

Mediation Effects of Innovativeness and Competitiveness on Knowledge Acquisition-Performance Links

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International joint venture (IJV) performance can be improved through translating and best utilizing the gained knowledge from foreign Multi National Corporations (MNCs). This is settled as a key goal of its formation. Drawing from the knowledge-based perspective, this paper examines two mediation factors between knowledge acquisition-performance links. Acquired knowledge will be well applied to increase IJVs' innovativeness and IJVs' competitiveness, which in turn will generally improve their performance. From a sample of 166 oil and gas IJVs in Algeria, data was analysed using AMOS v 23.0. The findings revealed that each of IJV's innovativeness and IJV's competitiveness successfully mediate the relationship between their knowledge acquisition and performance. The authors discuss the implications of these findings for future research, on the role of such capabilities in the successful formation of IJVs in transitional economic markets.

Key words: *Knowledge acquisition, innovativeness, competitiveness, performance, international joint venture.*

Introduction

Advancement in technology has enabled firms from transitional economies to form an arrangement with foreign MNCs from more developed countries, to acquire valuable knowledge, skills, and capabilities to improve their performance and success (e.g., Beamish & Lupton, 2009; Lane, Salk, & Lyles, 2001; Lyles & Salk, 1996). Most of these economics lack the means to generate technology and knowledge (Low & Robins, 2014). According to theorists, firms become involved in an IJV in order to acquire valuable knowledge, which

turns out to be the utmost strategic resource, that can be core to a better firm performance (Grant, 1996). However, previous studies documented an increase in the reported number of failed IJVs, where an average of two in five IJVs are perpetual strugglers or outright failures (Bamford, Ernst, & Fubini, 2004; Beamish & Delios, 1997; Damanpour, Devece, Chen, & Pothukuchi, 2012).

In addition, several empirical researches in transitional and emerging markets documented an inconclusive relationship between knowledge, acquisition and performance (e.g. Anh, Baughn, Hang, & Neupert, 2006; Dhanaraj, Lyles, Steensma, & Tihanyi, 2004; Park, Vertinsky, & Becerra, 2015). Hence, in line with the argument of Zhang, Wu, & Chen, (2018), knowledge transferred from foreign parents is only a necessary but insufficient condition to IJV performance.

However, several studies have attempted to examine the mediating factors of the link between knowledge acquisition and performance. Examples include channel management capability (Zhang et al., 2018), relational capital (Kwok, Sharma, Gaur, & Ueno, 2018), and subsidiaries' capabilities (J. Li & Lee, 2015). Nevertheless, there is dearth in the literature on how knowledge transfer affects IJV performance. Therefore, drawing on knowledge-based view theory (KBV), this paper suggests a mediating factor. We discuss how IJV innovativeness and IJV competitiveness may help transform knowledge acquisition benefits into greater IJV performance, in the transitional economic markets. IJV innovativeness refers to production or adoption, assimilation, and exploitation of a value-added novelty in economic and social spheres; renewal and enlargement of products, services, and markets; development of new methods of production; and establishment of new management systems (Rousseau, Mathias, Madden, & Crook, 2016). IJV competitiveness refers to the degree to which a company accomplishes, in a marketplace, compared with its major rivals (L. Y. Wu, Wang, Chen, & Pan, 2008; W. p. Wu, 2008). These mediators have been chosen in line with the researchers' argument that IJVs need to convert the transferred knowledge into capabilities to generate greater performance (Mahoney & Pandian, 1992).

In the past three decades, most studies in this field have been done in Hungary (Lyles & Salk, 1996; Lyles, von Krogh, & Aadne, 2003), Vietnam (C. P. T. T. Anh & Baughn, 2013; P. T. T. Anh, Baughn, Hang, & Neupert, 2006; THI THUC ANH, 2017), and China (Kwok et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). This paper chooses Algeria as a research setting to test the hypotheses. Algeria is one recent transition economic country (World Economic Forum, 2017) which since the 1990s have received a considerable number of inward foreign direct investment (FDI). This FDI (including MNCs and its affiliates) was mostly shifted to an international joint venture under the rule 51/49 (investment in Algeria guide, 2017). Algeria policy-makers mandated that all foreign investors align with rule 51/49, under which local partners constitute the majority. Therefore, the local partner will control the IJV in terms of

management and decision-making. The lack of empirical studies in Algeria, the dynamism of its environment, and the quick increase in the number of its IJVs give a fit setting for achieving the objectives of this paper. In an emerging economy where there are a lack of foreign rival companies, and local companies are still beginning, the study of IJV innovativeness and IJV competitiveness capabilities are significant for Algerian IJVs to sweep the market.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

IJV's Knowledge Acquisition

According to Anh et al. (2006), “knowledge acquisition from foreign MNCs’ affiliates can be defined as a procedure by which an entity of an IJV attains new knowledge from its foreign MNCs (foreign parent)”. This paper describe IJV knowledge acquisition as the new foreign partners’ knowledge that is acquired, absorbed, and applied by an IJV to create the same management techniques and manufacturing activities, equally to its original economic organizations (Nguyen & Aoyama, 2015; Sazali & Raduan, 2011).

Previous studies have proposed or examined the antecedents of IJV knowledge acquisition. For example, Lyles and Salk, (1996), Anh & Baughn, (2013), Anh et al., (2006), and Dhanaraj, Lyles, Steensma, & Tihanyi, (2004) documented social capital and absorptive capacity as the significant factors that positively affect IJV knowledge acquisition. Other studies also proposed different factors that may be examined. For example, management practices and formal mechanisms (Elhachemi & Ahmad; Elhachemi & Ahmadc, 2018) and environmental uncertainty (Elhachemi & Ahmad) were found to positively or negatively affect knowledge acquisition.

According to KBV theory, knowledge is a core source for superior organizational performance (Grant, 1996). Since the pioneering study by Lyles and Salk, (1996), several studies have attempted to link IJVs’ knowledge acquisition to their performance (e.g. (C. P. T. T. Anh & Baughn, 2013; Lane et al., 2001; Lyles & Salk, 1996). However, according to Zhang et al. (2018), the studies are inconclusive. For example, through sampling Vietnamese IJVs, P. T. T. Anh et al. (2006) found significant performance influences for tacit knowledge transfer, and a negative effect for explicit knowledge transfer. On the contrary, Dhanaraj et al., (2004) found a positive direct effect of explicit knowledge transfer on performance but a negative relationship between tacit knowledge transfer and IJV performance in a sample of 140 Hungary IJVs. More so, (Park, Vertinsky, & Becerra, 2015) documented how explicit knowledge transfer only has a significant influence on the performance of mature IJVs, while tacit knowledge transfer significantly influences the performance of both mature and young IJVs. These inconclusive findings justify the need to investigate a mediator, to enhance and improve performance through knowledge acquisition about IJVs.

Some studies have included several variables mediating IJV knowledge acquisition-performance links. For instance, a study by Zhang et al. (2018) utilized a sample of 136 China-based IJVs. It examined channel management capability as a mediator between knowledge acquisition and performance. More so, Kwok et al. (2018) identify mutual trust and reciprocal commitment as a mediator. They sampled 205 contractual IJVs in China, a highly competitive and dynamic emerging market. In addition, Li and Lee (2015) collected data from 167 foreign subsidiaries in China. They linked performance to the role of subsidiary capabilities in the knowledge transformation gained from parent firms. Thus, based on KBV theory, this paper assumes that when an IJV utilizes its acquired knowledge well, it will give the IJV the capability to innovate and compete against its rivals, which in turn will lead the IJV to greater performance. Therefore, foreign partner knowledge acquisition is truly important but an inadequate condition for accomplishing JV performance.

This study assumes that in a growing market like Algeria where foreign investment is increasing steadily, a high number of IJVs will be created over the year, while knowledge and technology inflow will also increase. Therefore, all the organizations will have different amounts of knowledge. In this case, the IJV who is more qualified to apply its knowledge well, may increase its innovativeness through new products, presenting a better service, and developing many new management approaches. In addition, the more acquired knowledge may lead the IJV to respond more promptly to both market demands and market opportunities, gaining the skills to defeat future competitors in the marketplace. These capabilities are assumed to be as a bridge to gaining greater performance for the IJV.

IJV Knowledge Acquisition and IJV Performance: The Mediating Role of IJV Innovativeness

A foreign partner's transferred knowledge has been described in the literature as essential for the success and the survival of IJVs (Beamish & Lupton, 2009). In addition, knowledge is an important resource to a firm as it creates, combines, recombines, and exploits knowledge which is vital to a firm's ability to innovate (Grant, 1996; Szulanski, Ringov, & Jensen, 2016; X. Wang, 2013), which in turn is core to an IJV's performance (Anh & Baughn, 2013; Lee et al., 2012; Tsang et al., 2004). Thus, innovativeness herein refers to the capacity of an organization to introduce new products, procedures or ideas in the organization (Hult, Hurley, & Knight, 2004).

Previous studies developed the idea that the competitive power of firms depends on the capacity to access information, generate knowledge and expand innovation capability (Grant, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spender, 1996). Hence, companies must continuously increase the distribution of knowledge to their employees, in accordance with new products

and technologies (Hung, Lien, Yang, Wu, & Kuo, 2011; Jaguli, Malek, & Palil, 2014). Certainly, there must be several conditional innovations, to enhance the performance of any organization for a long-term dominance (Bartel & Garud, 2009; Bowen, Rostami, & Steel, 2010; Standing & Kiniti, 2011). Researchers have established that innovation is a key factor that brings a better performance when fashioned with well-managed knowledge (Leal Rodríguez, Leal Millán, & Roldán Salgueiro, 2013). Thus, innovation may play a crucial role between knowledge and performance.

Several studies on knowledge acquisition in organizational contexts have proved that innovativeness can mediate knowledge and performance. For example, (Nawaz, Hassan, & Shaukat, 2014) collected data from 407 manufacturing companies listed on the Karachi Stock Exchange. They revealed that innovation partially mediates the relationship between knowledge management practices and firm performance. In another study, firm performance in the telecommunication and information technology industry was likewise found to indirectly affect knowledge management (Alrubaiee, Alzubi, Hanandeh, & Al Ali, 2015). This was also confirmed by the study of (Nawab, Nazir, Zahid, & Fawad, 2015) into the banking sector. In addition, (Al-Sa'di, Abdallah, & Dahiyat, 2017) investigate the mediation role of product and process innovations, using data from 207 manufacturing companies operating in the Jordanian capital of Amman. The study documented how only process innovation was found to significantly mediate the knowledge management-operational performance relationship. There is enough empirical evidence that there will be increases in innovation as well as the performance of IJV, once the knowledge acquired by an IJV takes place. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: IJV's innovativeness has a mediation role on the relationship between IJV's knowledge acquisition and IJV's performance.

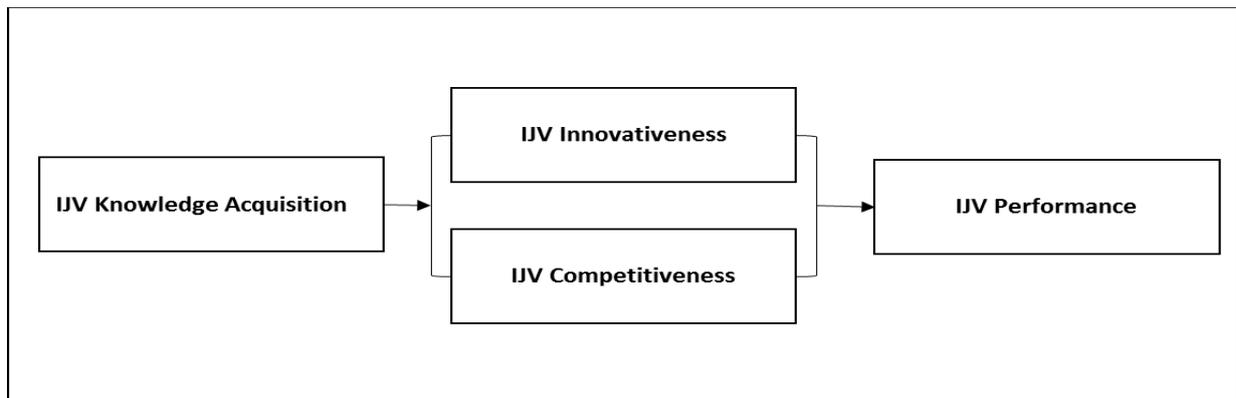
IJV's Knowledge Acquisition and IJV's Performance: The Mediating Role of IJV's Competitiveness

Knowledge is defined by KBV as the ultimate, strategic resource of any organization with the ability to generate a constant competitive advantage and superior corporate performance for its both social complexity and imitation difficulty (Nickerson & Zenger, 2004). Therefore, among the objectives of forming an IJV with foreign partners in a developing country, is to gain valuable knowledge; an important asset. The IJV has the capacity to secure, coordinate, store, share, and apply knowledge which is important for building and managing competitive advantage. Thus, competitiveness is defined as the degree to which an organization performs in a marketplace, compared to its major competitors (L. Y. Wu et al., 2008; W. p. Wu, 2008).

Organizational learning is a key factor to enhance performance and a basis to retain a sustainable competitive advantage (Brockman & Morgan, 2003; Dodgson, 1993). In other words, firms that are able to better sense events and trends in the marketplace would definitely be in a position for better performance (Sinkula, 1994; Tippins & Sohi, 2003). The literature has also empirically inferred that performance has been affected positively, and the firm has been provided with the mediation to outperform its rivals. For instance, the empirical study by (Zhou, Brown, & Dev, 2009) has suggested that competitive advantage indirectly enhances firm financial performance by improving market performance. Also, (S. Li, Ragu-Nathan, Ragu-Nathan, & Rao, 2006) empirically studied 196 organizations and found that several competitive advantages positively affects organizational performance. Therefore, competitiveness has become an essential pillar for increasing performance. Ma (2000) argued that competitive advantage aids a firm in bettering value for customers; hence contributing to the firm's performance. Also, competitive advantage can be discrete or compound, knowledge-based (Grant, 1996b) or market-position-based (Porter, 1980), and is expected to be positively related to performance.

According to (Wernerfelt, 1984), knowledge can only be linked to competitiveness and performance when an organization obtains a competitive advantage and higher performance through utilizing strategic resources for competitive advantage and robust financial performance. The researcher also presented the resources as 'tangible' and 'intangible' assets which are knitted to the firm (Wernerfelt, 1984, p. 172). More so, (Leonidou, Palihawadana, & Theodosiou, 2011) suggested that strengthening the firm's export-related resources and capabilities (e.g. knowledge) would cater for an instrument that allows the firm to develop and realize export marketing strategy. Therefore, the firm gains competitive advantage related to costs, products, or services, which in turn help it achieve superior export performance. These evidences prove the potential mediators of IJV's competitiveness between knowledge acquisition-IJV's performances. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: IJVs' competitiveness has a mediation role in the relationship between IJVs' knowledge acquisition and IJV's performance.



Methodology

Research Context

As aforementioned, this paper is undertaken in Algeria, particularly in the oil and gas industries. Since 2006, the government of Algeria has obliged every foreign investor in the oil and gas industries to follow rule 51/49, whereby the local partner(s) own the majority. Under this rule, a majority in the equity gives the local partner control over the IJV. The oil and gas industry is chosen in this study because of its importance in the country. It is considered the backbone of the national economy. The industry represents almost 60% of budget revenues, which account for approximately 40% of the country's GDP, and over 94% of export incomes. Data collected from the Algeria's National Centre for Trade Register, (CNRC), (2017), revealed that the number of IJVs in the oil and gas industries has increased progressively over the past 10 years. The numbers of IJVs has improved from 243 in 2006 to 791 in 2016. Hence, this paper tests its conceptual model and all the hypotheses in the context of oil and gas IJVs in Algeria, to provide useful learning for other developing economies embarking on their economic transition.

Population, Sample, and procedure

CNRC (2017) listed the total number of IJVs with their year of establishment, which represents the total population for this study. However, this study reduces the population to the total IJVs established between 2006 and 2013. Hence, the total population is 702 IJVs. This is to ensure that all IJVs in the selected population are already in the stage of knowledge exchange. Through systematic random sampling, this study uses both the online and drop off questionnaire to collect data from the key respondents working in the targeted IJVs (e.g. CEO, manager, and engineer). Most IJVs were located in the industrial zones of Algiers, Hassi Masoud, and Ouarigla. Also, a follow-up call, visiting, and emailing occurred in about two weeks to improve the response rate. The total number of returned questionnaires was 170. Out of the 170 questionnaires, 166 were completed (52.1% of distributed surveys). Out of 166 questionnaires, 134 were from drop-collected questionnaires and 32 were from online

surveys. An independent sample t-test shows no differences in the mean scores of all the study variables between these two groups; hence, the survey method does not have any effect on the results.

Questionnaire Design and Measures

The survey of this study is delivered in Algeria where firm's administrative relies heavily on French language. Hence, the first version of the questionnaire that was designed in English language was then translated to French, by a professional translator who can translate both English and French and, by experience, was fit for the purpose. After the survey was translated by him, the researcher used back-to-back translation to avoid any mistake or problem in the translation (Brislin, 1970; Douglas & Craig, 2007; Ozolins, 2009).

In terms of measurement, the independent variable of *IJV knowledge acquisition* was measured using (Lin, 2007; Nguyen & Aoyama, 2015) items. The measurement comprised seven items regarding the degree of staff acquiring exclusive knowledge, improvement of technical information, increasing the ability of operating skills to manufacture quality products, increasing the local staff motivation for further study, ability to improve product quality, long existence of trained and more knowledgeable staff in the IJV, and the cooperating and sharing of ideas between local and foreign staff (For example, every local technical staff member has fully learned exclusive knowledge, technical information, and the knowledge of local technical staff has improved significantly). All items were rated on a 7- point Likert response scale, ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. For the dependent variable of *IJV performance*, the study uses 12 items developed by (Tsang, Nguyen, & Erramilli, 2004) to measure the variable. For example, [“According to your expectation, to what extent has your IJV achieved the planned goals”](#). All items were measured using 7-point Likert scale ranging 1 “far less than expected” to 7= “far more than expected”.

Regarding the mediator, firstly, *IJV competitiveness* is measured using five items from (Wu et al., 2008) such as saying that our venture often defeats our main competitors in the marketplace, our venture can provide higher quality products and services to customers. This construct is measured in this study using a 7-point Likert scale. Secondly, *IJV innovation* adopted 10 items from the study of (C. L. Wang & Ahmed, 2004). The items of IJV innovativeness discuss the degree of agreement on IJV novelty of products and services, changes on products and services, cutting edge of technology, improving the business process, management problems solutions, updating technology and machinery, toleration of individual work style differences, solving problems with new methods, and first adoption of new ways of doing things.

Results

The proposed model was assessed by structural equation modelling using AMOS version 23 (Bentler & Wu, 2004). All models were tested with standardized coefficients obtained by maximum likelihood estimation. The goodness-of-fit of the model was evaluated using three fitness indices: the comparative fit index (CFI), root-mean-square residual (RMR), and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA). For CFI, values greater than 0.90 represent an acceptable fit (Schumacker & Lomax, 1996). For the RMR, and RMSEA, values below 0.05 indicate a close fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999), whereas values up to 0.08 represent acceptable errors of approximation (Browne & Cudeck, 1992). Table 1 presents the descriptive and the correlations statistics of the variables in the study among the variables.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix, Means, Standard Deviations and reliability of the study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. IJV knowledge acquisition	1	.66**	.70**	.63**
2. IJV innovativeness			1	.75**
3. IJV' competitiveness				.72**
4. IJV performance				1
SD	1.01	.96	.91	.89
Cronbach's alpha (α)	.91	.93	.89	.95

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This study follows the recommendation of Preacher & Hayes, (2004), in order to test the mediation hypothesis. To test the partial mediation (Model 1) we specified a direct path from IJV knowledge acquisition to IJV performance and IJV innovativeness and IJV competitiveness as an indirect predictor. Model 1 showed a very good fit to the data, SRMR= .04, CFI= .92 RMSEA= .07. All hypothesized paths in the model were positive and statistically significant ($\alpha=.001$).

To test the *full mediation model* (Model 2) we specified direct and indirect paths from IJV knowledge acquisition to IJV performance with this relation being mediated by IJV innovativeness and IJV competitiveness. Model 2 showed a satisfactory fit to the data, SRMR= .06, CFI= .90 RMSEA= .15. All hypothesized paths in the model were positive and statistically significant ($\alpha=.001$). However, adding the direct relationship from IJV knowledge acquisition to IJV performance the relationship become insignificant. Altogether, the predictor explained 60 % of the variance in IJV's performance.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to KBV theory, the reason for firms to form an IJV is because the IJV is viewed as a fundamental vehicle to access, learn or absorb foreign partners' embedded capabilities, technology, and knowledge. This acquired technology and knowledge are utmost, valuable resources that lead to superior performance (Grant, 1996). However, there are inconclusive results in the literature on the relationship between IJV knowledge acquisition and IJV performance. Hence, this study proposed a mediating role of IJV innovativeness and IJV competitiveness. The reason for choosing these mediations is the argument that knowledge is important but sometimes not enough, where IJV need an intervening factor to translate the benefits of their received knowledge into superior IJV performance. Using a sample of oil and gas IJVs in Algeria, the outcome of the analysed data strongly supports the formulated hypotheses. The result proved that IJV competitiveness and IJV innovativeness strongly support the relationship between their knowledge acquisition and their performance.

In this paper, we presented a framework that contains two mediators (IJV competitiveness and IJV innovativeness) between the knowledge acquisition-performance relationships. This framework and the findings presented reveal a more complex and fine-grained picture of IJV learning, answering the call for a systematic overview of the underlying determinants and consequences of knowledge transfer (Van Wijk et al., 2008). It also gives a better understanding to organizational learning, particularly the learning process in the post-knowledge transfer stage. The findings of this study contribute to the literature on the performance influence of IJV knowledge acquisition, by demonstrating the role of each of IJV competitiveness and IJV innovativeness. Each mediator may help to convert the possible benefits of IJV knowledge acquisition into greater performance. The mediation variables used in the study support the view of KBV theory. The main view of the theory is that firms would benefit from having resources that are diversely distributed and peculiar, and a subset of those that lead to superior long-term performance, valuable and rare resources can improve the outcomes (Grant, 1996). Some of those advantages "can be sustained over time to the extent that the firm is able to safeguard against resource transfer, imitation, or substitution" (Grant, 1996).

The results of this study have provided an empirical basis for future researchers who want to focus on the relationship between the study's variables. In addition, the results offer important practical implications in relation to knowledge acquisition of IJVs in the Algerian context. The findings of the study would be important to the policy-makers such as authorities in the Algerian Ministry of Industry and Mines, and finally to the managers of IJVs in the oil & gas industry, particularly in designing policies and entrepreneurship programs in the country. Also, the findings from the comprehensive assessment can help policy-makers formulate better policies for IJVs. Such understanding and awareness may



weigh value for policy-makers to make the right decisions to avoid IJVs' failures. More so, this study may inspire practitioners, such as managers, to take necessary steps in organizational practices in terms of IJVs' commitment to learning. And finally, this study also offers valuable insights to IJV knowledge management, especially in uncertain business environments. Hence, it can be concluded that this study contributes to the understanding of knowledge acquisition impact of IJVs' performance.

Limitation and Directions for Future Studies

As in any scientific research, this study has some limitations. First, given the cross-sectional sample employed in the study, our empirical analyses cannot incorporate changes over time. A longitudinal setting in future research would overcome the limitation. Second, this study is conducted in Algeria which is a transitional economic country characterised by a certain economic situation, cultural background, and market size. As a result, caution should be exercised when generalizing the conclusions drawn from this study on Algeria to other countries. Therefore, it is recommended that this study be replicated in a different transitional economic country, to increase the generalizability of the findings. This study focuses on IJVs' competitiveness and IJVs' innovativeness as conditions that could influence knowledge acquisition-performance relationships. Therefore, future researchers may want to propose other potential mediators and even integrate it with moderators, as a capability to help in translating the benefits of acquired knowledge into greater IJV performance.

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