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Knowledge Audit and Transient Competitive Advantage in Textile Manufacturing Firms in Kenya

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Abstract

The textile industry can advance the country's economic standing by offering work opportunities and contributing to the country's gross domestic product. Nevertheless, the textile sector in Kenya has not achieved the anticipated levels of growth. This paper aimed to investigate the influence of knowledge audit on the transient competitive advantage of textile manufacturing companies in Kenya. The study used a positivist research philosophy and utilized a quantitative correlational research methodology. A sample of 165 research respondents was randomly chosen from a population of 280 top-level managers from 56 textile enterprises in Kenya. Data collection was conducted using a standardized questionnaire, and the collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and linear regression analysis. The study findings established that knowledge audit had a statistically significant and positive influence on transient competitive advantage in textile manufacturing companies in Kenya ($\beta = 0.660$, $t = 13.314$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that textile manufacturing firms with effective knowledge audit practices including effective knowledge needs analysis, knowledge inventory analysis, and knowledge flow analysis are bound to have strong transient competitive advantage in terms of market share and profits. The study recommends that the management of textile manufacturing firms conduct frequent assessments of knowledge requirements inside their firms.

Key Words: Knowledge audit, Textile manufacturing firms, Transient competitive advantage.

Introduction

Every company aims to gain a competitive edge that sets it apart from its rivals, enabling it to better fulfill its consumers' long-term demands (Thomran et al., 2022) . Nimfa et al. (2021) define competitive advantage as the strategic benefit that a firm gains over its competitors by providing exceptional value to its customers. This value may be attained through several methods, such as offering discounted pricing or delivering additional benefits and services that justify equivalent or even elevated prices. Mezahem et al. (2022) argue that for businesses to stay competitively ahead, they need to have more than simply resources and assets. They must also exhibit strong unique talents, practices, and capabilities to develop and promote efficient work practices and routines. For organizations operating in fast-changing and dynamic markets, the knowledge management component of knowledge audit is crucial (Henao-García et al., 2020). Knowledge audit allows these organizations to effectively adapt to changing market conditions, ultimately gaining a competitive edge. Knowledge audit provides actionable evidence of an organization's knowledge requirements, the location of that knowledge, its use, existing challenges and issues, and potential areas for growth.

The role of knowledge audit as a fundamental capability necessary for competitive advantage has been emphasized by the knowledge management theory in the field of strategic

management (Usman & Fadhilah, 2020) . Knowledge audit encompasses knowledge needs analysis, knowledge inventory analysis, and knowledge flow analysis to ensure that the organization has the right knowledge and knowledge-sharing processes, tools, and practices (Alam et al., 2022) . Knowledge audit is an important tool in enabling the organization to achieve its objectives. In Indonesia, Sentika and Arissaputra (2022) intimated that for a firm to evaluate knowledge assets, the firm needs to identify the source, usability, and creation of the knowledge assets in an organization. In the Philippines, Nayak et al. (2023) reported that knowledge audit is vital to enable evaluation of the knowledge assets, and knowledge asset risk, and to assess the availability, accessibility, and affordability of the knowledge assets. In Kenya, Kosgei et al. (2018) asserted that conducting a knowledge audit to identify and evaluate the present state of knowledge inventories and uses among and within the firm is important for competitive advantage in the current complex and dynamic operating environment.

The textile industry in Kenya has been identified as a catalyst for industrialization in Kenya's Vision 2030, as outlined by the government (World Bank Group, 2022). In 2021, the industry accounted for 7% of the nation's total export revenue. To enhance its contribution to GDP, the primary policy tools used for promotion include a blend of tariffs and import quotas, complemented by measures about the distribution of foreign currency. However, the development of the sector is constrained by various challenges including the absence of policy consistency and institutional alignment, deficiency in the amount of value addition within the industry, and noticeable disconnection between this sector and other sectors within the value chain. Besides, the manufacturing costs are very high due to inherent systemic inefficiencies, and there is an absence of market preparedness among textile firms in the market (Shibia & Igesa, 2021) . Besides, Mwendwa et al. (2020) note that the adoption of knowledge audit as a facet of knowledge management remains relatively low in Kenya's textile manufacturing industry. There are built-in systemic inefficiencies in the textile manufacturers due to the lack of or use of obsolete technologies in the production lines and proper knowledge-sharing platforms as their main focus is on production, not process innovation. In this respect, the current study was conducted to determine the influence of knowledge audit on the sustainable competitive advantage of firms in the textile industry in Kenya.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Knowledge-based theory by Grant (1996) posits that knowledge is the most strategically vital resource for a company. The supporters of this viewpoint contend that the presence of diverse and sophisticated knowledge-based resources makes it difficult for others to replicate them (Foss, 1996) . As a result, the varied knowledge bases, processes and skills possessed by different organizations play a crucial role in achieving long-lasting competitive advantage and exceptional corporate performance. The knowledge that enables a firm to gain a competitive advantage is ingrained and transmitted through several entities, such as corporate culture and identity, procedures, policies, documents, systems, and personnel. Knowledge audit is a key process that assesses an organization's knowledge needs and how its structure, leadership, technology, and learning processes might collaborate to fulfill the firm's objectives (Grant & Phene, 2022). The objective of a knowledge audit is to provide concrete proof of the information that an organization needs, its whereabouts, use patterns, existing issues and impediments, and potential measures to enhance the efficiency of knowledge flow (Rao et al., 2018). Therefore, a knowledge audit enables the firm to have the right knowledge,

sharing tools, processes, and culture that enables the firm to utilize the knowledge for a competitive advantage (Mezahem et al., 2022). \

Empirical Review

In Iraq, Mahdi et al. (2019) examined how and why knowledge needs analysis and knowledge sharing may generate transient competitive advantage from the knowledge-based view and resource-based view of the educational environment. The study's respondents include 525 academic leaders in various positions from 44 private Iraqi institutions. The findings indicate a substantial link between knowledge needs analysis and transient competitive advantage. To achieve a higher transient competitive advantage, private universities must evaluate their knowledge needs, develop knowledge, store information, exchange knowledge, and apply knowledge that is supported by knowledge identification and goal formulation across all aspects of the business. Another study by Duh et al. (2020) examined the potential applications of knowledge needs analysis within the context of the development of the information society. The study findings showed that knowledge needs analysis is a fundamental component of corporate knowledge auditing that plays a key role in enabling a firm's competitiveness. Another study conducted on the need for this particular field of knowledge audit in the worldwide community revealed that the absence of a universally accepted methodology poses a hindrance to determining whether to proceed with performing an audit of knowledge (Abubakar et al., 2019).

Henao-García et al. (2020) explored contemporary methodologies that facilitate the integration of current company knowledge needs analysis practices with needs analysis in other audits such as information systems audit, operational audit, intellectual capital audit, and knowledge audit. The consolidation of these many audits into a unified assessment of a corporation has a notable impact on its operations. The findings concurred with other findings by Singh (2018) that the advent of the 21st century has brought about a shift in the perception of traditional knowledge needs assessment practices. This shift necessitates the need to provide a rationale for the business impact associated with the implementation of new knowledge-sharing platforms and systems and the modernization of existing ones. To determine the role played by knowledge inventory analysis on organizational outcomes, Perez-Soltero et al. (2016) examined how a knowledge audit technique that focuses on knowledge inventory analysis enables a firm to enhance its learning and competitive advantage. This study was undertaken in Mexico and its findings determined that knowledge inventory analysis was vital in enabling firm performance. Another study by Mezahem et al. (2022) investigated the impact of information exchange inside audit companies on the quality and efficiency of audits.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided the study is provided in Figure 1 which illustrates the relationship between knowledge audit and transient competitive advantage.

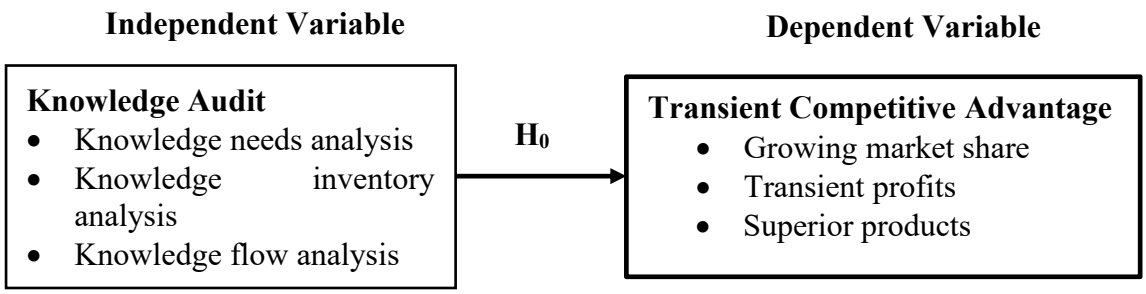

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Knowledge audit assesses an organization's knowledge needs and how its structure, technology, leadership, and learning processes might collaborate to fulfill its strategic objectives (Fayyaz et al., 2021). It comprises three components which are knowledge needs analysis, knowledge inventory analysis, and knowledge flow analysis. Knowledge needs analysis is used to determine the existing information possessed by individuals and organizations, as well as identify any additional knowledge they may want to enhance productivity (Mezahem et al., 2022). A knowledge inventory analysis is conducted to identify, document, organize, and classify the explicit and tacit knowledge assets that a firm already has. Knowledge flow analysis is an examination of the process by which information gets transferred from its source to the places where it is required. The need for knowledge audit is to enable an organization to formulate an efficient knowledge management strategy by identifying essential prerequisites and identifying areas that need improvement (Anthony, 2021). The dependent variable in this study was transient competitive advantage which was measured using growth in market share, transient profits, and superiority of products. Based on this conceptual framework, the following null hypothesis was tested:

H_0: Knowledge audit has no significant influence on the transient competitive advantage of textile manufacturing firms in Kenya.

Methodology

This study used the positivist research philosophy which assumes a deductive method, and was appropriate for the quantitative methodology that was adopted. Besides, this philosophy enabled the study to test the formulated hypothesis (Saunders et al., 2019). This study applied a quantitative research design since it sought to test the hypothesis statistically, gathered quantitative data using questionnaires, and sought to determine the causal relationship between study variables. Additionally, the study applied the correlational design to assess the influence of knowledge-sharing culture on the transient competitive advantage of textile manufacturing companies in Kenya. The target population for this study consisted of 280 members of the top management team of 56 export processing zone (EPZ) textile manufacturing firms in Kenya (KAM, 2022). The targeted respondents in each of the firms comprised five members of the top management team that is: chief executive officer (CEO), director of operations, director of marketing and sales, director of administration and human resources, and director of corporate affairs or their direct representatives. These were selected due to their involvement in strategic management and knowledge-sharing operations and processes.

This study used stratified random sampling techniques and the Yamane (1967) sample calculation formula to select a sample size of 165. Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire which was pretested for reliability and validity before the study. The study applied both the electronic (Google Forms) and drop-and-pick methods to administer the questionnaires. In the entire period of the study, the study observed ethical standards that included getting informed consent, non-malfeasance, honoring non-disclosure agreements, respecting respondent's confidentiality, upholding anonymity, and not misrepresenting results. Moreover, the study obtained requisite approvals from the Institutional Review Board of the United States International University, Africa, and a permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation. In analyzing the collected data, the study used descriptive statistics (percentages, means, and standard deviations) and linear regression analysis. The linear regression model used was;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where;

Y= Transient competitive advantage.

β_0 = Constant

ε = The error term

X_1= Knowledge Audit

Results

The research sample consisted of 165 top management employees in textile manufacturing companies in Kenya and out of the sample, 147 responded, resulting in a response rate of 89.1%. The study established that regarding gender, 55.8% of the study participants were male and 34.7% of the participants were between 36 and 44 years. Regarding the level of education, 47.6% of the participants had bachelor's degrees with only 2% indicating that they had doctorate degrees. The findings further demonstrated that 64.8% of the participants in the study were from enterprises that had been operational for over 20 years. Moreover, the majority of the firms (72.8%) had more than 100 employees with only 3.4% having less than 20 employees whereas 49% of the textile manufacturing firms were in the apparel textiles sector. Additionally, 35.4% of the study participants were production managers and a similar percentage (35.4%) had served their respective companies for 11 to 16 years.

Descriptive Statistics for Transient Competitive Advantage

Transient competitive advantage was the dependent variable in this study and was measured using three distinct measures: transient profits, superior products, and growing market share. Respondents were requested to rate their level of agreement with the provided statements on the transient competitive advantage of their textile manufacturing companies on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 represented strong disagreement while 5 represented strong disagreement. The responses were analyzed by the researcher using means (M) and standard deviations (SD). Table 1 presents the findings on the three sub-variables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Transient Competitive Advantage

Statements on Transient Competitive Advantage	Mean	SD
Transient Profits		
Our profits increased over the last three years 2020-2022	3.97	.619
Our sales revenue has been growing over the last three years 2020 -2022	3.87	.675
This organization has transient high profit margin for the past five years	3.90	.700
Our organization has invested in research and development focusing on consumers' needs to sustain profitability	3.99	.682
Superior Products		
Our firm has consistently produced superior quality products that are better than those of our competitors	3.90	.725
Our superior quality products are unique compared to our competitors	3.73	.872
Our competitors find it difficult to emulate our superior quality products	3.78	.757
The company produces innovative products	3.97	.682
Growing Market Share		

Our organization continued to have growth and satisfactory market share over three years 2020 – 2022	3.96	.890
The company has been able to enhance the loyalty of its customers	4.12	.629
Our company has eaten into the market share of its competitors	3.84	.811
This company has grown into new geographical markets	3.96	.640
Average	**3.92**	**0.406**

The research results in Table 1 indicate that regarding short-term profits, respondents agreed with all the statements. Specifically, they agreed that their organizations have invested in research and development focusing on consumers' needs to sustain profitability (M = 3.99, SD = 0.682). Respondents also agreed that the profits of their firms increased over the last three years from 2020 to 2022 (M = 3.97, SD = 0.619). These findings showed that the firms had high profitability indicated by profit increase, increased sales revenue, and high profit margins. Regarding superiority products, study respondents agreed that their companies produce innovative products (M = 3.97, SD = 0.682) and further agreed that their firms had consistently produced superior quality products that were better than those of their competitors (M = 3.90, SD = 0.725). These findings imply that the surveyed textile manufacturing firms enjoyed a transient competitive advantage based on the superior quality of their products. The study findings regarding growing market share showed that the study participants agreed that their companies had enabled to enhance the loyalty of their customers (M = 4.12, SD = 0.629) and similarly agreed that their companies have grown into new geographical markets (M = 3.96, SD = 0.640). The findings further showed that the average mean for all the statements was 3.92 which indicates that the respondents generally agreed with the statements on transient competitive advantage.

Descriptive Analysis for Knowledge Audit

The study evaluated the knowledge audit using a set of 12 statements which were classified into three distinct constructs which were knowledge needs analysis, knowledge inventory analysis, and knowledge flow analysis. The research participants were instructed to indicate their level of agreement with the statements related to knowledge audits in their respective textile manufacturing enterprises. A Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5, was used, where 1 denoted 'strongly disagree' and 5 denoted 'strongly agree'. The analysis of the responses included the use of means (M) and standard deviations (SD). Table 2 presents the descriptive findings.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Knowledge Audit

Statements on Knowledge Audit	**Mean**	**SD**
Knowledge Needs Analysis		
My organization assesses the status of the organization's knowledge to determine knowledge gaps	4.02	.677
My organization assesses the most effective methods for imparting knowledge to the workforce	4.05	.725
The organization makes regular assessments of what knowledge components should be focused on	4.07	.713
My organization involves employees when conducting knowledge needs	3.93	.764

analysis		
Knowledge Inventory Analysis		
My organization conducts a knowledge-sharing competence and performance audit	3.82	.803
My organization shares the knowledge audit report indicating available knowledge and gaps	3.96	.867
The firm has identified the knowledge it has and performed a preliminary evaluation of its competitive features	4.04	.757
The firm has documentation of all tacit and explicit knowledge the firm has	4.00	.712
Knowledge Flow Analysis		
My organization assesses how effectively new knowledge is applied in organizational activities	3.90	.655
The firm ensures that there is a smooth flow of knowledge from where it is to where it is needed	3.82	.800
The firm continually monitors knowledge-sharing practices and takes corrective action where needed	3.93	.679
The knowledge-sharing systems in this firm are effectively maintained	3.95	.738
Average	**3.96**	**0.456**

Regarding knowledge inventory analysis, findings showed that the respondents agreed with all the statements. They agreed that their firms have identified the knowledge they have and performed preliminary evaluations of their competitive features (M = 4.04, SD = 0.757) and further agreed that their organizations conduct knowledge-sharing competence and performance audits (M = 3.82, SD = 0.803). The findings on knowledge flow analysis show that respondents agreed that the knowledge-sharing systems in their firm are effectively maintained (M = 3.95, SD = 0.738) and similarly agreed that their firms continually monitor knowledge-sharing practices and take corrective action where needed (M = 3.93, SD = 0.679). Furthermore, respondents agreed that their organizations assess how effectively new knowledge is applied in organizational activities (M = 3.90, SD = 0.655). The average mean for the knowledge audit was 3.96 with a standard deviation of 0.456 indicating that the surveyed textile manufacturing firms engaged in best knowledge audit practices according to the study participants.

Regression of Knowledge Audit on Transient Competitive Advantage

The study investigated the influence of knowledge audit on the transient competitive advantage of textile manufacturing companies in Kenya. To accomplish this purpose, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The findings were used to test the null hypothesis of the research, which stated:

H_0: Knowledge audit has no significant influence on the transient competitive advantage of textile manufacturing firms in Kenya.

However, before fitting the regression model, preliminary tests were conducted to assess the assumptions of regression. The diagnostic tests conducted consisted of pre-test linearity, multicollinearity and normality tests, and post-test heteroscedasticity tests. The results of the

linearity test indicated a statistically significant linear relationship between knowledge-sharing culture and transient competitive advantage ($F = 2143.53$, $p < 0.05$). The findings also indicated that the two research variables were normally distributed because the p values were above 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). The Breusch-Pagan test indicated that there was homoscedasticity ($\gamma^2 = 2.718$, $p > 0.05$). After satisfying the repression assumptions, the study fitted the regression model to assess the influence of knowledge audit on transient competitive advantage in textile manufacturing firms in Kenya. Table 3 presents the model summary that provides the correlation coefficient (R), and the R-squared.

Table 3: Model Summary for Knowledge Audit and Transient Competitive Advantage

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.742[a]	.550	.547	.27313

a. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge Audit

The study findings presented in Table 3 indicate that there was a strong relationship ($r = 0.742$) between knowledge audit and the transient competitive advantage of textile manufacturing firms in Kenya. The results further indicate that knowledge audits in textile manufacturing firms in Kenya account for 55% of the variation in their transient competitive advantage (r-squared = 0.550).

The research examined the significance of the model through the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test. The research findings are presented in Table 4 and they show that the f-value was statistically significant, hence indicating that the model was statistically significant ($F = 177.271$, $p < 0.05$). The study findings indicate that the empirical data collected is a good fit for the regression model.

Table 4: ANOVA for Knowledge Audit and Transient Competitive Advantage

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.224	1	13.224	177.271	.000[b]
	Residual	10.817	145	.075		
	Total	24.041	146			

a. Dependent Variable: Transient Competitive Advantage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge Audit

The study used the regression coefficients to assess the influence of knowledge audit on the transient competitive advantage of textile manufacturing companies in Kenya. The coefficients were further used to evaluate the magnitude and direction of the influence, through the regression coefficients and t-tests. The results are as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
1	(Constant)	1.305	.197		6.610	.000
	Knowledge Audit	.660	.050	.742	13.314	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Transient Competitive Advantage

The study findings provided in Table 5 resulted in the following regression model:

$$\text{Transient Competitive advantage} = 1.305 + 0.660\ (\text{Knowledge Audit}) + \varepsilon$$

The findings presented in Table 5 and the regression model, indicate that when there is no knowledge audit in the textile manufacturing companies, transient competitive advantage would have a rating of 1.305 (constant = 1.305). The results of the study further revealed that knowledge audit had a statistically significant and positive effect on the transient competitive advantage of textile manufacturing companies in Kenya ($\beta = 0.660$, $p < 0.05$). The findings depict that a one unit change in knowledge audit would lead to a corresponding change of 0.660 in transient competitive advantage. Consequently, enhancing knowledge audit would result in an improvement in transient competitive advantage, and vice versa.

Discussion

The study assessed the influence of knowledge audit on transient competitive advantage in textile manufacturing companies in Kenya. The results indicated that knowledge audit had a significant influence on the competitive advantage among textile manufacturing firms in Kenya. In terms of knowledge needs analysis, the study found that organizations regularly assessed which knowledge components to focus on, identified effective methods for imparting knowledge to the workforce, evaluated the status of organizational knowledge to determine gaps, and involved employees in the analysis process. This is consistent with the findings of Mahdi et al. (2019) which found a significant association between the audit of knowledge demands and competitive advantage. Besides, Duh et al. (2020) had similar findings that conducting a knowledge needs analysis is a crucial aspect of corporate knowledge audits, which greatly contributes to a firm's ability to remain competitive. Moreover, the findings from this study support the findings by Abubakar et al. (2019) that conducting a knowledge audit and taking corrective measures enable a firm to have the required knowledge to enable it to attain its performance objectives.

The findings regarding knowledge inventory analysis, needs analysis, and flow analysis demonstrated that surveyed firms had identified their knowledge assets, evaluated their competitive features, documented both tacit and explicit knowledge, and shared audit reports indicating available knowledge and gaps. This is in concurrence with Henao-García et al. (2020) that consolidating several knowledge audits into a single audit significantly affects a corporation's operations. The results corroborated Singh's (2018) previous findings, indicating that the arrival of the 21st century has led to a change in how conventional knowledge requirements assessment approaches are utilized. This change requires the need to analyze information-sharing platforms and systems, as well as the update of current ones. Moreover, the findings agree with Perez-Soltero et al. (2016) that a knowledge audit

approach that focuses on knowledge inventory analysis might help a business improve its learning capabilities and gain a competitive advantage.

Conclusion

The study findings ascertained that knowledge audit has a statistically significant and positive influence on the transient competitive advantage of textile manufacturers in Kenya. As a result of these findings, the study concluded that textile manufacturing firms in Kenya had effective knowledge needs analysis, knowledge inventory analysis, and knowledge flow analysis. The study also concludes that textile manufacturing firms with effective knowledge audit practices including effective knowledge needs analysis, knowledge inventory analysis, and knowledge flow analysis are bound to have strong transient competitive advantage in terms of market share and profits.

Recommendations

From the foregoing study recommends that the management of textile manufacturing firms to prioritize frequent assessments of knowledge requirements inside the firm. This includes identifying crucial knowledge components, evaluating effective ways for sharing knowledge, and including employees in the process. This process guarantees the identification and rapid resolution of knowledge gaps, resulting in improved organizational capabilities. Textile manufacturers should persist in documenting and analyzing their knowledge assets, encompassing both tacit and explicit knowledge, to comprehend their competitive attributes. This entails the management of detailed records of knowledge and the dissemination of audit results to foster transparency and cooperation within the organization.

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