KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF MEDIA ESTABLISHMENTS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the association between knowledge sharing and competitive advantage of media establishments in Rivers State. The study adopted a correlational research design and used structured questionnaire to collect primary data. The population of the comprised 516 staff of media establishments in Rivers State. The study derived a sample size of 225 staff. However, the final analyses in the study was based on data gleaned from 203 respondents. The Spearman’s rank order correlation served as test statistics. The study found that knowledge sharing relates to competitive advantage in terms of market positioning and product uniqueness. The study thus concludes that knowledge sharing informs competitive advantage of media establishments in Rivers State; and recommends that media establishments should apply knowledge sharing practices if they seek to attain desired competitive advantage outcomes such as improved market positioning and product uniqueness.
Keywords: Competitive advantage, knowledge sharing, market positioning, product uniqueness.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge management has been recognized as a strategic component in business as well as a critical success factor in establishing competitive advantage (Chatzoudes et al., 2015; Chu et al., 2014). The success and survival of organizations depend to a large extent, on their ability to adapt to the ever-changing business environment. This has made the attainment of a position of competitive advantage, major focus of every business that seek superior performance relative to competitors (Rehman et al., 2015). Understanding how to implement strategies to transform knowledge into capital is vital for business leaders and managers. This led to the search for strategic and efficient techniques that may enable organizations meet their general and competitive objectives.

The world is seeing a chain of transformations that affect institutions and companies, as it is exposed to increasing pressure to improve performance or quality of products, and work to reduce costs and compete with high-quality technology. Now, these objectives can only be achieved with knowledge, and this has led many organisations to consider a new form of knowledge management. To meet the needs of fiercely competitive markets, organisations must always improve performance.

Frost (2012) defines knowledge management as the systematic management of an organization’s knowledge assets for the purpose of creating value and meeting tactical as well as strategic requirements. This is then deemed to consist initiatives, processes, strategies, and systems that sustain and enhance the storage, assessment, sharing, refinement, and creation of knowledge. Girard (2015) puts knowledge management simply as the creation, transfer, and exchange of organizational knowledge to achieve a (competitive) advantage. Samuels (2011) adds that firms, irrespective of orientation and sizes require realtime access to knowledge on several subjects, including information on core business and conditions affecting it, business units' current objectives and corresponding organizational requirements, and the latest industry trends.

The operational priority of all firms in today's fast-changing business world is to stay competitive in order to survive and grow. Porter (1985) indicates that competitive advantage is the heart of an organization's performance in a competitive environment. Hence, businesses locally and globally strive not only to attain competitive advantage but also to sustain and persevere in the long run. Peters (2010) claims that "excellence in execution" was, is, wherever, and forever will be sustainable competitive advantage. Barney et al. (2001) suggest that sustained competitive advantage is a resource-based strategy, which evidently is a potent business strategy today; and firms that can sustain their competitive advantage will outperform others in the long run.

The need for information and development of knowledge in organisations is the role of knowledge management, and as such, it has become a vision of organisations that are absorbed in maintaining competitive edge. Creating a long-term competitive advantage from information management and knowledge is paramount to organizational success in the knowledge economy and era of global competition. To address these challenges and improve performance, the adoption of knowledge management strategies is necessary for organisations.

However, despite the fact that knowledge has become a valued asset in all organisations, the process of knowledge management and its impact on organisational performance has scanty literature. Cerichone and Esposito (2017) noted that increasing organization's members' access to knowledge better equips them to perform more efficiently, and increases the probability of enhanced performance and competitive dominance. Ho et al. (2014) argue that technology is integral to maximizing knowledge management to achieve increased organizational performance; Wang and Wang (2016) examined knowledge management on the performance of the workforce. These studies examined knowledge sharing in relation to performance, and mainly focused in the Asian work environment, none seems to examine the effect of knowledge sharing in relation to competitive advantage in the Nigerian work setting, let alone Rivers State.

Therefore, this study focused on how knowledge sharing strategies can be used to enhance competitive advantage of media establishments in Rivers State, Nigeria, with the following research objectives and hypotheses as conceptualized in fig. 1.

1) To ascertain the relationship between knowledge sharing and market positioning of media establishments in Rivers State.
2) To ascertain the relationship between knowledge sharing and product uniqueness of media establishments in Rivers State.

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between knowledge sharing and market positioning of media establishments in Rivers State.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between knowledge sharing and product uniqueness of media establishments in Rivers State.

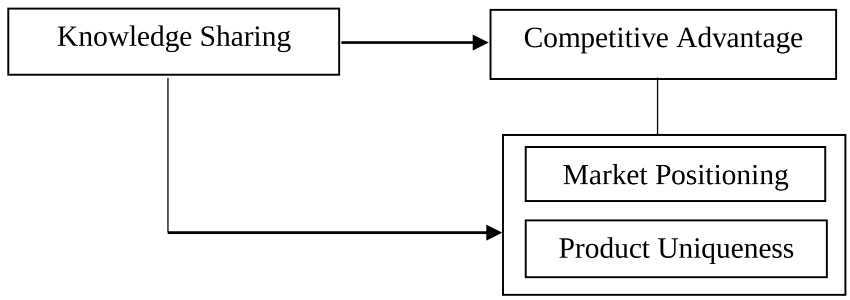

Fig. 1: Conceptual framework on the relationship between knowledge sharing and competitive advantage

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Knowledge sharing

Drucker (1998, as cited in Ateke & Didia, 2017) argue that business enterprises must become information-based and transform themselves into knowledge specialists in order to survive and remain relevant. The generation and use of knowledge is as essential feature of all health firms (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, as cited in Ateke & Didia, 2017). In their interactions with their environments, firms absorb and transform information into knowledge, and then, take action based on that knowledge, in combination with their experiences, values, and internal rules. An organization can neither organize itself nor maintain itself as a functioning enterprise without knowledge.

Knowledge management practices therefore, help organisations to (re)focus on the use of existing knowledge, and create an environment for innovation (Laudon & Laudon, 2012). A prevalent knowledge management practice among firms is knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is the process of transferring knowledge from one person or organizational unit to another, or from one organisation to another. It also called knowledge distribution. The aim of knowledge sharing is to provide opportunity for all to participate in knowledge, in the sense developed in the framework of rules and procedures that allow distribution to all interested in them, and make them available to all destinations, both within the organization and outside.

Knowledge sharing is the first step in the process of using knowledge. It involves distributing knowledge in an appropriate manner, to the right person at the right time, in right format, and in a cost-effective manner (Coakes, 2003). Turban et al. (2004) regard knowledge sharing as the application of willful transfer of ideas and vision, or solutions to someone else, either directly or through an intermediary, such as a computer-based system.

Knowledge sharing can happen during induction of new employees, and when preparing individuals for new posts. Formal instruments that supports knowledge sharing include reports, manuals and training and official meetings. Informal knowledge sharing instruments meetings and discussions that are not formalized. Informal instruments may be more effective, but it may lead to loss of essential parts of knowledge (Husain, 2011).

Almaadida (2003) identified three facets of knowledge storage in organisations. First, is the selection of valued knowledge that deserves preservation; the second is storing the knowledge through conservation, documentation, and archiving; and third, is reloading knowledge from periodically. Tiwana (2008) suggests that, to make better use of tacit knowledge, it is necessary to find a way for it to be transferred directly, making it explicit that can be shared throughout the organisation. Individuals who are rich in tacit knowledge (experienced employees, retirees and other talented experts) constitute a wealth of intangible assets of the organisation (Nemati, 2002; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Loss of tacit knowledge adversely affects quality of products offered by an organization.

The interaction between the employees and technology promotes the creation and sharing of knowledge. Sharing of knowledge plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the knowledge remains in the organisation, even when the familiar left the organisation (Tiwana, 2008). It also cans knowledge to be shared through seminars, conferences, team-building exercises, written reports, and performance evaluation programs and proposing traditional employees. Sharing of knowledge can face challenges Such as lack of time, lack of experience and lack of rewards and clear for knowledge sharing (Nemati, 2002).

Ipe (2003) defined knowledge sharing as "the process of exchanging personally possessed knowledge with others such that it is also understood in a similar manner in the organization." It is a deliberate action where there is no claim to ownership of the knowledge. Sveiby (2001) asserts that as one shares knowledge, there is increased mutual competency as both sharer and recipient are stimulated differently by the knowledge which yields even greater knowledge. Employees who do not share knowledge create barrier to the knowledge management process.

Goh (2002) stipulates that knowledge is equated with power especially in competition, and therefore if competition persists internally, it is expected that employees will hesitate to share knowledge. Knowledge transfer in organizations is facilitated by the communication process utilized and how information flows in the organization. IT constitutes a key enhancer of knowledge transfer through tools of formal communication such as email, teleconference, and intranet (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). Eppler and Mengis (2003) states that advances in IT has increased the quantity and quality of information available to firms. Bawden and Robinson (2008) concurred claiming that the crux of new technology is to facilitate faster access to information. Filippov and Lastrebov (2010) also agreed that ICT has transformed the creation and access to information exponentially.

Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage appears is a widely used term in strategic management even though it remains poorly defined and operationalized (Ma, 2000); and its root is largely debated. Cockburn et al. (2000) opines that competitive advantage is fundamental to strategy research; as it essentially focused on how some firms consistently outperform others. Cockburn et al. (2000) suggests that competitive advantage complex phenomenon rooted in historical analyses and qualitative research (Nguyen, 2010).

Competitive advantage is how attractive a company's offers appear compared to those of the competition. It is the difference in attributes and dimensions and what enables better performance compared to competition. In general, competitive advantage involves quality, effectiveness, responsiveness and innovation (Shahgholi, 2009). Sanayeie and Alavi (2006) define competitive advantage as the set of factors or enablers that allow an organization to perform better than the competition. In other words competitive advantage includes of factor(s) that allow an organization to succeed in a competitive environment and which competitor cannot imitate (Sanayeie & Alavi, 2006; Tajedini et al., 2012). In the view of Thompson and Strickland (2001), competitive advantage is the edge a firm has over rivals in attracting customers and defending against competitive forces.

Crafting an organizational strategy includes determining whether to pursue a competitive advantage based on low cost or product superiority or unique organizational capabilities (Ansari et al., 2013; Thompson & Strickland, 2001). Firms basically engage the use of competitive strategy with the sole aim of gaining competitive advantage (Oghojafor et al., 1998). Civi (2000) and Gupta et al. (2000) suggests that "what organizations know and how they use that knowledge" is the key competitive advantage in the 21st century. Strategic management literature presents competitive advantage as a multidimensional phenomenon. In this study, we proxy competitive advantage with market positioning and product uniqueness.

Market positioning

Positioning encapsulates the activities undertaken by firms to create a distinctive image for themselves and their products in their chosen market (Nwulu & Ateke, 2013). Market positioning therefore, describes how a firm differs from the competition in terms of what it does and how it does it within the market. Market positions are achieved through the deployment of competitive-advantage-generated resources matched to target customers' needs (Brahmane, 2014). Positioning evolved from market segmentation, targeting and market structure. Positioning is a core to strategic marketing (Zack et al., 2009; Clark, 2005).

Zaied et al. (2012) states that a positioning decision means selecting the associations which combine to form a total impression; and that it is often a crucial decision for a brand because it is central to customers' perception and choice. Blankson (2004) define positioning as the deliberate, proactive, iterative process of defining, measuring, modifying and monitoring consumer perceptions of a brand and its offerings. In other words, the process of positioning is iterative and requires deliberate and proactive involvement of the marketer (Blankson, 2004).

Blankson's (2004) definition of positioning is adopted for this study because it can be explained from the perspectives of the consumer, company and competitor. A clear positioning statement ensures that the elements of a marketing program are consistent and mutually supportive (Gregory, 2005; Hooley, 1998). The process of positioning can be described as iterative, it necessitates deliberate and proactive actions, and it involves decisions at conceptual, strategic and operational levels and should reflect the triumvirate deliberations of the company, its competitors and its target market (Kalafatis et al., 2000).

Competitive advantage in marketing literature is used to mean relative superiority in skills and resources or what we observe in the market – positional superiority (Armstrong & Green, 2007). Positional superiority is based on the provision of superior customer value or the achievement of lower relative costs, and the resulting market share and profitability performance. The skills and resources reflect patterns of past investments to enhance competitive positions. Comparative advantage theory explains that competition consists constant struggle among firms for a comparative advantage in resources that yield a position of competitive advantage, and thereby superior financial performance (Thompson et al., 2006).

Product Uniqueness

Scholars argue that people are unhappy if they use product that are common (Hamilton & Richards, 2009; Chung et al., 2013). Valencia et al. (2015) and Holcombe (2009) argue that each consumer has different desire for unique products; and that consumers have need for uniqueness; and a propensity to admire scarce products. Uniqueness is the core of a differentiation strategy (Lofsten, 2014) that focus on adding value. Uniqueness play important roles when a company wants to launch a new product (Davick & Sharma, 2015). The popularity of a new product is determined by the extent of its uniqueness. Hoonsopon and Ruenrom (2012) state that a unique product has more positive consumer response and easily acquire marketplace accomplishment.

Product uniqueness differentiates a firm's offers from those of competitors (Gupta, 2015; Hakkak & Ghodsi 2015). Elements of product excellence are the uniqueness, value, and benefits offered by a company when viewed from customers' perspective, based on the understanding of their needs and desires (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 2000). Hakkak and Ghodsi (2015); Chi and Sun (2015); Veerendrakumar et al. (2015) states that product superiority is an absolute characteristic that must be maintained by a company because it is key to new product success and improved marketing performance (Bellis et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a correlational sturdy design because the study seeks to indicate association between variables. The population of the study consists staff of media establishments in Rivers State. A total of 15 media establishments were identified and surveyed, using staff strength and operational presence as the selection criteria. The various establishments and their staff strength as provided by their respective human resource officers gave the researchers a population of 516 staff. The study employed the Taro Yamane formula sample for sample size determination to derive a sample size of 225 staff. The individual media establishments' sample size was determined using Bowley (1964). Table 1 provides a breakdown of the number of staff, and the proportion of the sample size drawn from each media establishment. The inferences drawn in the study are based on data analyses involving 203 valid responses from respondents.

The primary data needed for this study was collected using structured questionnaire designed in the 5-point Liker scale (where, 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). The research questionnaire fielded multiple choice and close-ended questions about the study variables. The Spearman's rank order correlation served as test statistic. The statistical analyses was aided by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.

The decision rule applied in the bivariate test where $P < 0.05$, reject hypothesis on the basis or evidence significant relationship; and where $P > 0.05$, accept hypothesis on the basis of insignificant relationship between the variables. The magnitude of correlation was assessed using the rho interpretations provided by Bryman and Bell (2003) as shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Population and Sample Distribution

S/N	Media Establishments	Population Distribution	Sample Distribution
1	Radio Rivers	48	21
2	Rhythm FM	23	10
3	Wazobia (Cool and 9ja Info)	31	13
4	Wave FM	22	10
5	Garden City FM	21	9
6	Love FM	20	9
7	Naija FM	21	9
8	Ray Power	23	10
9	Wish FM	20	9
10	Treasure FM	20	9
11	The Guardian Newspapers	23	10
12	Nigeria Television Authority (NTA)	83	36
13	Rivers State Television (RSTV)	87	38
14	Daar Communications Limited	51	22
15	The Nation Newspapers	23	10
	Total	**516**	**225**

Source: Field Data (2022).

Table 2: Description on Range of correlation (rho) values and corresponding level of association

Range of r with positive and negative sign values	Strength of Association
± 0.80 – 0.99	Very Strong
± 0.60 – 0.79	Strong
± 0.40 – 0.59	Moderate
± 0.20 – 0.39	Weak
± 0.00 – 0.19	Very Weak

Source: Adopted from Ahaiauzu, A., & Asawo, S. P. (2016). *Advance social research methods*.

The positive (+) sign in the values of (*rho*) indicates a positive relationship, while the negative (-) sign in the value of (*rho*) indicates an indirect/negative or inverse relationship. Thus, the sign of the *rho* explains the direction of association between the two variables. The above table forms our yardstick for the determination of the level of relationship between the variables of the dimensions and those of the measures as understudied. These relationships range from very weak to very strong as seen from the Table 3.

Table 3: Table showing correlations between knowledge sharing and the measures

			Know_Sha	Mark_Post	Prod_Uniq
Spearman's rho	Know_Sha	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.771**	.530**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	203	203	203
	Mark_Post	Correlation Coefficient	.771**	1.000	.758**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	203	203	203
	Prod_Uniq	Correlation Coefficient	.530**	.758**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	203	203	203

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data (2022).

Table 3 shows a positive and significant relationship between knowledge sharing and market positioning with a rho value of 0.771. This indicates that there is a high strength in correlation between both variables, and this indicates a strong relationship between the variables. However, statistically, as the level of significance is 0.000 and it is which is lesser than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and its alternative form accepted. This states that "There is significant relationship between knowledge sharing and market positioning in media establishments in Rivers State.

Table 5 shows a positive and significant relationship between knowledge sharing and product uniqueness with a rho value of 0.530. This indicates that there is a moderate strength in correlation between both variables. This indicates a moderate relationship between knowledge sharing and product uniqueness in the understudied airline companies. However, statistically, this statement is true as the level of significance of 0.000 is less than 0.05, and as such, the null hypothesis is rejected, and its alternative form accepted. This states that "there is a significant relationship between knowledge sharing and product uniqueness in media establishments in Rivers state."

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Knowledge Sharing and Market Positioning

Knowledge sharing makes a company's impacting decisions ability to increase dramatically, because individuals throughout the firm gain access to each other, rather than going through vertical channels of upper management. Those with the most current knowledge can share it with those who will benefit from it (Sundiman et al., 2013). Furthermore, they noted that it improves the organization's ability to make rapid decisions and execute them effectively. Rahimli (2012) maintained that that sharing of knowledge creates a culture appropriate for gaining competitive advantage and helps in reducing the fear-based approaches to management, which is harmful for competitive advantage. Furthermore, he noted that knowledge sharing reconceptualizes the control orientation of management and replace it with one that emphasizes, facilitation, coaching, and work focus.

Kamya et al. (2010) affirmed that sharing ideas with others is for management to take the lead in creating an environment of understanding, shared control, compassion and learning are objectives for growth. They further noted that all ideas set forth in good faith and backed by rational analysis should be reinforced as beneficial to the company's efforts to create a cauldron of strategic innovation, and the production of resounding results. Knowledge sharing is influenced by good communication and interaction between organizational members. Hence, the successful knowledge sharing is used to generate mutual learning and value creation. This research infers that; Knowledge sharing improves rapid organizational decision-making processes. Knowledge sharing results in the creation of mutual learning and value creation for competitive advantage. Therefore, knowledge sharing is a contributor to improved market positioning.

Knowledge Sharing and Product Uniqueness

Knowledge sharing converts organizational members' knowledge and expertise into explicit products or services (Yang, 2008) which further stimulates innovations. He further noted that knowledge sharing in organizations is the process through which one unit (e.g., group, department or division) is affected by the experience of another, and helps in solving organizational challenges. Although knowledge sharing in organizations involves transfer at the individual level, knowledge sharing in organizations manifests itself through changes in the knowledge or innovation performance of the recipient units (Rasula et al., 2012).

McAdam et al. (2007) found that firms that practice knowledge sharing have higher innovation performance than firms that do not practice knowledge sharing. Furthermore, they noted that these firms will be able to generate more value when they share research and development knowledge together. They concluded that both components of knowledge sharing, which are knowledge collecting and donating are positively related to the firm's innovative capability which contributes to innovative performance.

Firms with effective knowledge gathering and integration will be more distinctive in nature and pose a greater difficulty for competitors to duplicate, thus upholding the higher firm innovation performance potential and competitive advantage. Thus: Knowledge sharing is a contributor to the generation and development of innovative performance. Innovative performance is the core of product uniqueness. Therefore, knowledge sharing increase organizations' product uniqueness.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed to establish the relationship between knowledge sharing and competitive advantage (market positioning and product uniqueness) of media establishments in Rivers State. The evidence from the study showed that all bivariate relationships were significant and positive. Based on the findings, it was affirmed that knowledge sharing is a critical means for attaining competitive advantage. Its practices are core and imperative to the organization's advantage. This is as it is noted to drive the organizations goals and builds its interactions with its workers. The findings of this study nonetheless advance knowledge on the dynamics of knowledge sharing and its usefulness in achieving desired competitive advantage in the organisation.

The observed relationship between knowledge sharing and competitive advantage in media establishments, further credits the theoretical framework of the social exchange theory. There was a strong and positive significant relationship between knowledge sharing and market positioning, but a moderate and positive relationship between knowledge sharing and product uniqueness in media establishments in Rivers State. Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends that knowledge sharing is a strategy to attain desired competitive advantage outcomes such as increased market positioning and product uniqueness

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