outsourcing results.

4. Analysis and Results

To test the hypotheses, a structural linear equations model was proposed to determine the relationships among the constructs and the predictive power of the structural model. To do so, the PLS technique was used, specifically Smart PLS 2.0. M3 [75]. The purpose of PLS is to predict the latent variables based on the variance, by means of the estimation of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and principal components analysis. PLS does not make restrictive assumptions about the distribution of the data, the measurement levels, or the sample size [76,77]. PLS is also appropriate for developing theory [78]. The analysis and interpretation of a PLS model requires two stages: (a) the evaluation of the levels of reliability and convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model; and (b) the estimation of the structural model.

Measurement Model

The measurement model in PLS is evaluated in terms of the coefficients of individual reliability of the item, the convergent validity, and the discriminant validity. To analyze the individual reliability of the scales for each item, the indicators' loadings in their respective constructs were evaluated. The data show that most of the loadings exceed the threshold of 0.707 proposed by Carmines and Zeller [79]. Only one presented a factor loading of 0.676, and given that its value was quite near the threshold, it was included in the analysis. In the evaluation of the reliability of the constructs, the composite reliability (CR) was considered a better measure than Cronbach's alpha [80]. Table 1 shows that all the constructs are reliable, as they exceed the value of reference of 0.7. Together, the results of the model show that it has convergent validity. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha of each of the constructs exceeds the recommended value of 0.7 [81]. Moreover, to examine the convergent validity, the authors use the average variance extracted (AVE), which refers to the shared average variance between the construct and its indicators. In each construct, the AVE must exceed 0.5. The AVE of all the constructs exceeds the required threshold of 0.5, with values between 0.64 and 0.78, so that it can be stated that more than 50% of the variance of the construct is due to its indicators.

Table 1. Evaluation of the measurement model.

Factors	Factor Loadings	<i>t</i>	Composite Reliability	Extracted Variance AVE	Alpha
Perceived outsourcing benefits					
B1	0.709	6.147	0.943	0.677	0.932
B2	0.836	9.920			
B3	0.817	9.462			
B4	0.846	9.986			
B5	0.874	11.111			
B6	0.792	11.191			
B7	0.882	11.420			
B8	0.812	11.657			
Level of outsourcing					
E1	0.837	6.414	0.907	0.662	0.871
E2	0.708	5.256			
E3	0.784	6.541			
E4	0.874	5.651			
E5	0.855	5.512			
Partnership quality					
C1	0.811	16.647	0.900	0.644	0.861
C2	0.840	18.603			
C3	0.844	17.299			
C4	0.777	10.529			
C5	0.733	8.114			
Financial performance					
F1	0.676	4.667	0.813	0.594	0.693
F2	0.885	15.877			
F3	0.736	6.854			
Strategic performance					
E1	0.889	26.397	0.917	0.787	0.865
E2	0.881	17.947			
E3	0.893	25.871			
Overall satisfaction					
S1	0.789	14.079	0.909	0.715	0.867
S2	0.850	11.635			
S3	0.896	29.139			
S4	0.845	19.369			

Furthermore, the existence of discriminant validity was shown in the model. According to Fornell and Larcker [80] and Roldán and Sánchez-Franco [82], to guarantee the discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE measures must be superior to all the correlations among all the constructs. As Table 2 shows, the square root of the AVE (main diagonal) is in all cases superior to the correlations among the constructs, which shows discriminant validity. In addition, O’Cass and Ngo [83] indicate that discriminant validity is evident when the correlation between the two constructs is not higher than their respective composite reliabilities. Table 3 shows that the correlations have values inferior to their respective reliabilities (0.813–0.943). Therefore, all the constructs support the discriminant validity of the scales used.

Table 2. Square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) and correlations matrix.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Strategic benefits of outsourcing	(0.823)						
2. Level of outsourcing	0.242	(0.814)					
3. Partnership quality	0.319	0.245	(0.802)				
4. Strategic outsourcing performance	0.670	0.244	0.451	(0.887)			
5. Financial outsourcing performance	0.498	0.427	0.420	0.704	(0.771)		
6. Overall satisfaction	0.527	0.135	0.541	0.556	0.488	(0.846)	
7. Hotel size	0.048	0.176	0.049	−0.031	0.172	0.141	n.a.

Note. The elements on the diagonal (values in parentheses represent the square root of the variance extracted (AVE) and the values outside the diagonal represent the correlations between the constructs.) n.a. Not applicable structural model.

Table 3. Results of the structural model.

Hypothesis	Structural Model		
	Standardized Coefficients	t-Value	(R ² ; Q ²)
Strategic benefits of outsourcing → Partnership quality	0.276 **	2.853	
Hotel size → Partnership quality	0.04	0.073	(13.2%;0.041)
Degree of outsourcing → Partnership quality	0.178 *	1.863	
Partnership quality → Financial outsourcing performance	0.420 ***	4.545	(20.2%;0.090)
Hotel size → Financial outsourcing performance	0.155	1.550	
Partnership quality → Strategic outsourcing performance	0.453 ***	4.892	(20.6%;0.161)
Hotel size → Strategic outsourcing performance	−0.054	0.739	
Partnership quality → Overall satisfaction	0.540 ***	5.725	(30.5%;0.209)
Hotel size → Overall satisfaction	0.150	1.140	
GoF (Goodness-of-fit criterion)		0.377	

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

The structural model resulting from the PLS analysis is shown in Table 3 and Figure 2. The structural model was evaluated by examining the explained variance (R²) and standardized path coefficients (β) of each of the predicted relationships in the model's hypotheses with the t values obtained on the non-parametric bootstrap resampling test with 5000 samples, following the indications of Hair et al. [84] and Henseler et al. [85].

Figure 2 and Table 3 show that the strategic benefits positively influence partnership quality ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.01$); therefore, Hypothesis 1 is supported. In addition, a higher level of outsourcing positively influences partnership quality. Regarding Hypothesis 2, which predicts a positive effect of the level of outsourcing perceived by the manager on the partnership quality, the results confirm this prediction, and so Hypothesis 2 is supported ($\beta = 0.178$, $p < 0.05$). The total variance explained by the two variables used as the reference for the prediction of partnership quality is 13.2%. In the case of the influence of partnership quality on outsourcing performance, the results indicate a positive relationship between partnership quality and the different measures of the results that contribute to outsourcing success. Specifically, partnership quality positively influences financial performance ($\beta = 0.420$, $p < 0.001$), strategic performance ($\beta = 0.453$, $p < 0.001$), and overall satisfaction ($\beta = 0.540$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, Hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c are accepted. Moreover, the results indicate that hotel size did not affect partnership quality or influence the outsourcing performance. All the R² measures exceed the threshold of 10%, (financial performance, 20.2%; strategic performance, 20.6%; overall satisfaction, 30.5%) established by Falk and Miller [86], and so the model has predictive capacity.

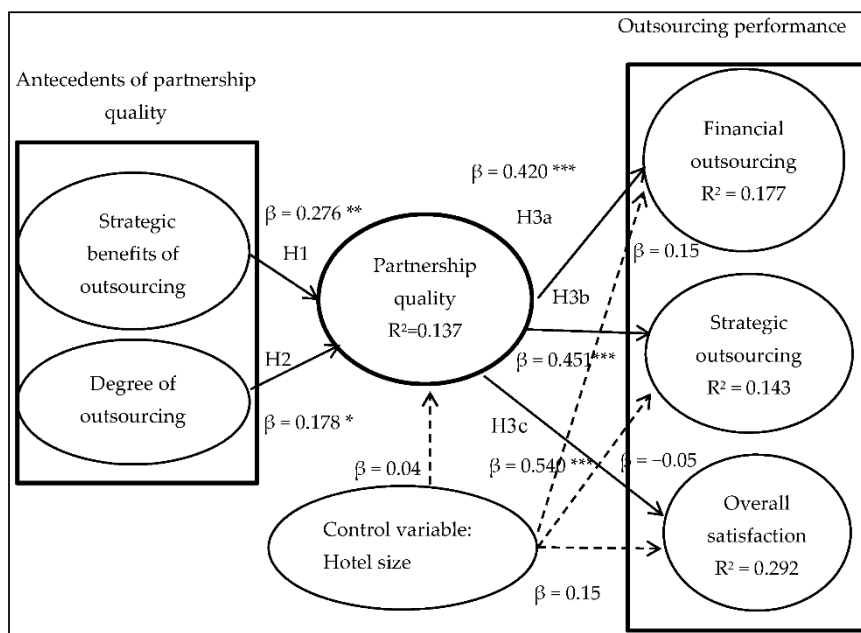


Figure 2. Structural model. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Given that the objective of the PLS is prediction, according to the proposals by Tenenhaus et al. [77], Barclay et al. [78], and Henseler et al. [85], the Stone-Geisser Q2 test [87,88] was used to measure the predictive relevance of the dependent constructs (partnership quality and outsourcing performance). The Stone-Geisser test generally accepts that a model has predictive relevance when Q² is greater than zero [76,89]. In the model, all the Q² values are above zero (partnership quality, 0.041; financial performance, 0.09; strategic performance, 0.161; overall satisfaction, 0.209), which indicates that it has predictive relevance.

Finally, the goodness of fit of the model was evaluated. The PLS technique does not have an index that can provide a validation of the model, but authors such as Tenenhaus et al. [77] propose an overall validation criterion for it. Specifically, the Goodness-of-fit (GoF) indicator was applied, which consists of the geometric mean of the communalities through the R² mean. A model with a GoF that exceeds 0.36 is considered a model with good fit [76]. In this case, the value is 0.377; therefore, the model has sufficient predictive quality (see Table 3).

$$GoF = \sqrt{Communality \times R^2}$$

5. Discussion

- Hypothesis 1

The results of this study support the relationships proposed in the model for the factors that determine partnership quality or interorganizational relationships. The factors that determine partnership quality in the pre-implementation of the relationship, that is, before building the relationship, are significant and influence the type of relationship outsourced suppliers have with the hotel. This study confirms that the strategic benefits of outsourcing perceived by the hotel influence partnership quality. Similar results are obtained in the study by Ren et al. [7], although applied to information systems and technologies in small and medium-sized companies. Tuten and Urban [32] indicate that potential partners must explicitly take into account the reasons for forming the interorganizational relationships and analyze, in terms of probability, what benefits will be obtained from the relationships established. This study confirms the findings of Grover et al. [5], who indicate that the perceived benefits are an important component of the outsourcing decision-making process.

Perceived strategic benefits are a requirement for starting high quality relationships based on relational aspects that provide more guarantees and protection to the relationship between the hotel and the supplier. When these benefits are not considered very relevant, the degree of association with the supplier is lower.

- Hypothesis 2

This study confirms that not only the strategic benefits of outsourcing are important for partnership quality, but also the degree of outsourcing perceived by the manager of the hotel. Both have a positive influence on the way the outsourcing relationships are managed. The results support those obtained by Espino-Rodríguez and Rodríguez-Díaz [45], who point out that a greater level of outsourcing allows a higher level of integration of suppliers' and clients' processes. Higher partnership quality implies a greater integration of hotels' and suppliers' processes, which leads to the development of relational profits. Confidence and commitment are antecedents of process integration [90]. A higher level of outsourcing means that the hotel depends more on external suppliers. Therefore, to maintain an adequate level of quality, the service has more closed relationships that require the use of relational governance.

One way to avoid the risks of outsourcing is by having relationships based on confidence and commitment, where the benefits and risks are shared, and good conflict resolution management guides the relationship. Thus, a higher level of outsourcing means that more resources and capabilities are obtained from the exterior, so that the hotel is more dependent on external agents to offer their service. This causes managers who perceive a greater level of outsourcing in their hotel to achieve greater partnership quality by paying more attention to their relationships to maintain the competitive advantage. The management of the outsourcing relationship continues to pose significant challenges, even for firms that have extensive and long-term experience with outsourcing [91]). A high level of relational capabilities makes it possible to mitigate the risk, and it has a positive effect on the strategic planning process [92]. Likewise, a loss of capabilities affects the relationship negatively [93], and therefore hotels will want to maintain the development of capabilities when there are higher levels of outsourcing with relationships based on trust and commitment.

- Hypothesis 3

Finally, the results show a positive relationship between partnership quality and outsourcing performance. These findings are consistent with previous studies [6,7,54,94]. This means that managers of hotels who are more committed to a closer relationship have greater outsourcing performance. The findings coincide with those of Park et al. [94], who demonstrate that the greater the partnership quality between the firm and the suppliers, the greater the supply chain performance analyzed from the perspective of outsourcing. These results agree with findings that belong to the perspective of the organization's relational capabilities, where the development of relational profits can improve the organization's results through interorganizational relationships [51,95]. Therefore, greater integration with suppliers makes it possible to achieve better results in the organization [96], which means that outsourcing success can be a necessary condition for outsourcing's influence on the competitive advantage. The development of partnership quality will make it possible to select the most competent suppliers and reduce the potential for inferior service, thus improving performance [97]. In general, confidence, commitment, business understanding, shared benefits and risks, and conflict resolution are requirements for increasing outsourcing performance. The results show that the use of relational governance can improve outsourcing performance. Relational governance measured through partnership quality makes the outsourcing more productive and efficient because the firm can better exploit its benefits.

The findings indicate that of the three types of performance analyzed (financial, strategic, and overall satisfaction), partnership quality explains the variability in the financial result slightly less than strategic performance and overall performance. This means that partnership quality has a

greater influence on strategic performance, related to concentrating on basic competences and greater flexibility, and to a lesser degree, on financial aspects. The study tested a model that shows that a higher level of outsourcing and a greater perception of its benefits lead to increased partnership quality. It also shows that there is a positive relationship between the development of partnership quality and the different dimensions of outsourcing performance analyzed.

5.1. Academic and Practical Implications

The conceptual model applied has both academic and practical implications. Researchers on hotel outsourcing have analyzed outsourcing from the perspective of comparing externalization versus internalization, the strategic benefits of outsourcing, and the impact of outsourcing on the organizational result. However, there are fewer studies in the existing literature about the client-supplier partnership approach, the quality of the relationships, and their impact on outsourcing success factors. In this regard, this study examines a structural model that analyzes the role of the pre-implementation stage of the quality of interorganizational relationships in hotels. The results confirm the importance of two categories: the perceived strategic benefits and the degree of outsourcing. In addition, the perceived strategic benefits are an important factor studied as an attitude toward outsourcing. However, this study analyzes to what degree the benefits of outsourcing and the perceived level of outsourcing determine the way the interorganizational relationships are understood and contribute to the quality of the relationship. Moreover, the study tests which constructs are valid and reliable to measure the interorganizational relationships involved in hotel outsourcing and, therefore, can be used in other investigations.

The results of this study have practical implications for industry. First, the findings of this study reveal that it is important for hotel managers and other management positions to know the benefits of outsourcing and be aware of the importance of a closer relationship with suppliers. Second, hotel managers must have organizational knowledge and an understanding of outsourcing, as well as the capacity to coordinate with suppliers and guide the relationship. Third, the study shows that higher levels of outsourcing improve partnership quality. This means that hotel outsourcing must reach a certain level to achieve high partnership quality. Hotels with a low level of outsourcing have less partnership quality and, therefore, lower outsourcing performance, which means that to take advantage of relationships with suppliers, a certain level of outsourcing is necessary. Fourth, if managers perceive greater benefits from the application of outsourcing, they will show more interest in maintaining higher partnership quality, which will allow them to obtain better performance, as this study shows.

Fifth, the study shows that partnership quality improves outsourcing performance from a financial and strategic point of view, which makes it possible to take advantage of the benefits of the outsourcing strategy. The managers of organizations who belong to the partnership will have to develop and maintain high quality relationships because this has been shown to have a positive effect on outsourcing performance. Ideally, these relationships need to evolve from a contractual form to a relational one because this latter modality will give greater value to the outsourcing. This transition will make it possible to improve the relationship between hotels and suppliers, which will lead to greater outsourcing success, as shown in this study. Sixth, the results show that relationships based on trust, where benefits and risks are shared and there is a high level of commitment between the parties, improve outsourcing performance, which can positively influence organizational performance. Finally, due to the increase in the pressure of market competition, the hotel industry must increase its efficiency and service quality to attract more tourists, so that outsourcing management based on relational mechanisms can be quite helpful in becoming more competitive and increasing occupation levels.

5.2. Limitations and Future Studies

The study analyzes the pre-implementation and post-implementation factors of outsourcing; however, it has some limitations that can lead to future research studies. First, regarding the

pre-implementation factors, it is necessary to incorporate other variables that can affect the development of the quality of the relationships, the specific assets involved, or the capabilities of the supplier. In this regard, cultural aspects, the corporate philosophy, or the strategic orientation could be considered in future studies to identify other determinant factors of partnership quality. Second, the model was applied to overall hotel outsourcing, and the questions were about hotel outsourcing, but without differentiating the activity. More specific studies to analyze these models for each of the hotel activities would be desirable in the future. It is also important to know the relationship between the degree of outsourcing and the hollowing-out of the organization and how it affects the quality of the service provided. They would make it possible to classify more contractual or relational partnerships based on trust with a certain level of quality depending on the type of outsourced activity. Third, the study is carried out only from the perspective of hotel managers, which can bias the results. Future studies should also analyze the perspective of the service supplier, especially in the formation of relationship quality. Fourth, the model includes the variable partnership quality, which encompasses aspects such as trust, business understanding, shared benefits, conflict resolution, and commitment. However, in future studies, each of these items could be considered separately as its own dimension.

Finally, this study must be viewed as the analysis of a case or a destination and cannot be generalized to the entire hotel sector. We would like this study to provide a starting point for the analysis of other destinations and for carrying out other similar studies on only one activity (such as food and beverage, information systems, leisure, marketing, security and vigilance).

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Appendix A

Strategic benefits of outsourcing

- B1. Thanks to outsourcing, we have more time to perform our tasks.
- B2. We perform our tasks better thanks to outsourcing.
- B3. The fact that this hotel outsources allows our personnel to do more things.
- B4. Outsourcing helps us to focus on the hotel's key activities.
- B5. With outsourcing, we get more work done with less effort.
- B6. Outsourcing contributes qualifications and experience to the daily work.
- B7. Outsourcing allows us free time to use on other tasks.
- B8. Outsourcing makes it possible to increase the quality of the hotel's services.

Level of outsourcing

- N1. A large part of this hotel's personnel come from contracted services.
- N2. Many departments in my hotel depend on external companies.
- N3. The volume of services that this hotel has outsourced is high.
- N4. A large number of my co-workers are subcontracted workers.
- N5. A high percentage of staff members are external workers.

Partnership quality

- C1. We and our service providers make beneficial decisions for both in any situation.
- C2. We and our service providers understand the business objectives of each party.
- C3. We and our service providers share the benefits and risks that can arise from our relationship together.
- C4. We and our external service providers have compatible policies and cultures when doing business.
- C5. We and our outsourced service providers fulfill our pre-established agreements and our promises.

Outsourcing performance

Financial performance

- F1. Outsourcing has meant we haven't had to make investments in that activity.
- F2. Services outsourcing has allowed us to reduce costs.
- F3. An important increase in the financial results and sales of hotel rooms can be attributed to the outsourcing of services.

Strategic performance

- E1. Services outsourcing has made it possible for our hotel to access new skills and capabilities.
- E2. Services outsourcing has increased the operative flexibility of the hotel.
- E3. External service providers have allowed us to have more free time to focus on basic activities.

Overall satisfaction

- S1. Service providers are good companies to do business with.
- S2. I would recommend that other hotels do business with suppliers of outsourced activities.
- S3. The service providers give us satisfactory service to carry out the hotel's operations.
- S4. In general, we are satisfied with the results obtained from outsourcing services.

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