

A Literature Review on Knowledge Management Practices and Sustainability of Microenterprises in the Informal Sector of Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the critical role of knowledge management practices in enhancing sustainability among microenterprises in Abia State's informal sector, Nigeria. Despite their substantial economic contributions, these microenterprises face significant challenges in implementing formal knowledge management practices due to informality, resource constraints, and limited access to training. By conducting a thorough literature review to investigate the relationship between knowledge management practices and microenterprise sustainability the study exposes context-specific challenges and opportunities. Theoretical perspectives and empirical findings are also integrated to develop a tailored framework which combines knowledge management, technology acceptance, organizational learning, and social capital to foster sustainable microenterprises. The proposed framework offers practical implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and microenterprise owners, contributing to evidence-based policymaking and sustainable economic development in Abia State's informal economy.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Sustainability, Microenterprises, Informal Sector, Organizational Learning, Technology Acceptance, Social Capital.

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's knowledge-driven economy, effective knowledge management (KM) has become a critical factor for organizational innovation, adaptability, and long-term success (Nyuga & Tanova, 2024). While large corporations have widely adopted KM practices, microenterprises in the informal sector have only recently gained recognition for their knowledge needs and potential. In Nigeria, microenterprises play a significant role in the economy, contributing to employment, income generation, and local development (Ekpe, 2011; Ibidunni, Mbamali & Olaniyi, 2021; Bawack, 2022).

Despite their economic relevance, microenterprises in Nigeria's informal sector face numerous challenges, including limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and weak institutional support (Adewumi & Chipunza, 2023). These constraints are compounded by difficulties in implementing formal knowledge management practices due to informality, resource limitations, and lack of training (Ibidunni, Kolawole, Olokundun & Ogbari, 2020). However, emerging research suggests that even informal knowledge-sharing processes, such as tacit knowledge exchange and peer learning, can enhance competitiveness and organizational productivity and sustainability (Ajibade, 2016).

In Abia State, where informal microenterprises dominate the entrepreneurial landscape, there remains a critical gap in understanding how knowledge is managed and leveraged for sustainability. Existing studies (Zayed, Edeh, Islam, Nitsenko, Polova & Khaietska, 2022; Garba, Salleh & Hafi, 2021; Babalola & Omobowale, 2013; Apulu & Latham, 2009; Olubiyi, Omoyele, Ilodigwe, Adeoye, Makinde & Ravinder, 2024) have not sufficiently examined the connection between KM and long-term survival in these contexts, nor have they explored the unique social, cultural, and technological dynamics influencing KM practices. This study seeks to address that gap by adapting principles from corporate knowledge management, and incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, where microenterprises in Abia State's informal sector can significantly enhance their sustainability and competitive advantage.

The study is guided by the following Research Questions (RQ):

1. How do knowledge management practices influence the sustainability of microenterprises in the informal economy in Abia State, Nigeria?
2. What challenges do microenterprises in Abia State face in implementing knowledge management practices, and how can these challenges be addressed?
3. What role does knowledge sharing play in enhancing the sustainability of microenterprises in the informal sector of Abia State, Nigeria?

The study's objectives are:

1. To explore the influence of knowledge management practices on the sustainability of microenterprises in Abia State's informal sector.
2. To identify the challenges faced by microenterprises in implementing effective knowledge management practices within the informal economy of Abia State..
3. To assess the role of knowledge sharing in enhancing the sustainability and goal achievement of microenterprises in Abia State's informal sector

By exploring these research questions and objectives, this study aims to develop a context-specific framework that captures the unique characteristics and needs of informal microenterprises. It seeks to contribute new perspectives to theory, support evidence-based policymaking, and offer practical

strategies for strengthening resilience and sustainability in similar contexts where research is limited or scarce.

The paper is structured as follows: empirical review of literature, a theoretical framework, gaps in the literature, a conceptual framework, methodology, and expected contributions.

2 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

2.1 Knowledge Management and Organizational Sustainability in Microenterprises

Both large corporations and microenterprises recognize the importance of KM in enhancing their competitiveness and sustainability (Halmaghi & Todăriță, 2023). They employ various KM practices, such as knowledge sharing, acquisition, and utilization, to drive innovation and growth (Villar et al., 2014; Escobar-Castillo & Velandia-Pacheco, 2023). However, the approaches differ significantly. Large organizations focus on structured processes, developing knowledge repositories, and nurturing communities of practice to facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation (Mishra & Bhaskar, 2011). In contrast, microenterprises adopt informal approaches, including face-to-face interactions, community gatherings, and storytelling, which leverage traditional social networks and cultural practices (Onwubiko, 2022). They can leverage indigenous knowledge systems (Manyaga et al., 2024) or frameworks like the Family Business Continuity Model (Atristain-Suárez & García-Álvarez, 2020) for knowledge transfer and continuity. Despite limited resources, microenterprises' agility and adaptability (Galli-Debicella, 2021) enable creative problem-solving (Vinberg & Danielsson, 2021). Effective KM practices can benefit both large corporations and microenterprises, albeit through different approaches.

Ajibade (2016) examined the role of KM in improving productivity in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through knowledge sharing, retention, and transfer. The study revealed that business owners struggle to comprehend the impact of knowledge acquisition, retention, and transfer on their operations, and most MSMEs lack the necessary skills to formalize tacit knowledge, hindering their ability to leverage business intelligence and enhance productivity. To address this, Herschel, Nemati, and Steiger (2001) suggested establishing knowledge exchange protocols to facilitate the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

The strengths of KM in microenterprises include informal knowledge sharing mechanisms, such as face-to-face interactions and community gatherings, which facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation (Onwubiko, 2022), as well as their ability to quickly respond to changes in their environment (Galli-Debicella, 2021). Numerous studies have recognized the vital role played by KM in enhancing organizational performance by facilitating knowledge creation, sharing, and retention, particularly in Nigerian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), but rarely focus on microenterprises.

Moreover, an overemphasis on technology without considering human and cultural factors can result in KM failure (Grant & Qureshi, 2006). The complexity of knowledge as an intangible asset poses additional challenges, with organizations often lacking supportive systems to leverage knowledge effectively (Torraco, 2000). The ambiguous and dynamic nature of knowledge creates a contradiction between knowledge and management, as KM often focuses on managing people or information rather than facilitating true knowledge creation (Alvesson & Karreman, 2001).

The use of general IT tools rather than specific KM solutions can also lead to issues, particularly when human factors are neglected (Edwards, Shaw, & Collier, 2005). Furthermore, KM is often criticized for being an ill-defined concept, with proponents focusing on implementation details rather than the broader economic and organizational context (Neef, 1999). These counterarguments highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of the challenges and limitations of KM.

Zayed et al., (2022) investigated the effect of KM on the business resilience of microentrepreneurs in Nigeria, finding a significant effect on the business resilience of microentrepreneurs, with knowledge acquisition, knowledge storage, knowledge sharing, and knowledge utilization all contributing to this effect. Using a cross-sectional survey with a purposive sampling technique, the study focused specifically on the Nigerian hospitality industry and was silent on study location and the informal sector. In a similar study, Ekwealor, Okeke, Nwankwo & Okeke (2023) investigated the influence of KM on organizational performance of small and medium enterprises in Anambra state, Nigeria and concluded that KM had significant positive effect on organizational performance of small and medium enterprises in Anambra State. Their study also utilized a quantitative approach, leveraging data from formal sector SMEs in Anambra State, but did not cover informal microenterprises or State differences.

Babalola & Omobowale's (2013) study reveals that cybercafé micro-entrepreneurs achieve success by developing trust, employing KM strategies, and innovating. Key factors contributing to their success include trust building, employee welfare, customer relations, knowledge transfer, and the strategic use of knowledge as a competitive force through the introduction of new services and activities. A qualitative approach was used for the study but like most other studies, though sustainability is implied. The study does not mention the informal sector and is limited to cybercafés in Ibadan, Oyo State Nigeria.

Research by Olubiyi et al., (2024) found a significant correlation between KM techniques and the long-term survival of family firms, with evidence suggesting that the growth of enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria is significantly influenced by factors such as knowledge training, knowledge generation, knowledge capture, information sharing, knowledge transfer, and knowledge application. The study also validates the empirical data on the correlation between KM strategies and the long-term viability of family enterprises. The study used a cross-sectional research design and a quantitative technique and was limited to Lagos state but did not clearly account for the unique constraints of microenterprises in the informal economy, sectoral or regional differences.

The effectiveness of KM in microenterprises is hindered by several limitations. These include resource constraints, limiting investment in KM infrastructure, technology, and processes (Paola et al., 2023), and inadequate strategic management, leading to fragmented activities and lack of organizational support (Martinsons, Davison, & Huang, 2017; Chan & Chau, 2005). Additionally, informal KM can lead to knowledge loss and limited scalability (Vinberg & Danielsson, 2021), while the complexities of tacit knowledge conversion can also pose challenges (Balaban-Ökten & Gundes, 2019).

While these studies confirm the importance of KM to business performance, they frequently neglect the unique contextual and structural challenges faced by microenterprises in resource-constrained, informal environments like Abia State.

2.2 Technology Use and Knowledge Management in Microenterprises

In a study on computer literacy and use of ICT as key factors of micro-enterprise success, Werber, B., Rajkovič, U., Urh, M., & Žnidaršič, A. (2015) emphasizes the importance of separately studying micro- enterprises due to their unique characteristics. The study reveals that successful micro-enterprises rely on strategic ICT adoption and effective use, underscoring the importance of ongoing ICT skills development and training for owners and managers.

While Okundaye, Fan & Dwyer (2019) and Ogunkoya, Adebayo & Soremekun (2023) provide valuable insights into the role of ICT adoption and knowledge creation in enhancing organizational performance, their studies have limitations. Okundaye et al.'s qualitative multiple-case study highlights the potential of ICT adoption to boost SMEs' profitability and global competitiveness in Nigeria, but its scope is limited by its silence on location-specific constraints, informal sector dynamics, and regional differences as well as its emphasis on SMEs. Similarly, Ogunkoya et al.'s study, which focuses on the manufacturing sector, recommends strategies to promote innovation and competitiveness, but may not be applicable due to its contextual limitations. Furthermore, Onikoyi, Fetuga, Odeh & Onaolapo (2024) study, which explores KM technologies and strategies in Lagos State's foam manufacturing sector, leaves a gap in understanding the experiences of informal microenterprises and regional variations. These limitations highlight the importance of context-specific research that addresses the distinct challenges and opportunities in various sectors and regions.

2.3 Social Capital and Enterprise Sustainability

In the Nigerian context, social capital has been identified as a critical factor in enterprise sustainability, particularly in the informal sector (Akintimehin, Eniola, Alabi, Eluyela, Okere & Ozordi, 2019; Olamide & Ogbechie, 2021). Research has shown that social capital can facilitate access to resources, information, and knowledge that are essential for enterprise sustainability in Nigeria (Akintimehin et al., 2019). Additionally, social capital can help enterprises build strong relationships with stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, and partners, which can lead to increased loyalty and retention (Adebayo, Abu & Yusuf, 2019). Several empirical studies have shown that social capital enhances knowledge access and business resilience. Nwosu, Orji, Urama, Emecheta, Chukwuma & Chukwuma (2020) and Ozigi, (2018) demonstrated that trust and reciprocity within informal networks facilitate informal credit access and reduce business risk.

In a study of women in Ekiti State, 2013 Oke (2013) noted that significant relationships exist between business growth and social network, with family and friends accounting for the largest part of the network. Olamide & Ogbechie, (2021) also demonstrated that external social capital, particularly leveraged through online networking and social media platforms, has a more pronounced impact on the business performance of female-owned SMEs in the Nigerian informal sector, suggesting that external networks, relationships, and resources accessed through digital channels play a critical role in driving business success. Meagher, K. (2006) argue that the current literature on African social networks relies too heavily on broad generalizations and instead proposes a closer look at the specific strengths and capacities of indigenous economic institutions. The study opined that social networks in Nigeria's Aba area in Abia State can promote economic development or hinder it due to redistribution and state neglect.

While studies acknowledge the significance of social capital, few have investigated its relationship with knowledge sharing and technology adoption in the context of microenterprise sustainability.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Knowledge Management (KM)

Knowledge Management refers to the systematic processes through which organizations acquire, create, store, share, and apply knowledge to improve performance and achieve strategic objectives (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Davenport & Prusak, 1998). KM theory asserts that knowledge is a vital organizational resource, and its effective management is crucial for enhancing decision-making, driving innovation, and ensuring long-term sustainability (Lopes, Scavarda, Hofmeister, Thomé & Vaccaro, 2017). The SECI model, developed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), is a KM framework that describes knowledge creation, sharing, and utilization within organizations. The model consists of four modes: Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization, which convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. By applying this model, organizations can identify, articulate, document, and share knowledge, enhancing individual and organizational learning. It remains a foundational concept in knowledge management, despite some limitations. In microenterprises operating in the informal sector, such as in Abia State, Nigeria, KM practices often occur informally and unintentionally, embedded in daily routines. Despite the lack of formal systems, knowledge is continually created, shared, and applied through interpersonal or group interactions, apprenticeships, job shadowing and hands-on experiences. To promote sustainability and continuity in these volatile or resource-constrained environments, it's essential to understand how knowledge is managed in such settings. Earlier research (Zack, McKeen & Singh, 2009; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Edvardsson & Durst, 2013) has demonstrated that even small enterprises can derive benefits from implementing basic KM practices, such as experience sharing, formal and informal documentation, and leveraging simple technology tools. Nevertheless, there remains a dearth of research on the applicability of KM theory to microenterprises operating within the informal sector, particularly in developing economies such as Abia State, Nigeria, thereby underscoring the significance of this study.

3.2 Organizational learning theory (OLT)

Organizational learning theory (OLT) (Argyris & Schön, 1978) is a framework for understanding how organizations learn and adapt to their environments. The theory emphasizes the importance of organizational learning in achieving long-term success and sustainability. Its key constructs which represent different levels of learning and adaptation in organizations are the (1) the single-loop learning in which actions are adjusted to achieve outcome without questioning assumptions, and (2) Double-loop learning in which assumptions and values are questioned, and actions changed accordingly. (3) Deutero- learning is the most advanced and involves learning how to learn and adapt to new situations.

The application of this theory in similar studies to understand how organizations learn and adapt to their environments include the innovation and change management to adapt to changing environment (Senge, 1990; Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011), KM to elucidate how organizations can manage knowledge and learning to achieve competitive advantage (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), how OLT can complement KM to enhance organizational performance through the utilization of tacit and explicit knowledge (King, 2009) and the use of OLT to understand how organizations can develop

and change over time (Argyris, 1993). Despite its wide application, OLT has been criticized for placing more emphasis on individual learning thereby neglecting the role of organizational structures and systems in facilitating learning and for not being generalizable to all types of organizations or contexts. In the context of microenterprises operating within the informal sector of Abia State, organizational learning is typically by experiential and adaptive approaches. These enterprises often rely on informal learning mechanisms, such as learning-by-doing, trial and error, observation, and mentorship, particularly through informal apprenticeships or peer learning networks, due to the absence of formal training structures (Irene, Chukwuma-Nwuba, Lockyer, Onoshakpor & Ndeh, 2024). This context-specific learning process enables microenterprises to respond effectively to changes in market demand, customer preferences, and supply chain disruptions (Rose, 2012). By leveraging organizational learning, microenterprises can enhance their resilience and sustainability through: (1) adapting to changing environments, (2) innovating within resource constraints, and (3) embedding lessons from past experiences into future practices (Awad & Martín-Rojas, 2024). When combined with Knowledge Management, organizational learning becomes more structured and repeatable, facilitating microenterprises' transition from reacting in order to survive to being proactive with a view to sustainability. The integration of learning into daily practice also encourages innovation and competitive advantage, even in resource-constrained environments (Dodgson, 1993; Bontis & Fitzpatrick, 2002). However, the existing literature on organizational learning tends to focus on large or formal organizations, leaving a knowledge gap regarding its application in informal, low-capital enterprises in developing countries. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how formal and informal learning support the sustainability of microenterprises in Abia State.

3.3 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was developed by Fred Davis in 1986 and later extended in 1989. TAM is a theoretical model that explains how users form attitudes and intentions to use a technology. It is hinged on five key constructs of (i) Perceived Usefulness (PU) which is the degree to which a user believes that a technology will improve their performance. (ii) Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) or the degree to which a user believes that technology can be easily used. (iii) Attitude Toward Using (ATU) or positive or negative feelings toward using a technology. (iv) Behavioral Intention to Use (BI) or user's intention to use a technology. (v) Actual Use (AU) being the actual usage of a technology. (Ursavaş, 2022; Hsiao & Yang, 2011; Taherdoost, pp. 962-3, 2018). TAM has been widely applied in various fields, including information systems to understand user adoption and acceptance of new technologies (Jokonya, 2015), e-learning to examine student acceptance and use of online learning platforms (Eraslan, Yalcin & Kutlu, 2019) and healthcare to investigate the adoption of telemedicine and electronic health records. (Rahimi, Nadri, Afshar, & Timpka, 2018). Notwithstanding its widespread application, there are gaps in the literature which include (i) limited focus on microenterprises compared to large organizations or individual users; (ii) its consideration for KM have been insufficient as few studies have examined its relationship with KM practices; and (iii) most TAM studies have been conducted in developed countries, with limited research in developing countries like Nigeria, resulting in a lack of contextual understanding (Lee, Kozar & Larsen, 2024; Straub, Kiel & Brenner, 1997).

This study aims to apply TAM in the context of microenterprises by investigating the acceptance and use of KM technologies in microenterprises in Abia State, Nigeria. Secondly, to examine the

relationship between TAM and KM by exploring how TAM constructs (PU, PEOU, ATU, BI) influence KM practices in microenterprises, and to provide a detailed and subtle analysis of how TAM applies to microenterprises in the specific cultural, social, and economic conditions of Nigeria thereby address the limitations of previous studies.

The TAM theory will provide explanation on how microenterprises accept and use KM technologies, influencing their performance, identify potential challenges, such as perceived usefulness and ease of use, that may hinder KM adoption, while TAM's ATU and BI constructs can inform strategies for promoting knowledge sharing and sustainability.

3.4 Social Capital Theory (SCT)

Social Capital Theory (SCT), developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988), posits that social relationships and networks are a valuable resource, providing individuals and organizations with access to information, support, and opportunities through key functional components, including network ties, trust, norms, and reciprocity. Individuals and organizations derive resources and benefits from their social relationships (Salajegheh & Pirmoradi, p. 41, 2013; Claridge, 2018) through the connections and relationships between them that forms network ties (Granovetter, 1973; Tsounis & Xanthopoulou, 2024) and the level of trust and confidence they have in each other (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, pp. 710-712, 1995; Wojciechowska, 2021), the values they share and norms that govern social interactions (Coleman, 1988; Mercy Corps, 2017) and the reciprocity that transpires through the exchange of resources, favours and support (Xu, Li & Zhang, 2021; Zaid & Liamputtong, 2024).

SCT has been widely applied in various fields including organizational studies to understand the role of social capital in organizational performance, innovation, and knowledge sharing (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, p.242, 1998; Tsai & Ghoshal, p.464, 1998; (Tantardini & Kroll, 2015); in entrepreneurship to examine the impact of social capital on entrepreneurial success and business growth (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Shane & Cable, 2002; Rijal, Utomo & Ramdhani, 2024) and to investigate the role of social capital in community development and social cohesion (Woolcock, 1998; Adamtey & Frimpong, 2018; Prince, 2024).

Despite its widespread application, SCT has been criticized for its focus on large organizations or communities, neglecting microenterprises (Honig, 1998; Klyver & Hindle, 2007) insufficient consideration of the relationship between SCT and KM practices (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Jurik, Cavender & Cowgill, 2006; Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough & Swan, 2009) and the absence of context- specific studies as most SCT studies were conducted in developed countries, and limited research in developing countries like Nigeria (Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Sheu & Bordon, 2016). This study aims to fill these gaps by applying SCT to investigate the role of social capital in microenterprises in Abia State, Nigeria; examine the relationship between SCT and KM by exploring how SCT constructs (network ties, trust, norms, reciprocity) influence KM practices in microenterprises and offer a more detailed and contextualized understanding of SCT in the Nigerian context, addressing the limitations of previous research.

SCT directly relates to this study's research questions and objectives as it helps to explain how social capital influences KM practices and organizational performance (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), identifies potential challenges, such as limited network ties and trust, that may hinder KM adoption

(Granovetter, 1973; Tsounis & Xanthopoulou, 2024) and focusses on social capital and reciprocity which can inform strategies for promoting knowledge sharing and sustainability (Xu et al., 2024).

4 GAPS IN LITERATURE

1. Scarcity of research applying KM theory to microenterprises operating within the informal sector, particularly in developing economies like Abia State, Nigeria.
2. Insufficient literature applying organizational learning to resource-constrained microenterprises in the informal economy of developing countries.
3. Most TAM studies have been conducted in developed countries as opposed to developing countries like Nigeria, resulting in a lack of contextual understanding.
4. Few studies exist that have examined the relationship between TAM constructs and KM practices.
5. Social Capital Theory (SCT) has been criticized for its focus on large organizations or communities, neglecting microenterprises.
6. There is a need to explore how SCT constructs (network ties, trust, norms, reciprocity) influence KM practices in microenterprises.
7. Organizational learning, Social Capital and Technology Acceptance studies conducted in developed countries did not consider their application and relevance in developing countries like Nigeria.
8. Microenterprises in the informal sector are rarely studied, despite their distinct challenges. Most studies are rather centred on formal SMEs.
9. Research on knowledge management frequently neglects microenterprise sustainability. This undermines its potential for supporting the achievement of long-term sustainability.
10. Knowledge management studies that are specific to Abia State and the South-East zone of Nigeria are rare.
11. The adoption of an integrative theoretical frameworks that combine KM, organizational learning, technology acceptance and social capital is uncommon.

This study, therefore, aims to bridge the existing knowledge gaps by examining the role of KM in promoting the sustainability of microenterprises in the informal sector of Abia State, Nigeria, thereby contributing new empirical and conceptual understandings that enrich the KM and development literature.

5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded on a conceptual framework that brings together four key theories: Knowledge Management Theory (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), Organizational Learning Theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), and Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986). The framework aims to explore how these theories interact to support the sustainability of microenterprises in the informal economy of Abia State.

At its core, the framework focuses on the KM processes of acquiring, sharing, utilizing, and retaining knowledge (Wiig, 1993; Davenport & Prusak, 1998). KM is crucial for microenterprises to develop capabilities, make informed decisions, and adapt to changing environments (Skyrme, 2007; López-Nicolás & Meroño-Cerdán, 2011).

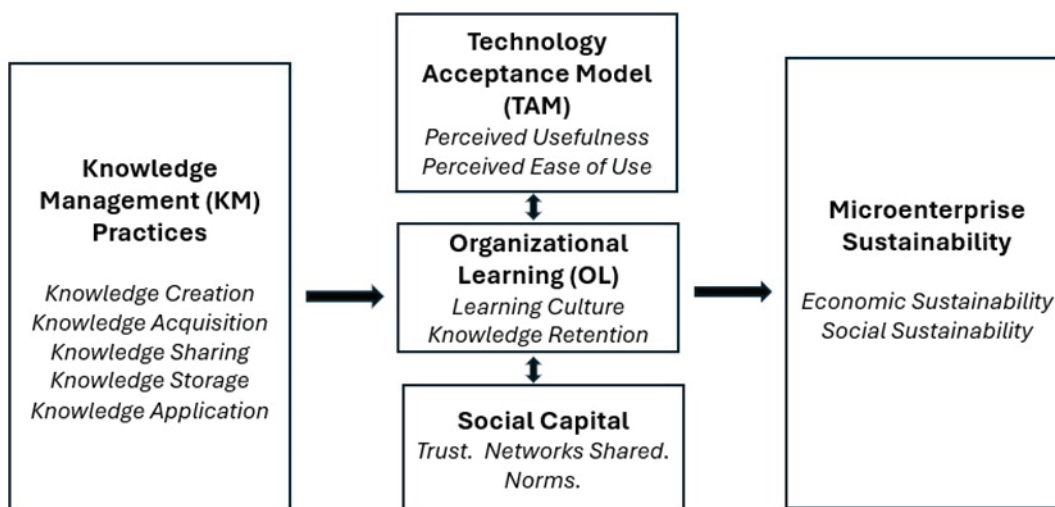
Organizational Learning Theory is also integral to the framework, highlighting the dynamic learning processes that occur within microenterprises. This includes single-loop and double-loop learning, which are essential for continuous improvement and innovation (Cvjetković, Cvjetković & Josimović, 2022). These learning processes are both an outcome of and contributor to effective KM

practices. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is incorporated to examine the role of technology in facilitating knowledge processes. Specifically, it looks at how perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use influence the adoption of digital tools, platforms, and information systems that enhance knowledge sharing and operational efficiency. (Obiki-Osafiele, Efunniyi, Abhulimen, Osundare, Agu, & Adeniran, 2024)

Social Capital Theory adds a socio-relational dimension to the framework, exploring how networks of relationships, trust, norms, and shared values affect individuals' willingness and ability to share knowledge (Islam, Naqshbandi, Bashir, & Ishak, 2022). In informal sector microenterprises, where formal structures are limited, social capital is a vital enabler of collaboration and informal learning (Joseph & Totawar, 2020).

The framework suggests that these four constructs interact to influence microenterprise sustainability, which are defined in terms of long-term viability, adaptability, and continuity in a dynamic environment. The relationships between the constructs are complex and interdependent, with social networks supporting knowledge sharing, technology enabling its dissemination and application, learning enhancing its depth, and all contributing to enterprise resilience and growth. This is illustrated in the diagram below:

Figure: 1. Conceptual Framework Linking KM, TAM, OL and SC to the Sustainability of Microenterprises in the Informal Sector of Abia State, Nigeria



Conceptual Framework Linking Knowledge Management, Technology Acceptance, Social Capital, and Organizational Learning to the Sustainability of Microenterprises in Abia State's Informal Sector

In the diagram, the Independent Variable is Knowledge Management Practices while the the Dependent is Microenterprises Sustainability. Knowledge Management influences Microenterprise Sustainability indirectly through Technology Acceptance, Organizational Learning, and Social Capital which are intervening variables. These variables serve as mechanisms through which KM practices affect sustainability. Knowledge Management therefore plays a crucial role in the sustainability of microenterprises by enabling a structure and organized approach of acquiring, creating, sharing, and applying knowledge which will ultimately result in enhanced decision-making, innovation, adaptability, and operational efficiency.

The effectiveness of KM is influenced by the intervening variables. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is centred on perceived usefulness and ease of use upon which the adoption of KM depends, and its integration into microenterprise operations will ultimately enhance sustainability. Knowledge Management's effectiveness is also enhanced by a strong learning culture that is rooted in Organizational Learning (OL), leading to improved sustainability through continuous improvement and adaptability. Networks, norms, trust and relationships which are components of Social Capital (SC) contribute to sustainability by facilitating knowledge sharing, collective problem-solving, and community engagement.

Integrating KM, TAM, OL, and SC facilitates sustainability by (i) providing platforms for knowledge sharing and application, (ii) fostering trust, connections, and shared goals, (iii) enabling microenterprises to adapt and innovate, and (iv) promoting informed decision-making and sustainable practices.

By incorporating KM into their operations, microenterprises in the informal sector of Abia State, Nigeria can enhance resilience, reputation, and long-term success, contributing to economic and social sustainability.

Building upon the aforementioned conceptual framework, this study posits the following hypotheses to investigate the correlations between knowledge management practices and sustainability performance within microenterprises:

RQ1

H1. A positive indirect relationship exists between knowledge management practices and sustainability within microenterprises, mediated by organizational learning.

H2. A positive indirect relationship exists between knowledge management practices and microenterprise sustainability, mediated by social capital.

H3: The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) constructs of perceived usefulness and ease of use moderate the relationship between knowledge management practices and sustainability within microenterprises.

RQ3

H4. Knowledge sharing has a positive indirect effect on sustainability through Organizational Learning (OL) in microenterprises.

H5. Knowledge sharing has a positive indirect effect on sustainability through Social Capital (SC) in microenterprises.

H6. Technology Acceptance Model factors, specifically perceived usefulness and ease of use, moderate the relationship between knowledge sharing and sustainability in microenterprises.

These hypotheses investigate how Organizational Learning, Social Capital, and Technology Acceptance intervenes in the relationships between Knowledge Management practices, knowledge

sharing, and microenterprise sustainability. Research Question 2 takes an exploratory approach to uncover challenges and potential solutions.

6 METHODOLOGY

This study will utilize a mixed-methods exploratory case study design to investigate the role of KM in enhancing sustainability of microenterprises in the informal sector of Abia State, Nigeria. A sequential approach that commences with a quantitative survey of approximately 150-200 microentrepreneurs, followed by qualitative interviews with 10-15 key participants will be utilized. The data collection will comprise a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Collected data will be analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS or similar tools. The patterns and themes in the qualitative data will be identified by conducting thematic analysis. For the purpose of ensuring validity and reliability, pilot testing will be performed and the findings triangulated. To maintain ethical considerations informed consent shall be obtained from participants, their responses kept confidentiality, and data securely stored.

7 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS

This study is expected to provide new insights into how formal and informal knowledge management practices influence the sustainability of microenterprises, identify and address the challenges encountered by microenterprises in implementing effective knowledge management practices, and offer a deeper understanding of the role of KM practices such as knowledge sharing in enhancing the sustainability and goal achievement of microenterprises within the context of the informal sector of Abia State, Nigeria.

Furthermore, it will provide empirical insights into how Integrating KM, TAM, OL, and SC facilitates sustainability by providing a framework for knowledge sharing and application, fostering trust, connections, and shared goals, enabling microenterprises to adapt and innovate, and promoting informed decision-making and sustainable practices. The study offers a framework that is contextualized and suitable for resource constrained and informal enterprises that is applicable to the study area, regional and African settings. The findings there will provide actionable insights for government and development institutions, NGOs and practitioners who are desirous of supporting microenterprise sustainability through knowledge-based interventions.

The potential limitations of this study include its focus on Abia State, Nigeria which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts within or outside of Nigeria. The study relies on self-reported data which may be subject to biases and errors capable of truncating the validity of the findings. Also, the informal economy and knowledge management are complex and diverse concepts that can be challenging to capture within a single study.

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