Systematic Review: Global Knowledge Management Across Cultures and Organizations in MNCs

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Abstract. This study presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the TCCM (Theory, Context, Characteristics, and Methodology) framework to examine Global Knowledge Management (GKM) in multinational corporations (MNCs), focusing on cross-cultural dynamics. A total of 389 articles were retrieved from Scopus; 36 were selected through rigorous screening. Findings reveal that GKM is shaped by antecedents such as human capital, organizational culture, and absorptive capacity mediated by knowledge sharing, trust, and communication and moderated by cultural intelligence (CQ), institutional distance, and leadership style. Cultural dimensions particularly power distance, collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance significantly influence knowledge transfer effectiveness. This study contributes a conceptual framework integrating cultural and organizational factors for enhancing innovation and global competitiveness.

Keywords: Global Knowledge Management, MNCs, cultural intelligence.

1 Introduction

Multinational Companies (MNCs) face significant challenges navigating today's uncertain global environment [1]. Global competition demands that MNCs maximize knowledge assets to remain agile and innovative [2,3]. Cross-border knowledge transfer is hampered by information asymmetry, varying institutional environments, and uneven acceptance of Knowledge Management Systems (KMS) [4,5,6,7,8]. A key issue is knowledge hiding particularly among expatriates which undermines knowledge flows, tied to low trust and weak cultural adaptation [9,10]. Building a knowledge-sharing culture requires transformational leadership, robust technological support, and a high degree of intercultural sensitivity [11]. While several studies emphasize the role of national culture in KM, integrative theoretical frameworks explicitly connecting cultural dimensions with KM processes in MNCs remain scarce [12,13,14]. Current research often isolates national or organizational culture rather than analyzing their interaction in digitally mediated contexts [15,16]. To address these gaps, this study

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adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine how GKM is conceptualized and influenced by cultural and organizational factors, guided by two research questions:

RQ1: What are the key dimensions and characteristics of Global Knowledge Management, including its antecedents, mediators, moderators, and consequences? RQ2: What are the key cultural influences that affect global knowledge management?

2 Methods

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the TCCM framework (Theory, Context, Characteristics, Methodology) to systematically map GKM findings and research gaps. A Scopus database search returned 389 articles, filtered through three steps: (1) selecting studies directly related to GKM in MNCs (52 articles), (2) excluding journals outside the research scope (39 articles), and (3) abstract screening, resulting in 36 final articles. The TCCM dimensions are: (a) 'Theory' dominant theoretical models; (b) 'Context' geographic and organizational settings; (c) 'Characteristics' key constructs such as knowledge transfer and cultural adaptation; and (d) 'Methodology' research designs used to assess credibility of findings.

3 Results and Discussion

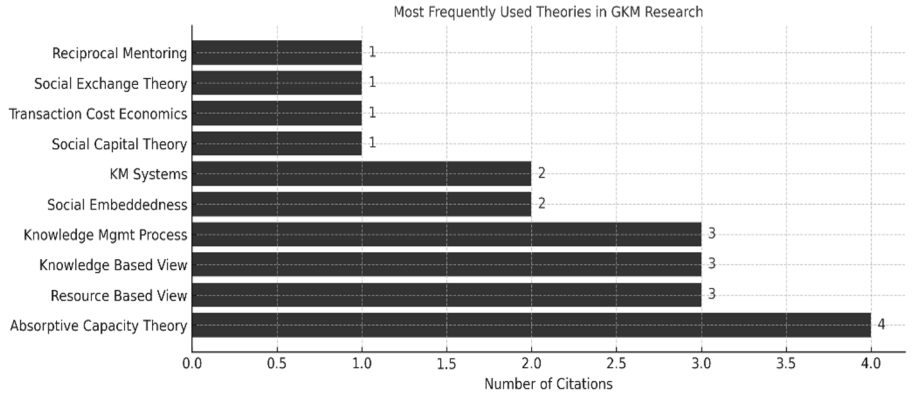
3.1 Theory

GKM in MNCs is underpinned by three dominant theoretical perspectives: Absorptive Capacity Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Knowledge-Based View (KBV). Absorptive Capacity highlights how a firm's internal structures influence its ability to acquire and utilize external knowledge in cross-border flows [2,3]. RBV emphasizes intangible assets such as intellectual capital in enhancing innovation across global operations [17], while KBV considers knowledge as a core resource requiring deliberate management of tacit and explicit forms [18]. Researchers also integrate cultural and behavioural theories Hofstede's dimensions, Social Identity Theory, and Cognitive Resource Diversity to examine how national culture affects trust and collaboration. Multi-theoretical frameworks are increasingly favored, as no single theory fully accounts for the multifaceted nature of cross-cultural knowledge dynamics [19]. A summary is presented in Fig. 1.

3.2 Context

The contextual analysis reveals geographical and industrial dimensions shaping GKM. U.S.-based MNCs in IT and automotive sectors leverage advanced knowledge infrastructures; Chinese MNCs emphasize local adaptation in manufacturing and energy; while firms in the UK, Germany, and Italy prioritize knowledge integration across borders. Emerging economies India, Malaysia, and South Korea focus on absorbing global knowledge and translating it into locally relevant innovations [4,16].

Cultural context is decisive: Hofstede's dimensions of individualism vs. collectivism and power distance affect communication, trust-building, and willingness to share knowledge [13,14]. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is consistently identified as a key enabler of knowledge integration, while organizations applying standardized KM strategies regardless of local context tend to underperform [20].



Source: Authors' work based on systematic literature review (n = 36)

Fig. 1. Summary Theory Used

3.3 Characteristic

Independent variables across reviewed studies include dynamic talent management, innovation, and digitalization [20], human and structural capital [21], emotional and cultural intelligence [22], and knowledge and human capital spillovers [23]. Mediating variables identified are knowledge sharing and coordination mechanisms [21], as well as interpersonal trust and communication [22]. Maley and Kiessling (2021) further show that leader–member exchange (LMX) quality and inpatriate manager social attachment facilitate global knowledge transfer [23]. Key moderators include cultural differences and organizational support [22], industry characteristics [23], and cross-national institutional distance [24]. Dependent variables span strategic agility [20], firm performance [21], KM process effectiveness [22], MNE scaling [23], and KM transfer effectiveness [24]. Cultural intelligence and adaptability to diverse organizational values are significant moderators, while control variables company size, degree of internationalization, and recipient unit commitment further affect transfer effectiveness [24]. Collectively, these variables highlight that GKM outcomes are not determined by a single factor but by the dynamic interplay of human, cultural, and structural elements within MNCs.

3.4 Method

The 36 reviewed studies employ diverse methodologies: quantitative methods (surveys, regression, SEM) in 15 studies (41.7%), qualitative methods (case studies, interviews,

thematic analysis) in 12 studies (33.3%), and mixed methods in 9 studies (25%) [20,21,22]. Qualitative approaches particularly interviews are crucial for exploring cultural and interpersonal dimensions not easily quantified, such as communication styles and trust-building [22]. The dominance of quantitative approaches reflects the field's preference for generalizability; however, qualitative studies confirm that contextual understanding is equally essential [22].

3.5 Key Antecedents, Mediators, Moderators, and Cultural Influences

Key antecedents of GKM include human capital, dynamic talent management, and ICT infrastructure [25]. Interpersonal trust, knowledge sharing, and coordination mechanisms are crucial mediators when knowledge is not fully shared between central and subsidiary units, knowledge hiding arises due to low trust and poor informal communication [9,10]. Moderators such as cultural distance, institutional gaps, organizational support, and communication styles shape GKM success [26,27], with consequences including enhanced innovation, strategic responsiveness, and global competitiveness [28].

Cultural influences are equally decisive. Hofstede's dimensions individualism vs. collectivism and power distance directly affect willingness to share knowledge: high power distance cultures may discourage open sharing, while collectivist cultures facilitate stronger collaboration when relational trust is established [13,28]. Uncertainty avoidance further influences receptiveness to new knowledge systems, with high uncertainty avoidance cultures preferring formalized, explicit knowledge exchange [14]. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) encompassing rational, emotional, and social intelligences is a pivotal capability enabling managers to integrate multiple cultural norms and facilitate smoother knowledge flows [29,30]. For MNCs in emerging markets, localizing global knowledge through high CQ and cultivating transnational communities of practice are strategic imperatives for sustainable performance [30].

4 Conclusion

Global Knowledge Management (GKM) in multinational corporations (MNCs) is shaped by diverse cultural, organizational, and industrial dynamics, with significant contributions from theories like Absorptive Capacity, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Knowledge-Based View (KBV). These frameworks emphasize the importance of leveraging internal capabilities, managing knowledge flows, and adapting strategies to local contexts. Cultural factors, including Hofstede's dimensions and Cultural Intelligence (CQ), play a critical role in facilitating or hindering knowledge sharing and trust in cross-cultural teams. Research shows that effective GKM requires flexible strategies tailored to specific cultural and industrial environments, supported by dynamic HRM policies, organizational culture, and leadership. While quantitative methods highlight patterns and relationships, qualitative approaches, such as interviews, uncover nuanced insights into the complexities of knowledge transfer and adaptation. Ultimately, GKM success lies in fostering collaboration, overcoming

cultural barriers, and aligning global knowledge practices with local needs, especially in the face of challenges like knowledge hiding and institutional distance.

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