

Knowledge Management as a Determinant of Social, Economic and Environmental Sustainability in Social Enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research focused on social enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria, and the impact knowledge management has on their sustainability. Using the Resource-Based View, Knowledge-Based Theory, and Organisational Learning, the current research has been able to understand one relational aspect of knowledge management, which is divided into four dimensions, namely, knowledge generation, utilisation, sharing, and storage, and how they impact the three (3) branches of sustainability, which are economic, social and environmental. A quantitative correlational research methodology was employed. Primary data was obtained by the means of structured questionnaires administered to 486 social enterprises that were purposefully sampled from a target population of 80,740 enterprises located in Lagos State. The cross-sectional descriptive research method was supplemented by the use of questionnaires, which reflect the constructs of the study, and were measured by the use of multi-item validated scales that have been proven to have reliability. The statistical tools employed descriptive statistics, and regression analysis. The results denote that knowledge utilisation and knowledge storage have positive influence and impact on economic, social, and environmental sustainability, but knowledge generation and sharing have weak and statistically no impact in the sustainability of social enterprises in accordance to the research. This denotes that the sustainability of social enterprises is not the mere creation or generation of knowledge, but the transformation or application of the knowledge that has the impact. The most important aspect of the model is that there is enough value in sustaining internal knowledge capabilities. Sustainability in social enterprises is the process of building internal knowledge capabilities. This is a demonstration that the current sustainable development goals (SDGs) can be achieved by privatising the social enterprises and it adds to the social enterprise and knowledge management literature by showing that different dimensions of knowledge have different impacts on sustainability. The study emphasizes that social enterprises developing better organized systems for capturing and applying knowledge for improving resilience and developmental impact over the long term.

Keywords: *knowledge management, social enterprises, sustainability, sustainability of social enterprises*

1. Introduction

Knowledge management (KM) is best understood not as one tool or as a single system, but as a response to a fundamental managerial problem facing all organizations: how to make sure that what they know is usable as time, roles, and situations change (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). KM is a set of interrelated processes of knowledge creation, storage, retrieval, transfer, and application, and is operationalized by an organization's systems of structure and technology. Their model is noteworthy because it positions knowledge as a kind of active flowing stream and not a bank. The stream of knowledge is not valuable because it is owned, rather, it's valuable because it is active and flowing.

From a more human-centred perspective, Davenport and Prusak (1998) argue that knowledge is experience-based and derives meaning through interpretation and contextualization. In their view, KM is contingent on the cultural, relational, and structural variables of trust and incentives that lead people to share and use their knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) suggest that to achieve a sustainable

competitive and innovative edge, organizations must constantly engage both the tacit and the explicit knowledge of their employees through the processes of socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization.

Considering together these different viewpoints about KM, it can be understood as an integrated process architecture (i.e. KM as a process and a system (Alavi & Leidner, 2001)), a socio-cultural practice (KM as a social and cultural practice (Davenport & Prusak, 1998)) and an innovation mechanism focused on tacit-explicit conversion (KM as an innovation engine (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995)). For sustainability research, this plurality is significant as various KM mechanisms i.e. coordination, learning, or innovation, may affect economic, social, and environmental outcomes differently.

Comparison can be drawn with the ambiguity surrounding the concept of social enterprise. Following the Defourny and Nyssens (2012) framework, social enterprise is described as a hybrid organisational structure with a predominant social aim, economic activity under an associated economic risk, and governance mechanisms that limit the distribution of profits and incorporate stakeholder interests. This approach views hybrid organisational structures as more than just mere rhetoric and instead focuses on the protections surrounding social purposes through organisational structures. In contrast, the ecosystem-based approach as seen in the British Council's mapping of Nigeria's sector (British Council, 2022), operationalises social enterprise by looking for a social or environmental aim, accompanied by economic activity, and the reinvestment of any surplus towards the aforementioned aim.

This distinction is significant in KM research. Theories of governance, as operationalised in these definitions, are centred on decision rights and accountability mechanisms, which structure knowledge (validated and used) internally. In contrast, the ecosystem-oriented definitions emphasize the constraints of resources, the role of informality, the centrality of the founder, and other factors that shape how knowledge is created and practiced. Management of knowledge contributes to sustainability by allowing organizations to create, keep, and use knowledge to enhance the quality, innovativeness, and economical use of resources.

Sustainability has two main levels. On an initial level, the Brundtland Commission (1987) defines sustainable development as considering the future needs of generations and not compromising the future of the existing and future needs of the population. From an ethical and intertemporal viewpoint, they define sustainability. On an organizational level, sustainability has been reframed by Elkington (1997) Triple Bottom Line as social equity, economic viability, and environmental stewardship simultaneously. On an analytical level, it is not simply additive; it amplifies trade-offs and tension across varied dimensions of value. For social enterprises, sustainability is fragile as legitimacy derives from the delicate balance of financial resilience, mission integrity, and environmental accountability.

These definitional foundations help clarify why Lagos is not just a geographic backdrop. Lagos provides a theoretically significant context for examining KM as a driver for sustainability. Lagos is Nigeria's economic centre and a significant contributor to the national GDP, representing an impressive level of commercial dynamism (Lagos State Government, 2025). Simultaneously, it is marked by a high level of informality; Nigeria's enterprise landscape is dominated by informal micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which exhibit a detrimental influence on the level of documented practices, managerial structures, and financial access (World Bank, 2022). This duality complicates KM assumptions.

In economies that are highly informal, KM is often likened to systems that capture and organize data, such as databases, and other structured repositories. Many social enterprises in Lagos operate with fewer staff members, little administrative support, and rely on founders to make decisions. In this scenario, tacit, relational and improvisational forms of knowing may prove to be more critical for operational functions than knowing in a more formal, articulated way.

There are also special features of environmental sustainability in Lagos. Owing to urban pressure including insufficient waste management, flooding, and insufficient regulatory enforcement,

environmentally responsible practices are limited by available infrastructure. For example, more recently implemented policies such as the banning of certain single-use plastics demonstrate how internally-driven environmental sustainability practices are insufficient, and external factors including the price elasticity of the supply chain and the buying habits of consumers also come into play (AP News, 2025). Thus, social enterprises are required to develop and make use of knowledge, and when faced with insufficient infrastructure, to be able to sustain practices in a way that is innovative and in a manner that is aligned with sustainability practices on a global scale.

From an economic perspective, the rapid volatility of the demand in Lagos means that the more that enterprises sustain their practices, the more that their sustained practices will need to resemble resilience to a greater degree than stable growth. Rapid changes in policies, inflation, and competition require enterprises to be responsive in order for them to be successful. In such a context, the KM mechanisms that facilitate the rapid flow of learning and adaptive decision-making are more important than strategies that focus on the long-term codifying decision-making. In the context of social heterogeneity in Lagos, sustainability depends on social legitimacy relationally and across many stakeholder groups. Knowledge also involves interpretative/context-based understanding of community expectations and informal arrangements of governance structures, going beyond mere technical service knowledge.

Lagos is not exactly like other contexts where a lot of KM and sustainability theory originated. The main theoretical relationships remain valid, but they do not express themselves in the same way. They are knowledge enhancing coordination, learning supporting adaptation, innovation enabling sustainability. Lagos amplifies the importance of tacit/relation focused/ adaptive improvisation. It also raises the cost and complexity of formal KM systems, and embeds sustainability within a flexible/integrated infrastructural/institutional fluidity. The point is not to ignore or discard definitions as they are, but contextualize them. KM in Lagos social enterprises is best viewed as a flexible/evolving mix of strategies or defined systems. It should be a system of formal/informal systems that allows hybrid organizations to adapt to economic fluidity, social complexity, and ecological stress while maintaining good performance in the triple-bottom-line.

This study is based on the resource-based view (RBV), knowledge-based theory (KBT) and organizational learning theory (OLT) to show how KM affects sustainability of social enterprises. RBV states that the focus of sustainable advantage is on those that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources (Barney, 1991) and, therefore, knowledge is viewed as a strategic resource. Based on this, KBT argues that the primary resource of the firm of the greatest strategic value is knowledge. According to KBT, the performance of an organisation hinges on the combination and utilisation of specific types of knowledge (Grant, 1996). OLT adds to this by stating that sustained performance hinges on the ability to continually learn, adapt, and maintain the right mix of the two (March, 1991). All these theories converge on knowledge management capabilities as internal strategic mechanisms that, through the generation, sharing, storage, and utilisation of knowledge, enhance the economic, social, and environmental viability of social enterprises.

1.1. Aim

The aim of the study is to examine knowledge management as a determinant of the sustainability of social enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria.

1.2. Research Questions

The study will provide answer to the following:

1. How does knowledge generation, sharing, storage and utilisation influence the economic sustainability of social enterprises in Lagos State?
2. To what extent do knowledge generation, sharing, storage and utilisation affect environmental sustainability of social enterprises in Lagos State?

3. What is the relationship between knowledge generation, sharing, storage and utilisation with social sustainability of social enterprises in Lagos State?

2. Theoretical Perspective

The study is grounded on three theoretical lenses: RBV, KBT and OLT. RBV is applicable for this study as it provides a structured way to argue that the social enterprises' sustainability is not only a result of external constraints (volatile funding, institutional gaps, market failures) but also the resource profile the enterprise possesses and how defensibly those resources can be held over time.

RBV's base claim is that firm resource heterogeneity explains sustained advantage in cases where the resources are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable). When applied to social enterprises in Lagos State, the "advantage" at stake is not merely profit, but the capacity to continuously generate blended outcomes (social, economic and environmental) along the mission. RBV is analytically useful to help identify the category of resources that underpin that endurance: relational capital with the community, legitimacy with the regulators and donors, local problem-solving knowledge, trust and organizational routines.

The RBV also poses a sharper applicable question for social enterprises: if these resources are indeed sustainability-relevant, why don't they automatically translate into stable performance? The answer is that many social enterprises comprise intangible, socially embedded resources, and their value is contingent on sustained activation, particularly through knowledge practices. The KM-focused theories explain the 'how' (how those resources are mobilized, renewed, and protected), while KM alone is insufficient because it provides the 'what' (strategic resources).

KBT is most useful because it can be considered a precise elaboration of RBV: it does not view knowledge as just another resource, but instead centres the integration and application of knowledge as the primary reason for the success and longevity of a firm. Grant's knowledge-based theory views the firm as a place for the integration of specialized knowledge and shifts the focus of resource ownership to the coordination of know-how across people and situational contexts (Grant, 1996). In social enterprises, where the need for integration is the highest due to the complexity of the task at hand, it is also the limiting factor. The enterprise must put together mission knowledge (psychological beneficiary, ethical, community, and, legitimacy), commercial knowledge (pricing, partnerships, and, operational efficiency), and in some cases environmental/operational knowledge (waste, energy, and, compliance). Since Barley, Treem and Kuhn (2018) are not the first to argue that enterprises must be able to manage "multiple trajectories of knowledge," it can streamline our understanding of why sustainability knowledge must sustain diverse forms of knowledge and should not get simplified to a single dominant logic (Barley *et al.*, 2018).

KBT interprets sustainability as the enterprise's ability to sustain the coordination of multiple knowledge pathways so that social or environmental commitments do not get overlooked and compromised as a result of economic considerations. It clarifies what "knowledge management" needs to be understood as in your model: not a generic IT system, but the micro processes that enable, share, transform, and utilize knowledge in the presence of constraints.

This resonates with evidence-based KM in social enterprise. Granados, Mohamed and Hlupic (2017) posit that KM practices in social enterprises facilitate the creation of social, environmental, and economic value, and they point out the informal nature of these practices in smaller, hybrid social enterprises (Granados *et al.*, 2017). The study contribution, consistent with KBT, suggests that the sustainability of a system largely depends on how effectively the system's tacit, experience-based, knowledge is transformed into a pattern of behaviour that can be repeated.

When funding is ambiguous, or there is high turnover of staff, informal, yet solid, knowledge routines become the means by which the enterprise retains its "capability memory." Maalaoui, Le Loarne-Lemaire and Razgallah (2020) take the same logic, but with a more critical approach, by formulating

the question: does weak KM help to justify the stagnant growth of social enterprises, arguing that knowledge, not codified, repeated or leveraged systematically is a reason, not the only one, but a reason, sustainability failures (Maalaoui *et al.*, 2020). Sustained growth of enterprises is contingent on KM because memory capability is integrated and reconfigured aligned to the changing milieu.

The theories of OLT are relevant because they deal with the evolution of knowledge capabilities over time especially under uncertainty, delays of signals, and conflicting objectives. From a different angle, KBT elucidated that knowledge integration is central, while the learning theory posits that integration is not fixed, but a result of iterative processes, where experimentation, detection of errors, and adaptation are present. March (1991)'s delineation of exploration (search, experimentation, and variation) and exploitation (refinement, efficiency and implementation) is particularly pertinent to sustainability because the three dimensions of sustainability to which enterprises are inclined propels them into different learning modes (March, 1991).

Social sustainability usually needs innovative service models to meet changing community needs. Economic sustainability typically is based on expenditure control such as informal routinization or cost containment. And for Environmental sustainability, there is usually a mix of both (i.e. innovative processes that are green and routine processes that ensure compliance). Social enterprises embody this competing demand that often leads to failure because of its over-exploitative (structural, efficient, narrow and mission focused) or over explorative (innovative and financially tenuous) nature. In this regard, the study has a point of leverage: KM is not good by itself. It is good when it strengthens the social, economic and environmental balancing acts of the organization.

Argyris and Schön (1978) have elaborated single-loop and double-loop learning to explain the relevance further. This explains why some organizations engage in adaptation only on the surface while others engage in adaptation at a much deeper level. In double-loop learning, it is not only about error correction within a specific routine but also about revisiting and changing the goals, values, and assumptions that inform an action (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Social enterprises are often vulnerable to this kind of balancing because the sustainability challenge is inherently a matter of values. This is the case when financial pressures, without the ability to engage in a fundamental restructuring of value-laden assumptions, lead to gradual mission drift, and such values include those concerning beneficiaries, pricing, environment and impact accountability.

Sustainability within KM practices through organisational learning theory occurs as a result of reflective adaptation. KM practices that only capture information support single-loop improvements, whereas KM practices that foster collective sensemaking and disruption of hypotheses are more able to foster durable hybridity.

3. Methodology

This study sought to determine the strength and direction of the relationships among knowledge management and the three dimensions of sustainability in social enterprises. The study employs the quantitative, correlational, research design. A correlational approach was adopted as the aim was not to control variables, rather, to determine statistically whether knowledge management practices were associated with economic, social, and environmental sustainability and to what degree. By employing quantitative methods, the study was able to place confidence in the relationships and their interpretations.

Primary data was gained via the use of structured questionnaires directed to social enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria. Lagos offers a convincing empirical scenario: as the economic, commercial, and industrial hub of the country, it contributes significantly to Nigeria's GDP and hosts varied and dynamic business ventures in numerous sectors (Lagos State Government, 2025). Its highly intricate and innovation-based economy that cuts across trade, manufacturing, technology, services, and creative industries is a strong catalyst for social enterprises that tackle social and environmental issues using market solutions (Lagos State Government, 2025). The majority of the enterprises studied are in

education, health, circular economy initiatives, agriculture, technology, creative arts, and environmental services, which are highly aligned with the state's most urgent developmental needs.

The study was aimed at social enterprises that adhered to precise and definable inclusion criteria: organisations with a primary purpose that is social and/or environmental; that undertake commercial trading and make a profit; and that plough back most of their revenue into pursuing their social or environmental goal. These criteria ensured that the study comprised only hybrid organisations, i.e. those organisations that combine a mission orientation with economic activity. The British Council (2022) states that Nigeria is home to about 443,000 social enterprises, with the Lagos State contributing 18 percent (approximately 80,740 enterprises). This estimate set the target for the study's sample size.

Using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size determination, the required sample size was calculated at a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. Applying this estimator to the target population yielded a minimum required sample size of 400 respondents. This threshold was considered sufficient to achieve acceptable sampling precision and to allow generalisation of the findings to the broader population. Upon completion of data collection, 486 fully completed questionnaires were returned and deemed valid for analysis.

A structured questionnaire was created to assess sustainability and knowledge management's essential aspects. Elkington's (1997) Triple Bottom Line framework encompassed sustainability concerning economic, social, and environmental dimensions, and knowledge management items were drawn from Alavi and Leidner's (2001) process-based model. For relevance and contextual appropriateness, a pilot study was conducted involving 20 social enterprises in Ibadan, Oyo State, outside the primary study area. In this pre-test, the data collection tool was refined before full-scale data collection. For assessing the scales' reliability, the internal consistency was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Sustainability was measured using three constructs: Economic Sustainability (6 items, $\alpha = 0.934$), Social Sustainability (6 items, $\alpha = 0.916$), and Environmental Sustainability (6 items, $\alpha = 0.932$) all measured with a Likert scale of 5. Knowledge management was assessed using 28 items across four dimensions: Knowledge Generation (7 items, $\alpha = 0.949$), Knowledge Utilisation (7 items, $\alpha = 0.953$), Knowledge Sharing (7 items, $\alpha = 0.932$), and Knowledge Storage (7 items, $\alpha = 0.938$). The high reliability coefficients represent the internal consistency of all the constructs.

The questionnaires were administered in English, as the participants were educated and proficient in the language to complete the instrument independently without translation and assistance. To reduce non-response bias, several procedural measures were implemented. Follow-up reminders were made through phone calls and personal visit to encourage participation and improve the response rate. Additionally, participants were provided with an ethical consent letter prior to the administration of the questionnaire assuring anonymity and confidentiality, which helped minimise social desirability bias and promote honest, accurate responses.

For the analysis of data, a simple mix of descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation, and variance) was used with some inferential statistics. The measurement model validation and the relationships among the various study variables were assessed using regression analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Details

Developing the demographic profile, information is given about the respondents being Chief Executive Officers (72.2%, $n = 351$) of the majority, while smaller percentages include Officers (13.8%) and Directors and Managers (7.0% each). Such a high number of represented CEOs shows the founder-led and quite flat organisational structures many social enterprises in the developing world have, where roles are multidisciplinary since there is one person doing the planning, executing, and managing. Most

enterprises (85.8%) being formally registered implies some of them are trying to understand and work with the developing laws of the sector.

The sector is predominately young. 81.1% of the enterprises are less than 10 years old and 43.0% are in the 0–5-year range, indicative of a young and growing enterprises. Leading sectoral participation is Technology, Environment, and Innovation (36.8%), followed by Agriculture (21.8%) and Education (18.3%). Ownership is primarily entrepreneurial, with sole proprietorships (55.8%) and partnerships (44.2%) prevalent. Over half (54.7%) are small sized firms, which combines limited resources with agility. Commercial trading (43.8%) affirms hybrid revenue models, while strong community commitment (33.5%) is in contrast with a limited focus on democratic governance (3.9%).

4.2. Knowledge Generation, Sharing, Storage and Utilisation Effect on the Economic Sustainability of Social Enterprises

Table 1: Relationship between Knowledge generation, sharing, storage and utilisation effect on the economic sustainability of social enterprises; source: original research

	β	Std. Error	T	Sig.P
(Constant)	6.325	0.910	6.951	0.000**
Knowledge generation	0.127	0.060	2.108	0.036*
Knowledge Utilisation	0.125	0.060	2.081	0.038*
Knowledge storing	0.236	0.067	3.493	0.001**
Knowledge sharing	0.029	0.066	0.436	0.663

$r = 0.669$, $r\text{ square} = 0.447$, $F = 97.197$, $p = -0.00$ Dependent Variable – Economic sustainability

As can be seen in Table 1, knowledge generation ($\beta = 0.127$, $t = 2.11$, $p = 0.04$), knowledge utilisation ($\beta = 0.125$, $t = 2.08$, $p = 0.04$), and knowledge storage ($\beta = 0.236$, $t = 3.49$, $p = 0.01$), have a positive and significant impact on the economic sustainability of social enterprises. This means that an increase in any of these knowledge management dimensions will result in an increase in economic sustainability. Knowledge sharing, on the other hand, ($\beta = -0.029$, $t = -0.44$, $p = 0.66$) have no significant impact. This means that, even though the coefficient is extremely low and insignificant, knowledge sharing does not have a positive impact on economic sustainability in this model.

The overall regression model shows significance ($R^2 = 0.447$, $F = 97.20$, $p < 0.005$) and thus strong explanatory power. The R^2 of 0.447 tells us that 44.7% of the variance in economic sustainability can be explained by knowledge generation, knowledge utilisation, knowledge storage and knowledge sharing. The explained variance is quite high which shows that this model covers the determinants of economic sustainability quite thoroughly.

Of the predictors, knowledge storage has the greatest impact ($\beta = 0.24$), followed by knowledge generation ($\beta = 0.17$), knowledge utilisation ($\beta = 0.16$), and knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.03$). This means knowledge storage has the highest impact, in comparative terms, on economic sustainability, among the other dimensions of knowledge management.

Table 2: Relationship between Knowledge generation, sharing, storage and utilisation effect on the environmental sustainability of social enterprises; source: original research

	β	Std. Error	T	Sig.P
(Constant)	9.604	1.053	9.121	0.000**
Knowledge generation	0.146	0.070	2.091	0.037*
Knowledge Utilisation	0.182	0.070	2.606	0.009*
Knowledge storing	0.093	0.078	1.197	0.232
Knowledge sharing	0.107	0.076	1.397	0.163

$r = 0.627$, r square = 0.393, $F = 77.819$, $p = 0.000$ Dependent Variable – Environmental sustainability

According to Table 2, both knowledge generation ($\beta = 0.146$, $t = 2.09$, $p = 0.04$) and knowledge utilisation ($\beta = 0.182$, $t = 2.606$, $p = 0.009$) positively and significantly impact the environmental sustainability of social enterprises. This means that social enterprises that develop new knowledge and apply it to their business model tend to have a better of performance a view of the environment. This means that developing new ideas and implementing them as eco-friendly will result in better sustainable performance.

In a different view, knowledge storage ($\beta = 0.09$, $t = 1.20$, $p = 0.23$) and knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.107$, $t = 1.397$, $p = 0.163$) exhibit no statistically significant impact for the last case. Although the coefficients have a positive value, the effect is statistically insignificant result mean, in previous works, the variables have no predictive level concerning the ecological outcome. This means that simply storing and sharing knowledge is not enough if the knowledge is not transformed to environmental practices that can be implemented at the time. The overall regression model is statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.393$, $F = 77.82$, $p < 0.005$), that is also shows a good level of explanation of the model.

The R^2 value indicates that 39.3% of the variation in environmental sustainability can be explained by the four dimensions of knowledge management. This level of explained variation is quite notable. Among the predictors, knowledge utilisation has the strongest relative effect ($\beta = 0.18$), followed by knowledge generation ($\beta = 0.15$), knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.11$), and knowledge storage ($\beta = 0.09$), emphasising the importance of knowledge application in advancing environmental sustainability.

Table 3: Relationship between Knowledge generation, sharing, storage and utilisation effect on the social sustainability of social enterprises; source: original research

	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.P
(Constant)	7.238	0.870	8.315	0.000**
Knowledge generation	0.080	0.058	1.395	0.164
Knowledge Utilisation	0.134	0.058	2.328	0.020*
Knowledge storing	0.178	0.065	2.756	0.006**
Knowledge sharing	0.101	0.063	1.602	0.110

$r = 0.6637$, r square = 0.440, $F = 94.32$, $p = 0.000$ Dependent Variable – Social sustainability

Positive association was found in the effects on the social sustainability of social enterprises for knowledge utilisation ($\beta = 0.134$, $t = 2.33$, $p = 0.02$) and knowledge storage ($\beta = 0.178$, $t = 2.76$, $p = 0.01$), and they are statistically significant. The given results imply that the social impact of the enterprise is greater when the enterprise is able to knowledgeably utilise and integrate systems in their operational processes. Also, findings revealed that operational systems and the knowledge that can be changed into operational systems seem to improve the act of sustaining all of the services that are provided to the all the different groups so that they can profit and also the essence of the community as a whole.

As opposed to knowledge generation, ($\beta = 0.08$, $t = 1.40$, $p = 0.16$) and knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.101$, $t = 0.06$, $p = 0.11$) do not show any positive effects that are statistically significant to social sustainability. Even though these two factors are positive, their lack of statistical significance illustrates the knowledge model, that suggests that these two factors neither impact nor predict social enhancements. Their lack of statistical significance suggests that knowledge generation in itself is insufficient to achieve the social objectives without knowledge sharing. The overall regression model is statistically significant, as is the overall regression model in social enterprises ($R^2 = 0.440$, $F = 94.32$, $p < 0.005$).

The data reveal an R^2 value of 0.440, indicating that the four knowledge management dimensions explained 44.0% of the variance in social sustainability. Of the four dimensions, knowledge storage has the highest positive influence ($\beta = 0.18$), followed by knowledge utilisation ($\beta = 0.13$), knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.10$), and knowledge generation ($\beta = 0.08$). This shows that in order to sustain social impact; the retention and application of knowledge is most important.

5. Discussion

The results show that KM is neither consistently positive or consistently negative regarding outcomes of sustainability; instead, some dimensions of knowledge have positive or negative relationships in the economic, social, and environmental aspects independently of the others. Most importantly, positive relationships were absolute with the positive impact of knowledge utilization and knowledge storage, while knowledge generation and knowledge sharing had relationships with little positive impact or relationships that were reliant on the context.

The findings from the study confirm the proposed theoretical framework. In agreement with the RBV, KM dimensions, knowledge storage and utilisation emerged as significant association with sustainability, supporting the perspective that knowledge functions as a strategic internal resource. The results also in agreement with KBT (Grant, 1996), as sustainability outcomes were stronger where knowledge was effectively applied and integrated. The codification and storage of knowledge make it possible for an organization to cut down on needless redundancies and stabilize organizational routines, which is critical for economic sustainability in environments characterized by resource scarcity. Furthermore, OLT (March, 1991) is reflected in the positive effects of knowledge generation and utilisation, indicating that adaptive learning enhances long-term performance. However, the weaker role of knowledge sharing suggests partial rather than complete theoretical confirmation.

The finding also supports the view that for an innovation to have sustained impact, it has to be incorporated into practices that can be easily repeated in the organization. In many social enterprises in Lagos which happen to be young enterprises and often founder-driven enterprises, systematic storage of knowledge can be a substitute for some of the absence of structures and it can also enhance financial discipline and the sustainability of the social service of the enterprises. In the same way, the positive impact of knowledge utilization on all three dimensions of sustainability indicates that knowledge only has value when it is applied in practice.

KM activities can create value in social enterprises when they go beyond passive accumulation, especially for social impact initiatives (Granados, Mohamed & Hlupic, 2017). The results for environmental sustainability particularly demonstrate this: creating environmental ideas is not enough;

they need to be transformed into environmentally efficient processes. This aligns with those who define KM as a means to achieve sustainability in operations. The takeaway is that it is the real actions, as opposed to the facade of actions, that generate results in sustainability.

The knowledge sharing results are a rebuttal to the social capital and open innovation literature that suggest knowledge exchange for relational purposes is always good (Reiche, Kraimer & Harzing, 2008; Juusola *et al.*, 2026). One possible explanation is that without appropriate frameworks for absorption, sharing knowledge will not yield results. Barley, Treem and Kuhn (2018) argue that knowledge sharing must be done with a purpose; in smaller enterprises with less capacity to absorb new information, too much knowledge sharing can create misinformation, knowledge gaps, or create misalignment. The results suggest that knowledge sharing has to include processes for assimilation and application in order to achieve results in sustainability.

The results for knowledge generation as a predictor for social and environmental sustainability may be less predictive because of the stage of the enterprises that were surveyed. Maalaoui, Le Loarne-Lemaire, and Razgallah (2020) claim that social enterprises have difficulty scaling and growing because they do not leverage new knowledge in a systematic way. In early-stage ecosystems, the obstacle may be less about the creation of new knowledge and more about the stabilization and the exploitation of knowledge that already exists. In these situations, incremental improvements and a disciplined approach may be more important than the creation of new ideas.

6. Conclusion, Recommendation and Implications of the Study

6.1. Conclusion

This study explored the connection between the different aspects of knowledge management and the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of social enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria. The results show that knowledge management is a predictor of sustainability outcomes, but the individual dimensions of knowledge management have different effects. Specifically, for the three pillars of sustainability, knowledge use and knowledge retention are the strongest and most consistent predictors, while knowledge creation and knowledge sharing have weaker and more context-specific impacts. The results demonstrate that the sustainability of social enterprises is less dependent on the creation and sharing of knowledge and more dependent on the ability of the social enterprises to institutionalize and apply knowledge

Consequently, the study argues that the sustainability of social enterprises is, at its core, a question of capability. Social enterprises that have the ability systematically to capture and retain knowledge and to convert that knowledge into operational, strategic, and mission-driven KM actions are most likely to achieve positive economic, social, and environmental triple-bottom-line outcomes. In the context of developing economies, particularly those that are characterised by scarcity of resources and systemic unpredictability and volatility, knowledge management is a means of ensuring that a social enterprise is sustainable and that it is more operationally efficient and able to adapt to changing circumstances.

6.2. Recommendations

Firstly, social enterprises ought to take advantage of knowledge storage systems that have already been developed. This could be in the form of internal documentation practices, digital repositories, standard operating procedures, and succession planning to maintain organizational memory that extends beyond individual founders or critical staff.

Next, enterprises should enhance knowledge utilization systems by integrating learning into every level of decision-making. This turn, knowledge that is generated or obtained can be transformed to actual outcomes that will yield sustainability.

While in this study, knowledge sharing *per se* is not noted to have significant independent effect, this does not mean that social enterprises should ignore collective learning. They ought to ensure that integrated knowledge goes with systems for organized integration to all members.

Also, social enterprises, and even more, small and medium enterprises, ought to have more training and capacity building workshops in KM systems. A lot more internal knowledge capability should be built to ensure internal sustainability, in the long run, more than what is obtained through external funding, for short periods.

6.3. Implications of the Study

The study reaffirms the RBV, KBT and OLT frameworks by demonstrating that internally held knowledge can sustain hybrid organisations. It adds to the body of literature by demonstrating that not all knowledge processes are created to achieve sustainability goals.

The findings suggest on the practical front that social enterprises should develop a more robust sustainable strategy that includes formal frameworks for knowledge governance, in addition to securing funding and expanding to new markets. Managers should begin to treat the storage and knowledge-usage systems as a knowledge bank. In terms of policies, the study suggests that the social enterprise sector, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, can be more resilient and have a greater developmental impact by improving its knowledge systems.

6.4. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the strength of the ability to determine cause and effect in KM of sustainability outcomes gets restricted through the use of cross-sectional design. Longitudinal studies will show stronger evidence of causality and the effects that come with it on the time span of an effect. The second, depends on a longitudinal study, has the potential of providing those additional contributions, as the time span also disregards the use of anonymity longitudinal design, as these potential contributions will be additional to those of a social longitudinal study and the design of a social longitudinal design, as the limitations of longitudinal design social design will be ignored. To the study of social enterprises in Lagos State, it will not allow additional generalisations in the knowledge in other regions, or the institutions in ignorance, regions. The knowledge has no boundaries to the sustainability, and therefore, the knowledge has no additional contributions to the boundaries of sustainability. Longitudinal studies will show the additional contributions to the knowledge of sustainability.

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