
MUTUAL SUPPORT AND SUSTAINABILITY PERFORMANCE OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANIES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between mutual support and sustainability performance of telecommunications companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. It adopted a cross sectional survey design. The study population was 98 managers of five telecommunications companies that use GSM technology in Rivers State. Descriptive statistics was used for univariate data analysis. Spearman Rank Order Correlation was used for bivariate analysis. The analysis showed significant relationship between mutual support and measures of sustainability performance (environmental and social performance). This study concludes that significant relationship exists between mutual support and sustainability performance. The study recommends that managers should set clear goals, create teamwork recognition programs and continually assess organizational performance on the basis of sustainability.

Keywords: Mutual Support, organizational sustainability performance, environmental sustainability, and social sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The sustainability and sustainable development discourse in the academic and policy literature is gaining momentum. For nearly twenty years, these ideas have dominated discussions on how to advance international development. Climate change, the race to cut fossil fuel emissions, the move to renewable energy, and the transition to a circular economy are all recent developments in the policy arena that have increased the momentum behind sustainability and sustainable development (Wackernagel et al., 2017).

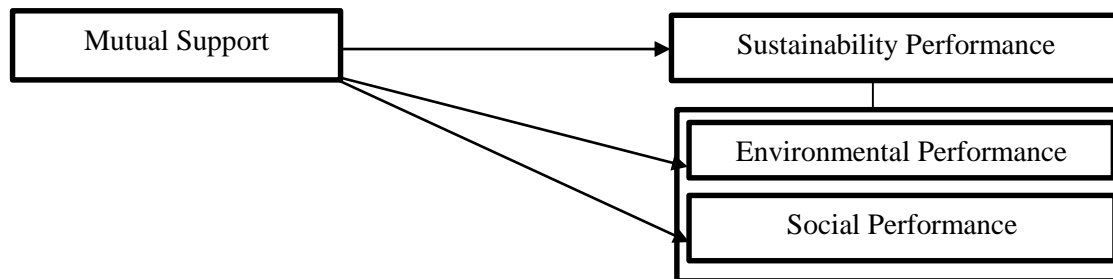
Academics and researchers have worked to uncover the elements that aid or impede the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs) so that policy decisions made to achieve these goals can be better informed. Weak infrastructure, unusually huge demand for service due to inefficiencies of the past, spectrum planning and allocation problems, enabling laws and regulations limitations, and unreliable power supply are some of the challenges facing the achievement of the SDGs. Others include interconnectivity, tariff regulations, effective competition, monitoring and compliance, managing consumer expectations, consumer education and institutional strengthening.

However, the debate on drivers of the achievement of the SDGs is ongoing. Herein, we speculate that mutual support among team members is a likely driver. This speculation is premised on the notion that teamwork is essential to the attainment of organizational goals, and since SDGs have become intertwined with business goals, then supportive working relationship among team members has the capacity to lead to the attainment of sustainability of objectives of the firm. Teamwork is the lifeline of corporate existence. The firm ceases to exist or exists on life-support, once its members begin to work at cross purposes.

Organizations become inefficient and perform poorly when workers' effort or contribution declines; and unmotivated workers indulge in anti-social and uncooperative behaviors. So, teamwork and cohesion suffer; and goal attainment is negatively affected when employees do not support one another. This study therefore, attempts to explain the relationship between mutual support and sustainability performance of telecommunications companies in Rivers State. The study looked only at the environmental and social aspects of sustainability performance. The study therefore, formulated and tested the following null hypotheses:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between mutual support and environmental performance of telecommunications companies in Rivers State.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between mutual support and social performance of telecommunications companies in Rivers State.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: Stakeholder theory

This study is rooted in stakeholders' theory which holds that a company should not produce value for shareholders alone, but also for other stakeholders. The idea of stakeholders is a perspective on capitalism that emphasizes the interdependent connections that exist between a company and its clients, suppliers, workers, investors, communities, and any other individuals or groups who have a vested interest in the organization.

Companies work toward their ultimate objective, which is to produce the highest possible profit margin in their operations (Hategan et al., 2018). In order for businesses to maximize their earnings, they need to work on enhancing their reputation and image in the eyes of their stakeholders and satisfying the requirements that they have set forth (Hategan et al., 2018). The study adopts stakeholders' theory because it highlights the obligation of telecommunications companies to engage various stakeholders, better understand their perspectives and concerns on key issues and to integrate those perspectives and concerns (when and where feasible and prudent) into the company's social sustainability policy.

Concept of Mutual Support

Mutual support undergirds the ability of an organization to achieve sustainability performance. According to Hoegl and Gemünden (2001), the basic idea behind teamwork is mutual support. That is, team members' support for one another, instead of giving in to unhealthy competition. Mutual support is embedded in cooperation among team members and respecting team member's ideas and decisions. The quality of contribution and acceptance of ideas generated by members of a team increases when members effectively work together (Cooke & Szumal, 1994).

To understand the sustainability of job performance, Jiang et al. (2017) study of 389 project teams analyzed task sustainable performance and relational sustainable performance, which refer to, respectively, the extent

to which employees achieve their own sustainable development by meeting their tasks on time, and the extent to which employees contribute to the organizational goal and the sustainability of organizational culture (Jiang et al., 2017). The position aligns with the report of Nguyen (2019) that managerial support, environment, motivation, and engagement of all members in the organization drive sustainable performance of small and medium enterprises.

Concept of Sustainability Performance

Governments, corporate bodies and private individuals have increasingly recognized the impact businesses have on the economic, social and environmental psyche of society. Thus various stakeholders have accorded more attention to sustainability, and are evaluating impacts of companies' operations on society and environment. The realization today, is that maximizing profit at the detriment of the operating environment is not a sustainable approach. Hence, discourses on sustainability highlight the need for firms to contribute to economic prosperity, environmental quality and social justice. These three planks are the fulcrum of sustainability. So, a company's sustainability performance may be measured in terms of economic, social and environmental performance. In this study however, we focus only on environmental and social performance.

Environmental performance: this is a measure of a company's performance that gauges its efforts at maintaining the natural environment to sustain human existence now and in the future. Ecosystem health and the ability of the natural environment to support human activity are essential concepts in discussions of environmental sustainability (Brodhag & Taliere, 2006). It necessitates long-term use of natural capital as a reservoir for economic inputs. To put it another way, we cannot take from the earth any more quickly than it can give back, and we cannot dump our garbage any quicker than nature can absorb it. This is because there are bounds or limits within which the earth maintains balance.

Social performance: A firm's efforts to ensure equal opportunity, self-determination, ease of access, people's active engagement, maintaining one's cultural identity, and the reliability of institutions are all elements of social performance. Since development is focused on people, this idea infers that people are important. The term "social sustainability" was used by Littig and Griebler (2005) to describe a method of social organization that effectively combats poverty. On a more fundamental level, however, the term "social sustainability" is used to describe the interconnectedness of social problems like poverty and environmental degradation (Farazmand, 2016). Thus, a firm score high on social performance if it providing people with access to quality healthcare, education, gender equality, peace, and stability so that they may live fulfilling lives (Saith, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

This study used cross-sectional research design because it allows for quantitative depiction of population-wide patterns, attitudes, or views via the examination of representative samples. The population in the investigation comprise management level employees of 9 licensed telecommunications firms in Nigeria (Nigerian Communications Commission [NCC], 2021). However, the accessible population comprise managers of 5 major telecommunications firms using the Global System for Mobile communication (GSM) technology in Rivers State, and that are registered with NCC. They are MTN, Globacom Limited, Airtel, 9mobile (formerly Etisalat), and Ntel. These firms are selected on the criteria that GSM technology has the largest number of subscribers totaling 122,681,418 as compared to other technologies such as CDMA, Fixed Wireless, Fix Wired, Voice over internet protocol (VOIP) (NCC, 2019). The study collected data using structured questionnaire, and tested the formulated hypotheses using the Spearman's Rank Order statistic.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSES

Table 1: Summary distribution of Responses for Mutual Support

Dimensions	Indicators	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Mutual Support	Team member’s support and complement each other as well as they can.	9	7	37	18	2.74	.743
	Discussions among the team members are constructive and beneficial.	2	4	12	53	2.82	.814
	Proposals and suggestions of team members are respected.	14	12	25	20	2.21	1.071
	We work within a cooperative ambience.	2	3	23	43	2.63	1.093

The summary mean distribution for the dimensions of teamwork as seen in Table 1 reveal values for each item of mutual support.

Table 2: Summary distribution of Responses for sustainability performance

Dimensions	Indicators	SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Environmental Sustainability	We are fully aware of the environmental damage caused by our activities and take steps to address them.	9	5	39	18	2.61	.737
	We offer our employees training on environmental issues to reinforce our ecological awareness and recognition.	3	2	23	43	2.82	.964
	We take steps to install systems that enable us make more money while being environment friendly.	6	7	40	18	2.54	.,733
	Our organization has an effective system for sustainability reporting and compliance.	3	2	23	43	2.42	.835
Social Sustainability	We consider our employees as our best asset and ensure we care for their safety and welfare.	2	2	24	43	2.66	.841
	We pay our employees fair wages according to their professional skills and performance.	9	7	37	18	2.71	.758
	Our organization is concerned about preserving the cultural heritage of the communities in which we operate.	2	4	12	53	2.61	.703
	We are mindful of the needs of our immediate community and work to satisfy them.	2	4	17	48	2.31	.791

Table 2 illustrates frequency of respondents’ agreement to items concerning the metrics of sustainability performance (environmental and social performance). The results reveal that respondents agreed that their organizations operated in a sustainable manner.

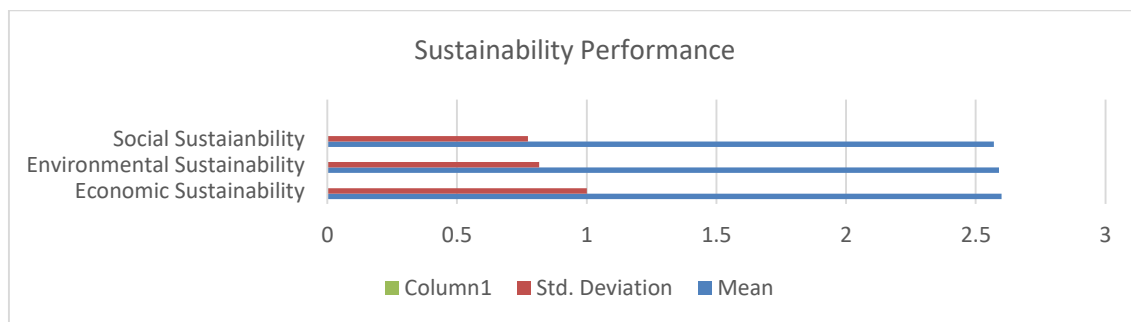


Fig. 1: Bar chart showing summary mean value for each metric of sustainability Performance.

The summary mean distribution for metrics of sustainability performance are as follows: Social sustainability ($x = 2.57$). The mean value for each measure further affirms that the respondents' agreed that there was a moderate level of sustainability performance in telecommunications companies in Rivers State.

Table 3: Correlation between mutual support and measures of sustainability performance

		Mutual Support	Environmental Sustainability	Social Sustainability
Mutual support	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.710**	.901**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
	N	71	71	71
Environmental Sustainability	Correlation Coefficient	.710**	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	71	71	71
Social Sustainability	Correlation Coefficient	.901**		1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	71	71	71

Table 3 shows the results of Spearman Rank correlation Coefficient for the relationship between mutual support and measures of organizational sustainability performance. The evidence of this relationship is as follows:

- 1) The association between mutual support and environmental performance is significant at $\rho = .710$ and $P = .0000$. The result indicates a significant relationship between mutual support and environmental performance of telecommunication companies in Rivers State.
- 2) The association between mutual support and social performance is significant at a very high extent where $\rho = .901$ and $P = .0000$. The result indicates a significant relationship between mutual support and social performance of telecommunication companies in Rivers State.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The main objective of the study is to ascertain the relationship between mutual support and sustainability performance of telecommunications companies in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives were to determine whether, mutual support has significant association with proxies of sustainability performance (environmental and social performance). The results showed that mutual support has positive significant relationship with sustainability performance of telecommunications companies in Rivers State.

Given the responses obtained from respondents and the result from the analysis, it is apt to conclude that mutual support has significant relationship with sustainability performance of telecommunications companies in Rivers State. Specifically, we conclude that mutual support could lead to sustainability performance of telecommunications companies.

Thus, the study recommends that managers of telecommunications companies should encourage mutual support among their employees. Also managers of telecommunications companies should set clear team goals and create an environment where team members are encouraged to contribute to discussions to boost inclusion and a sense of commitment towards accomplishing organizational goals.

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