

# Cross-Cultural Communication, Diversity Management, and Competitive Advantage Among Multi-National Corporations: Evidence in Nigeria

Adjerhore Isaiah, Habsah Binti Muda

Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin

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## ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural communication and workforce diversity management have become issues of concern that requires urgent attention especially for corporations that want to succeed in the global market. This study investigated the influence of cross-cultural communication and diversity management on competitive advantages of MNCs in Nigeria. The study used a quantitative research method with a cross-sectional design. Primary data was collected from 247 selected respondents of the 68 multinational corporations that are listed in the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) using a structured questionnaire. The respondents were selected using a simple random sampling technique. The collected data was analyzed using the descriptive and regression analysis. The descriptive analysis was used to describe the respondents of the study, while regression analysis was used to explain the hypotheses on the effect of cross-cultural communication and diversity management on competitive advantages of MNCs in Nigeria. The hypotheses between cross cultural communication and competitive advantage; and workforce diversity management and competitive advantage were examined and the result revealed a significant positive influence of cross-cultural communication and diversity management on competitive advantage. The study concludes that the cross-cultural communication and diversity management are critical to achieving competitive advantage in MNCs. Therefore, MNCs should give priorities to cross-cultural communications and diversity management as tools used to improve the interpersonal relations among expatriates and local workforce in a multifaceted and diverse culture environment to enhance competitive advantage and success of MNCs in the host countries.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural communication, diversity management, competitive advantage, multi-national corporations, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

With the advent of globalization, economic development, markets, production, consumption activities and multinational corporations (MNCs) activities have become predominant. MNCs operate in several countries where they have to cater for their customers and employees with different cultural background (Hobaya & Benbadji, 2015). These companies operate independently as a tool of foreign policy inside the parent company's location which requires prudent managerial task (Vlad & Stad, 2018). To effectively manage this diversity, they need not only conventional production management, but also the hiring of people of diverse cultural backgrounds and values. As a result, managing a workforce with a diverse cultural context is unavoidable (Tutar et al., 2014).

Furthermore, since the presence of MNCs is noticeable in almost every sector of the economy (Obalum & Amah, 2018), this indicates that opportunities are provided for entrepreneurs and young manager to travel abroad and communicate cross-culturally in order to develop the requisite skills for dealing with cultural differences. At the same time, it has provided managers with the opportunities to relate with one another and tap opportunities present in a culturally diversified global market (Okoro, 2013). Furthermore, differences in culture arise as a result of the mixture of people with diverse group identities (Pidduck et al., 2022). The

purpose of managing these variations in culture is to create an environment that allows them use their potentials optimally (Tutar et al., 2014). Therefore, there is need for individuals who can adapt and effectively manage the challenges associated with adjusting to working in a diverse cultural background (Pulakos et al., 2000).

MNCs are a new way through which corporations adapt to the new trend of economic structures (Kim & Milner, 2019; Tutar et al., 2014). In order to stay abreast of competition in the global market, MNCs prefer to produce their goods and services in foreign country rather than producing it locally and then export the goods. This has increased the presence of MNCs in every sector of economy and hence, the need to manage employees with different cultural background is paramount. Assigning managers, professionals and people to countries with unique legal, cultural and political framework on one hand, and additionally their family members with the workers from the host country, on the other hand, has become a challenge which MNCs have to manage (Pulakos et al., 2000).

In the case of Nigeria, increasing competition among MNCs and new entry of other players in the Nigerian international business environment necessitated the need for cross-cultural communication that can guarantee competitive advantage (Reckendrees et al., 2022; Chelimo, 2013). MNCs have realized that adapting and localizing to the business requirements of the home country is a key to achieving success. Meanwhile, barriers created by commerce and technology are being overcome, whereas cultural issues are emerging as new barriers for MNCs in international business. Nigerian business environment being characterized by multiple culture, multiple languages and multiple mix of religion among its people, achieving success in MNCs will be difficult without adaptation and diversity of the local workforce (Kaloki, 2011).

In recent decades, workforce diversity is one of the major concern of many MNCs. Workforce diversity indicates similarities and differences in term of age, physical abilities, race religions, sexual orientation and cultural background (Ince, 2023). Diversity has created heterogeneity in workforce and it has become necessary for every organization to manage such diversified workforce. Apparently, and overwhelming and difficult task for MNCs (Garg & Panchal, 2017). This is because managing the differences in workforce is a complex phenomenon, although, a tool to increase competitiveness in MNCs in order to meet the current changes in the global market.

For this reason, multinational firms have to apprehend that their managers want to always take into account cultural differences in their administrative roles. In a multinational organization where variations in employees' culture are ignored, experiences a terrible culture, whereas properly managed cultural differences in multinationals leads to achieving competitive advantages (Tutar, et al., 2014). While interacting with people belonging to quite a number of cultural environments, MNCs will have to advance and structure their communication policies as a response to the diversity in their cultural make up (Sand, 2023). In addition, bringing employees from different cultural background together within the same multinational corporation creates positive contributions such as innovation, and at the same time, cause problems (Dionisio & de Vargas, 2022) which can hamper the achievement of their competitive advantage, especially if proper communication and support of supervisor is absent. Cross-cultural communications have become an important means suggested by which managers in the multinational companies can address the challenges facing everyday decision making, building consensus and reaching agreements in MNCs (Mba, 2015).

Cross-cultural communication has become strategically vital to firms due to the increase in globalization (Lombardo & Kwong, 2021; Mba, 2015). Under that note, understanding cross-cultural communication is important for any company that has a diverse workforce or plans on conducting global business (Aririguzoh, 2022). This type of communication involves an appreciation of how human beings from distinct cultures

speaking, communicating, and identifying the world around them. Cross-cultural verbal exchange in an organization offers a unique perception about enterprise customs, beliefs and verbal exchange techniques. According to Torkkeli and Durst (2022) and Martin (2007), multinational corporations are expected to act in a manner and behaviour that is considered internationally and socially acceptable. Within the context of international business, firm's competence both international and domestic, and how effective is their communication strategy determines the extent to which the corporation achieves competitive advantage in the international business environment.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a quantitative research method that was conducted in a cross-sectional design. Primary data was collected from 247 selected respondents of the 68 multinational corporations that are listed in the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) using a structured questionnaire. The respondents were selected using a simple random sampling technique. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive and regression analysis. The descriptive analysis was used to describe the respondents of the study, while regression analysis was used to explain the hypotheses on the effect of cross-cultural communication and diversity management on competitive advantages of MNCs in Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Past studies on cross-cultural communication have employed a universal approach in managing cross-cultural practices in MNCs, which has widened the gap on the impact of cross-cultural communication and success of MNCs (Kotter & Heskett, 2012; Mirithi, 2017). Previous research and anecdotal evidences have emphasized the importance of cross-cultural communication in the success of multinational corporations (Derak, 2006; O'Rourke, 2010; Aburge, 2012; Chaney & Martin 2013; Mba, 2015). Derek (2006) emphasized that the concept of cultural convergence is crucial in managing multinational operations. Consequently, researchers in the international business domain have made great strides in the field of foreign cultural communication as a differentiator factor responsible for the success and capabilities of multinational corporations in the global markets (Thomas, 2008; Moran et al., 2011; Aburge, 2016; Aburge 2017).

Although the past two decades have witnessed the importance of culture and cultural effects leading to increase in cross-cultural researches that have provided empirical evidences to support the relevant relationship between cross-cultural communication and multinational corporation success in the global market (Kendra, 2022; Khailanen et al., 2019; Obalum & Omah, 2018; Okoro, 2013; Thill & Bovee, 2011; O'Rourke, 2011;). Yet, many of these cross-cultural studies continue to suffer from some primary limitations (Aburge 2017). One noticeably important limitation is the erroneous assumption that global culture is homogenous and which emphasizes either a Western-centric or Eurocentric culture in the developing nations (Aburge, 2017). However, considering the increasing numbers of MNCs entering the Nigerian business environment, understanding the cultural composition of the business environment in Nigeria which may be more demanding and important than the perception they take for granted.

Review of literature shows that there is dearth of studies in the aspect of cross-cultural communication as critical perspective of international business (Szkudlarek et al., 2020; Harzing & Freely, 2009; Aburge, 2017). Many studies have made attempts to identify cultural imperialism as one of the factors responsible for MNCs' achievement of competitive advantage in Nigerian business context. For example, Mba (2015) and Obamul and Amah (2018) conceptualized the factors of cross-cultural communication in Nigeria MNCs but there is lack of empirical investigation of the influence of the factors of cross-cultural communication on the success of MNCs. Aburge (2017) opined that balancing cross-cultural investigation is needed to understand the cultural nature of the globe. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the factors influencing

cross-cultural communication for the success of MNCs in Nigerian business context.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### • Gender of the Respondents

A total of 247 respondents participated in this survey. The descriptive analysis result with respect to the gender of the respondents indicates that 86.2% are male, while 13.8% of the respondents are female. Table 1. shows the frequency distribution of the respondents with respect to their age.

Table 1. Gender Distribution Of The Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	213	86.2	86.2	86.2
	Female	34	13.8	13.8	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Author’s computation (2023)

### • Age of the Respondents

The age of the respondents is grouped into five (5) in this study. The description of the age distribution of the respondents revealed that; less than 25 years old (47.8% of the respondents), 25 – 35 years (21.9% of the respondents), 36 – 45 years (8.1% of the population), 46 – 55 years (13.4% of the respondents), and above 55 years (8.9% of the respondents). The result of the age distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Age Distribution Of The Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	less than 25 years	118	47.8	47.8	47.8
	26 – 35 years	54	21.9	21.9	69.6
	36 – 45 years	20	8.1	8.1	77.7
	46 – 55 years	33	13.4	13.4	91.1
	above 55 years	22	8.9	8.9	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Author’s computation (2023)

### • Position of the Respondents

The frequency distribution of the position of the respondents in this survey revealed that 14.2% of the respondents are in executive/manager position, managing director (56.2% of the respondents, human resource manager (23.1% of the respondents) and 6.5% are supervisor. Table 3. presents the frequency distribution result of the position of the respondents.

Table 3. Position Of the Respondents

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Executive/manager	35	14.2	14.2	14.2
	Managing Director	139	56.3	56.3	70.4
	Human Resource Manager	57	23.1	23.1	93.5
	Supervisor	16	6.5	6.5	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Author’s computation (2023)

• **Nature of Business of Respondents**

The frequency analysis result of the nature of business of the respondents in this survey revealed that 78.5% of the respondents are from the manufacturing sector of the industry, trading has 13.8% representation, service sector is represented by 4.9%, while telecommunication is represented by 2.8% of the respondents. Table 4. presents the frequency distribution of the nature of business of the respondents.

Table 4. Nature Of Business Of The Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Manufacturing	194	78.5	78.5	78.5
	Trading	34	13.8	13.8	92.3
	Servicing	12	4.9	4.9	97.2
	Telecommunication	7	2.8	2.8	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Author’s computation (2023)

• **Nationality of the Respondents**

Of the 247 respondents, the frequency distribution analysis of the nationality of the respondents revealed that 19.4% of the respondents are Nigerian, while the remaining 80.6% are non-Nigerian. Table 5 presents the frequency distribution of the respondents’ nationality.

Table 5. Nationality Of The Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Nigerian	48	19.4	19.4	19.4
	Non-Nigerian	199	80.6	80.6	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Author’s computation (2023)

● **Reliability of the Constructs**

Reliability is a quality criterion of a construct; it requires a high level of correlation among the indicators of a particular construct. The reliability of this study was assessed through the value of Cronbach’s Alpha. Hair et al., (2013) state that the Cronbach’s Alpha value greater than 0.7 indicates a good internal consistency among the measures of a construct. Table 6 shows the result of reliability test of the constructs in this study.

Table 6. Reliability Test

Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha	No of Items
Cross-Cultural Communication	0.786	31
Diversity Management	.802	10
Competitive Advantage	.661	9

Source: Author’s computation (2023)

The result of the reliability test as shown in Table 6 revealed that the Cronbach’s alpha for all the constructs is greater than the threshold value of 0.7 except for competitive advantage which had a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.661. However, a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.6 and above is acceptable for exploratory study (Hair et al., 2013). Therefore, the result of the Cronbach’s alpha in this study indicates a good internal consistency for all the constructs.

**Correlation Analysis**

To examine the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent variables (cross-cultural communication and Diversity management) and competitive advantage in MNCs, Nigeria, the researcher performed Pearson (r) correlation co-efficient. The results as shown in Table 7 indicate a significant positive correlation between cross-cultural communication (CCC) and competitive advantage (CA). The relationship implies that as cross-cultural communication and diversity management improve, so does competitive advantages of MNCs in Nigeria. Further, Table 7 shows that diversity management (DM) and competitive advantage (CA) are significantly and positively correlated, implying that competitive advantage of MNCs in Nigeria increases as their diversity management increases.

Table 7. Correlation Analysis

		CA
Cross-cultural communication (CCC)	Pearson Correlation	.134*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036
	N	247
Diversity Management (DM)	Pearson Correlation	.250**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	247

Source: Author’s computation (2023)

**Multiple Regression Analysis**

This section presents the multiple regression analysis and the hypotheses testing result between cross-cultural communication (CCC), diversity management (DM) and competitive advantage (CA).

Figure 1 showed the standardized regression coefficients as well as the squared multiple correlations also known as R-square for the constrained model in the relationship between cross-cultural communication (CCC), diversity management (DM), and competitive advantage (CA). The result in Table 8 shows a positive and significant correlation between cross-cultural communication (CCC) and competitive advantage (CA), and between diversity management (DM) and competitive advantage (CA).

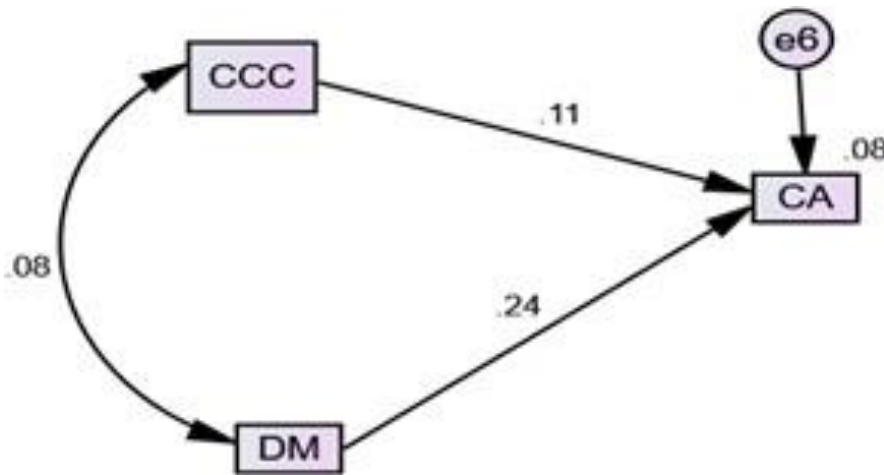


Figure 1: Regression Model

The result revealed that the probability of getting a critical ratio of 3.903 in absolute value is less than 0.001 for the path relationship between DM and competitive advantage, and the probability of getting a critical ratio of 1.854 in absolute value is less than 0.1 for the path relationship between CCC and CA. Table 8 presents the regression weights for the model.

Table 8. Regression Weights

Path	Standardized Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
CA←DM	0.240	0.075	3.903	0.000
CA←CCC	0.114	0.094	1.853	0.064

Source: Author’s computation (2023)

It is evident from Table 8 that cross-cultural communication (CCC) and diversity management (DM) have positive relationship with competitive advantage (CA). The path of DM to CA has more magnitude (beta=0.240, t= 3.903) than the path of CCC to CA (beta= 0.114, t= 1.853) which is significant at 90 percent level of significance. It can be concluded that both exogenous variables CCC and DM could predict 8 percent of the variances in the endogenous variable (CA).

The result revealed a positive significant effect of CCC and DM on competitive advantage. Hence, it is indicated that CCC and DA have positive significant effect on competitive advantage of MNCs in Nigeria. Hence, hypotheses H<sub>01</sub> which posited that cross-cultural communication has a significant influence on

competitive advantage of MNCs in Nigeria and  $H_{02}$  which posited that diversity management has significant influence of competitive advantage of MNCs in Nigeria are accepted.

## DISCUSSION

### • Influence of cross-cultural communication on competitive advantage of MNCs in Nigeria

Cross-cultural communication reflects the interaction and understanding of the communication codes, value orientations of people and the relationship among people using language and communication within a specific environment (Aburge, 2017). The test of hypothesis on the influence of cross-cultural communication on competitive advantage of MNCs in Nigeria revealed a positive significant influence of cross-cultural communication on competitive advantage of MNCs in Nigeria. This result implies that a unit increase in cross-cultural communication causes an increase in the competitive advantages of the MNCs. The beta value of the hypothesis indicates a weak positive value of 0.240 which indicates that an increase in the cross-cultural communication will increase the competitive advantage of MNCs. The result signifies that in Nigeria, cross-cultural communication influences the competitive advantage of MNCs.

This result supports the findings of previous studies that effective cross-cultural communication is a critical source of competitive advantages among MNCs (Aburge, 2017; Marithi, 2017; Rajpal, 2018; Bako et al., 2019; Aburge & Debrah, 2019). Furthermore, effective cross-cultural communication enables the appreciation of the differences in communication gap due to cultural differences among expatriates in MNCs (Aburge, 2017). According to Aburge (2017), for MNCs to successfully operate in the host country – Sub-Saharan Africa such as Nigeria – there is need to first reduce the perceived uncertainty through the way people gather information and communicate with others (cross-cultural communication management) which enables expatriates to adjust in order to overcome the difficulties or concerns in his/her daily tasks in the new environment.

The finding is also in harmony with result the of Bako et al., (2019) that cross-cultural management has significant influence on the performance of MNCs. Cross-cultural communication helps boost MNCs image and manage the relationship between the host and parent companies. Hence, effective cross-cultural communication has become a critical source of competitive advantage among MNCs (Bako et al., 2019). Similarly, the finding is in-line with Aburge and Debrah (2019) who found that cross-cultural communication competence has a significant positive relationship with expatriates' business operations in Ghana. Expatriates needs to be trained in host culture in order to facilitate their interaction with both the local staff of their home communities. In addition, the findings corroborate with the results of Rajpal and Onyusheva (2018) who found that having cross-cultural communication has led multinational firms to providing a varied experience and advanced thinking in the establishment of competitive positions among organizations.

### • Influence of diversity management on competitive advantage of MNCs in Nigeria

Diversity management refers to the utilization of human resources management practices for maintaining the differences in human capital and ensure that such differences do not negatively impact the achievement of the organizational goals and objectives. The second hypothesis of the study posited that diversity management will significantly influence competitive advantage in MNCs in Nigeria. The result of the regression analysis to test the hypothesized relationship between diversity management and competitive advantage showed a positive significant influence of diversity management on competitive advantage of MNCs. The beta value (beta= 0.114) of the relationship revealed a weak positive relationship between diversity management and competitive advantage of MNCs.

This implies that a unit increase in the diversity management will increase the competitive advantage of



MNC positively. The indication of this result is that MNCs could take advantage of workforce diversity through proper management approach and policies such that equality of opportunity and preventing discrimination at workplace booster workforce efficiency and productivity in order to create competitive advantage.

This result corroborates the findings of Ohunakin et al., (2019) who found a significant positive influence of diversity management on organizational outcomes of multinational corporations (MNCs). Ensari et al. (2017) found a positive effect of diversity management on competitive strategy. The study emphasized that workforce has been the most important element, asset, and capability possessed by an organization to create a difference as intellectual capital. Diversity management creates an avenue for employers to transform their workforce diversities into strategies that will lead to organizational richness and competitive advantages (Ensari et al., 2017).

According to Tozkoparan-vatanzever (2011), appreciation of diversity enables people to work without feeling pressured, and this positively impact firms' approaches to performance measures such as employees' efficiency, and productivity and a win-win situation is established in an organization that can sustain, manage, accept, value and respect the diversity in its workforce.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the influence of cross-cultural communication, diversity management and competitive advantage among multi-national corporations in Nigeria. Many multinational corporations have established their operations in developing countries like Nigeria. These corporations have a high number of employees with diverse cultural background which remains a challenge to achieve organization objective. The result from study revealed that practicing cross-cultural communication and managing the culturally diverse workforce of these employees influence the competitive advantages of MNCs and thus enhance their success.

Understanding the relevance of cultural diversity is identified to be a key factor towards building successful relationship between the host and parent country of MNCs. For this reason, organization management should not be limited to the economic dimensions of MNCs, but rather, important pay close attention to the diversity among the local workforce when taking decision in culturally multifaceted host country like Nigeria.

Given this circumstance, for MNCs to remain competitive and succeed in the host countries, priorities should be given to cross-cultural communication as an effective tool that could be used by expatriates in MNCs to train expatriates on interpersonal relations in a multifaceted and diverse cultural environment such as Nigeria. By doing this ultimately leads to a shift from mere teaching of culture to managing diversity and interpersonal skills that would enhance competitive advantage and MNCs success in the host countries.

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