



Providing a Comprehensive Model for Customer Knowledge Management in Industrial Companies Affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation




Alireza Nejadafshar¹, Mahmoud Ahmadi Sharif^{2,*}, Farzad Asayesh³ and Alireza Rosta⁴

¹ Department of Business Management, Shahr-e-Qods Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; 

² Department of Business Management, Shahr-e-Qods Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; 

³ Department of Business Management, Shahr-e-Qods Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; 

⁴ Department of Business Management, Shahr-e-Qods Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; 

* Correspondence: sharif58@gmail.com

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Abstract: Customer knowledge offers a dual-value proposition. On one hand, it helps companies better meet customer needs by identifying their requirements and desires, thereby creating value for customers. On the other hand, by identifying needs, behaviors, consumption patterns, and demands, it aids organizations in the development and improvement of products and services tailored to customer needs, thereby increasing profitability and customer loyalty. Therefore, the aim of this study is to present a model for customer knowledge management in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation of the Islamic Revolution. This research is applied in purpose and descriptive-analytical in nature. The research method is qualitative. The statistical population consists of academic experts and managers of industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation, from which 12 individuals were selected using snowball sampling and theoretical saturation. The data collection tool for the qualitative section was semi-structured interviews based on theoretical foundations. The data analysis method used was grounded theory. The results of this section were explained in the form of 4 main categories and 19 sub-categories. The results indicated that the identified factors related to the dimensions, drivers, and outcomes of the customer knowledge management model in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation in this study include: evaluating the current state of knowledge within the organization, collecting, documenting, and transferring customer knowledge, establishing effective communication with customers, and fully understanding their needs and interests, focusing on the process of creating knowledge about customers, conducting psychological assessments of customers, and analyzing customer behavior, feedback strategies from customers (through surveys, comments, feedback, and interviews with customers), focusing on the company's knowledge-based products, reviewing the history of current customers (previous purchasing behaviors), applying creative ideas regarding products and services, emphasizing the training of knowledge transfer and management methods, strengthening technological infrastructure, collaborating with customers in creating shared value, comparing the sales of new products with competitor products, measuring the achievement of set goals, increasing efficiency in customer service and customer orientation, digital self-service tailored to the customer (in the field of customer support), intelligently transferring customer requests to relevant experts, creating the greatest value from knowledge and knowledge management at a strategic level, and improving the quality and speed of decision-making and customer service.

Keywords: Knowledge, Knowledge Management, Customer Knowledge.

1. Introduction

The concept of customer knowledge management is a relatively new one, but numerous studies have addressed its importance and benefits. All of these studies have motivated various businesses to adopt this concept, either consciously or unconsciously [1]. Today, it is rare to find a company that is unaware of using electronic tools such as the internet, websites, databases, email, or SMS services to communicate with customers [2]. Most companies employ these tools in their business processes, but the critical issue is how effectively these organizations have utilized their knowledge interactions with customers to improve business processes and develop new products and services for their customers, ultimately establishing long-term and sustainable relationships with them [3, 4]. The increasing demand from customers for improved quality and innovation in products and services has created challenges for organizations [5]. Meanwhile, knowledge is the only reliable and sustainable source of competition. The only companies that have a competitive advantage are those capable of continuously creating new knowledge and effectively managing their intellectual assets [6]. Knowledge about customers is a type of knowledge (as well as data or information that can be analyzed, interpreted, and eventually transformed into knowledge) that helps organizations better understand their customers, their needs, expectations, and motivations, enabling them to target them effectively. This type of knowledge is obtained through channels such as interviews and observations [7]. Organizations need not only knowledge about their customers but also data, information, and knowledge regarding customer purchasing behavior [8]. The advantage that this knowledge provides is the facilitation of market segmentation processes and improvement of the relationship between the organization and the customer [9]. Although there is significant evidence indicating that employee popularity has a positive correlation with customer satisfaction, the impact of employee popularity on customer satisfaction can be explained using the exploratory judgment model [10]. The foundation of customer knowledge management lies in improving process performance by using customer knowledge and experience, and this is crucial for leading organizations that aim to maintain their competitive position through proper customer relationships and meeting customer needs [6].

In recent research, various studies have focused on the role of customer knowledge management in different industries, particularly in banking and organizational settings. Teimourian et al. (2023) proposed a customer relationship management model emphasizing customer knowledge management in the banking sector. The model identifies core categories of causal factors, contextual factors, intervening factors, strategies, and internal marketing realization as the key outcomes for customer relationship management, highlighting the importance of factors such as customer needs-based banking strategies and modernized service delivery in enhancing customer relations [11]. Khosravi and Rajabzadeh (2022) explored the challenges and stages of developing customer knowledge management within organizations, underlining its importance in actively engaging customers for product and service innovation. The findings suggest that the management of customer knowledge is crucial for organizational success and can help overcome challenges in its implementation [6]. Seyfollahi (2022) examined the impact of customer knowledge management on market performance, with the mediating role of innovation capabilities. The study concluded that customer knowledge management positively affects market performance and innovation capabilities, thus supporting organizations' efforts toward greater focus on customer knowledge management [12]. Chen et al. (2023) assessed the competencies of customer knowledge management in companies using a balanced scorecard and fuzzy-AHP, revealing that business process performance was ranked the highest among performance dimensions. The study also identified critical barriers to implementing customer knowledge management, such as senior leadership attention, customer knowledge sharing efficiency, and IT infrastructure

[13]. Shemshadi (2024) investigated the impact of leadership and knowledge-oriented culture on innovation and organizational performance, with a particular emphasis on knowledge management processes [14]. Soleimani and Geshani (2023) examined the relationship between organizational learning and creative problem-solving skills, mediating by knowledge management in secondary schools in Tehran, finding that knowledge management plays a significant role in enhancing learning and problem-solving capabilities [15]. Furthermore, Shen et al. (2023) analyzed the dimensions of customer knowledge management in small and medium-sized enterprises, emphasizing the correlation between knowledge management and innovation capability. They highlighted the significant positive relationship between organizational culture and knowledge management, concluding that an open innovation culture fostered by trust, collaboration, and leadership enhances knowledge management practices, leading to better innovation outcomes [16]. These studies collectively emphasize the crucial role of customer knowledge management in enhancing organizational performance, innovation, and customer relationships, particularly in dynamic and customer-oriented sectors such as banking and technology.

To establish better relationships with customers, it is essential to serve each customer in their preferred method, which requires customer knowledge management. Customer knowledge management refers to managing organizational knowledge embedded in the customer's mind. Since customer relationship management cannot efficiently acquire knowledge from customers, customer knowledge management, with its methods and styles, facilitates the process of acquiring, transferring, and exploiting customer knowledge [17]. Customer knowledge management integrates the principles and procedures of knowledge management and customer relationship management, creating value that goes beyond the sum of the values of knowledge management and customer relationship management [18]. Customer knowledge management enables organizations to better recognize emerging opportunities in the market and enhance their competitive advantage (Ali et al., 2021). In the customer knowledge management cycle, various types of knowledge created through interactions between customers and the organization are utilized to create value for both parties (customer and organization) and deliver better and more appropriate services or products. Therefore, this study aims to present a model for customer knowledge management in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation of the Islamic Revolution.

2. Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature. The study employs Sanders' research onion model, which illustrates the layers of the research process. According to this model, a research study consists of various layers, with each layer being influenced by the layer above it.

This study is exploratory in nature. As the name suggests, exploratory research aims to discover what is happening, with the main research question focused on those occurrences.

In terms of research strategy, this study follows an inductive approach. This method indicates that general truths can be derived from individual and specific realities. The path in the inductive approach moves from the part to the whole.

One of the strategies in qualitative research is the case study. The case study method is one of the most common strategies in qualitative research. This approach is not a specific method but rather a research strategy. A case study is an in-depth, multi-faceted examination conducted using qualitative research methods on a social phenomenon. This study, in terms of research strategy, adopts a single-case study approach in the domain of "developing a comprehensive model for customer knowledge management in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation." Based on the provided categorization, this research is a single-case study. A single-case study is an

in-depth study of a closed system (case) that, over time, uses precise and deep data collection processes involving multiple sources of information (such as observation, interviews, audiovisual materials, documents, and reports), ultimately presenting a descriptive report of the case and case-based themes.

The study population for the qualitative part of this research consists of academic experts in the field of business and senior managers of industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation in Tehran. The sampling method used is "purposive sampling," which is based on the researcher's subjective judgment. Specifically, in cases where resources are limited or the sampling framework cannot be defined, non-probability sampling techniques can be employed. To achieve a model derived from the qualitative method, data saturation was reached after 12 interviews with various individuals.

The criteria for inclusion in the research are as follows: a doctoral degree in business management and marketing (for academic experts), more than 10 years of experience for faculty members, and senior managers of industries affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation who have over 10 years of executive experience in business and marketing.

Data collection is based on library studies and interviews. In this regard, articles from the NoorMagz, Megiran, SID, Human Sciences Research Institute, Journal of Management Research, International Journal of Technology Management, International Journal of Intelligence and Technology Planning, Journal of Engineering and Technology Management, as well as articles from Elsevier, Emerald, Springer, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley databases were used in this research. Additionally, data were collected through interviews with experts and managers. A structured interview is similar to a questionnaire, except that the researcher asks the questions in person and marks the respondent's chosen options. In an unstructured interview, no questions are predetermined, and the researcher allows questions to emerge during the interview. The most commonly used method is the semi-structured interview, where main questions are asked, and if necessary, new questions are introduced during the research process. This research utilized semi-structured interviews. Finally, data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis.

3. Findings and Results

Data collection was conducted through interviews with 12 academic and executive experts from industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation. Based on the findings, the majority of interviewees were male (73%) and the minority were female (27%). Regarding work experience, 9% had 5-10 years, 64% had 11-20 years, and 27% had over 20 years of experience. In terms of education, 91% held a doctoral degree, and 9% had a master's degree. To analyze the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed, specifically using the thematic network method.

Initially, the primary theoretical codes for discovering themes were extracted. In this phase of the research, the key concepts and points obtained regarding the presentation of a structural model influenced by the dimensions and components of the customer knowledge management model in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation were listed from the interview process. After transcribing the interviews, coding was performed. During the theoretical coding phase, the data were carefully reviewed, suitable expressions and concepts were identified, and the relevant categories were specified, along with their dimensions and characteristics, and the model was examined. The primary unit of analysis for the theoretical coding and thematic network was the concepts derived from the interviews, which were generated through labeling by the researcher directly from the interview transcripts, resulting in 166 items from the interviews. Based on the theoretical codes

and the themes generated in this step, the initial concepts were formed, and 166 codes were obtained, although not all the extracted codes are necessarily correct.

Next, the thematic network analysis was conducted. After comparing the extracted concepts, related concepts were grouped into a general category. Based on the existing titles in related theories or the concepts obtained from the research, general titles were assigned to the categories. Thus, after continuous comparison of the responses obtained from the interviews, similar responses were organized, and similar concepts were extracted. Additionally, closely related items were merged, and the themes were categorized into three main categories.

Category 1: Dimensions and components of the customer knowledge management model in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation; this category includes 41 core themes.

Category 2: Drivers of the customer knowledge management model in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation; this category includes 51 core themes.

Category 3: Outcomes of the customer knowledge management model in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation; this category includes 36 core themes.

Subsequently, the thematic network was presented. The purpose of the thematic network is to establish relationships between the generated categories. This process is usually based on a paradigm model and helps the theorist carry out the theory-building process more easily. In the thematic network phase of this research, the relationship between the main category and other categories was identified. In this phase, primary and secondary classes were connected to each other to collect the theoretical concepts related to the "customer knowledge management model in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation." These actions enabled the researcher to integrate the concepts obtained in previous phases and use them to present the thematic network.

At this stage, the screening of the generated themes was carried out:

In this section, to examine the importance of each of the organizing themes in each core theme, a survey of the experts was conducted to select the most important categories, which were then placed in the thematic network model.

Table 1. Screening of Themes

Organizing Themes	Core Themes
Dimensions and components of the customer knowledge management model in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation	Evaluation of the current level of knowledge in the organization
	Collecting, documenting, and transferring customer knowledge
	Effective communication with customers and a thorough understanding of their needs and interests
	Focus on the process of creating knowledge around the customer
	Psychological analysis of customers and customer behavior analysis
Drivers of the customer knowledge management model in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation	Customer feedback strategy (through surveys, comments, customer reviews, and interviews)
	Focus on the company's knowledge products
	Analysis of current customers' backgrounds (previous purchasing behaviors)
	Applying creative ideas about products and services
	Focusing on the training of knowledge transfer and management methods
	Strengthening technological infrastructure
	Collaborating with customers in creating shared value
	Comparing new product sales with competitors' products
	Measuring the achievement of set goals

Outcomes of the customer knowledge management model in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation	<p>Increasing efficiency in customer service and customer orientation</p> <p>Digital self-service tailored to customers (in customer support)</p> <p>Smartly transferring customer requests to relevant experts</p> <p>Creating maximum value from knowledge and knowledge management at a strategic level</p> <p>Increasing quality and speed in decision-making and customer service delivery</p>
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Finally, the final model was extracted from the core, organizing, and overarching themes. In this section, the method of data analysis and the extraction of core, organizing, and overarching themes from the raw data obtained from the interviews is shown in the table above. After implementing the interviews, quotes explicitly or implicitly related to the research questions were selected, and the core, organizing, and overarching themes were extracted from them.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The identified factors in the context of the dimensions, drivers, and outcomes of the customer knowledge management model in industrial companies affiliated with the Mostazafan Foundation in this study are as follows: assessing the current level of knowledge in the organization, collecting, documenting, and transferring customer knowledge, maintaining effective communication with customers and fully understanding their needs and preferences, focusing on the process of knowledge creation around the customer, conducting psychological assessments of customers and analyzing customer behavior, implementing a customer feedback strategy (through surveys, comments, reviews, and interviews with customers), focusing on the company's knowledge products, reviewing the history of current customers (previous buying behaviors), employing creative ideas about products and services, focusing on training methods for transferring and managing knowledge, strengthening technological infrastructure, collaborating with customers in creating shared value, comparing the sales of new products with those of competitors, measuring the degree of achievement of set goals, increasing efficiency in customer service and customer orientation, providing digital self-service tailored to customers (in the customer support sector), intelligently transferring customer requests to relevant experts, creating maximum value from knowledge and knowledge management at a strategic level, and enhancing quality and speed in decision-making and customer service.

Organizations must learn and take advantage of every method and tool that can assist them in this process. It seems that knowledge management and the application of complexity theories are among the most crucial tools for creating a learning organization. Organizations must increase their knowledge capital and learning capabilities, as these are the best competitive advantages. Furthermore, organizations need to abandon the mechanical view that perceives the environment as simple and static. Among these, organizations like the Social Security Organization, with an economic and social approach covering over half of Iran's population, managing extensive financial and economic resources with complexities in horizontal, vertical, and geographical management dimensions, and considering the crucial role of the Social Security Organization in realizing social justice and sustainable national development, need to enhance their capabilities in knowledge management to better understand and manage their organizational complexities.

In today's world, where the production of goods and the provision of services are deeply knowledge-driven, knowledge has become a key asset for gaining competitive advantage. Hence, one of the issues that organizations have focused on in recent years is always seeking factors that lead to the implementation of knowledge management so that they can gain a competitive advantage over their competitors. Gaining this competitive advantage depends on the organization's ability to effectively use existing knowledge to create new intellectual assets and act based on them. In an era where innovation and creativity are key to success, an organization must be able to apply the right knowledge in the right place. Today, knowledge management is one of the most critical success factors for banks to gain competitive advantages. Identifying key factors affecting the implementation of knowledge management is a significant challenge for banks. Although many organizations have invested in and succeeded in implementing knowledge management at various levels, many organizations have also faced failure. The lack of proper mechanisms for evaluating and implementing knowledge management has led managers to view it merely as an additional cost. Knowledge management systems are highly complex, and the multitude of factors and challenges makes it difficult to predict the behavior of the system.

Knowledge management, which is a strategic resource for organizations, must be gathered and managed in a way that it can serve as a competitive advantage. Therefore, before implementing knowledge management plans, organizations must evaluate their organizational subsystems, existing resources, and components of their knowledge management systems to identify the most important and effective knowledge management strategies. Certainly, in the coming years, knowledge will become an inseparable part of all organizational structures, and organizations that are positioned in this field will be those that provide the necessary infrastructure for its implementation and design the appropriate framework. Hence, this study aims to identify the factors affecting knowledge management components and their impact on employee performance.

Today, the most critical issue facing every organization is business performance. In fact, knowledge management systems play a significant role in organizations, and their importance is highlighted when they contribute to improving the quality of services. The key to organizational sustainability is the correct management of valuable human resources. In this regard, it can be said that small-scale businesses are the driving force of economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction in developing countries. They act as tools through which economic growth and industrialization are accelerated.

Today, organizational knowledge is recognized as a valuable resource for gaining competitive advantage, and organizations have paid considerable attention to managing such intangible assets to maintain competitive superiority. Knowledge management first emerged in the 1980s and 1990s in various industries and operational areas such as the pharmaceutical industry and research and development departments. However, today, it has been applied in other industries and has become an integral part of organizational business activities and organizational goals. Some of the benefits of knowledge management include increased internal efficiency, coordination, service quality, and overall organizational productivity.

In the past, organizations sought to acquire and obtain information and knowledge. However, today, they are confronted with an overwhelming volume of information and data, which, in many cases, poses a challenge in managing and exploiting them effectively. In recent years, knowledge management has gained significant attention within organizations. This system focuses on acquiring knowledge from employees about customers, competitors, and organizational products. In other words, knowledge management encourages employees to share knowledge and ideas to increase the added value of products. Therefore, the vision of knowledge management is internal within the organization, and its advantage lies in customer satisfaction from better services and products.

The concept of knowledge and its management is gradually finding its place in organizations. Today, managers in organizations know that machines, equipment, and buildings cannot be considered the primary assets of an organization. What is considered the most important asset is organizational knowledge and its proper management, which provides a competitive advantage for the organization and ultimately helps it triumph over competitors. Knowledge management has rapidly overshadowed information technology and, in some cases, even outpaced it. As the importance of intellectual assets grows, the need for organizations to focus on managing these assets has intensified. In the present era, having access to information and managing knowledge has become a fundamental requirement for the survival of dynamic and innovative organizations, and even the ability to compete in markets and trade depends on acquiring, developing, and updating individual and organizational knowledge. Knowledge is increasingly being viewed as an essential part of capital. Sadeghi and Salehi, in their study, state that in the knowledge-driven era, where knowledge is considered the most crucial asset of organizations, a different managerial approach toward organizational issues and employees is required. Consequently, successful organizations constantly measure and evaluate the production, dissemination, exchange, and utilization of knowledge among their employees through various methods to acquire strategies for achieving organizational goals. Knowledge management is one of the new concepts in management science, and for the success of modern organizations, it is considered one of the vital resources. Therefore, organizational knowledge should be viewed as a strategic asset in organizations. Knowledge management is understood as a set of processes through which knowledge is acquired, maintained, and utilized. The goal is to leverage intellectual assets to increase productivity, create new values, and enhance competitive capabilities. In the coming years, only companies that create new knowledge and use it effectively and efficiently will succeed in gaining competitive advantages. Today, societies are increasingly moving toward a knowledge-based model. Therefore, it can be said that implementing and dynamically managing knowledge is essential for improving organizational performance and decision-making.

Organizations with good performance optimize their production processes by reducing production time, improving product quality, and reducing the number of employees. Thus, creating more value depends on industrial capabilities, capital budgeting, and tangible and financial assets. However, in a knowledge-based economy, this approach is no longer feasible for several reasons. First, with the short lifespan of knowledge and the high rate of innovation, maintaining a competitive position for an extended period is no longer possible. Optimization, as a process, is still important in a knowledge-based economy, but on its own, it cannot create or maximize value. The only method of value creation in a knowledge-based economy is accepting innovation as a business process. The organization's ability to create value depends on the innovation process, intellectual resources, and creativity of its human resources (intellectual assets). Reducing the amount of knowledge based on reducing human resources is significant and impacts human performance. In today's knowledge-based economy, most organizations and companies are trying to implement knowledge management in their organizations and take advantage of its benefits. Undoubtedly, organizations and companies that implement this system will face challenges in a competitive market where information is easily shared, as their competitors will be able to innovate in processes, products, and services using the advantages of this system. This will lead to attracting more customers and gaining a larger market share.

The most important goal of implementing knowledge management in various institutions is quick adaptation to changes in the surrounding environment to enhance efficiency and profitability. Consequently, this field focuses on the process of how knowledge is created, disseminated, and utilized within an organization. In other words, the ultimate goal of knowledge management is to share knowledge among employees to enhance the added value of

existing knowledge within the organization. Knowledge management is a rapidly evolving approach that addresses recent challenges in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of business processes, along with continuous innovation. The need for knowledge management arises from the growing recognition within the business community that knowledge embedded in employee creativity and access to sustainable knowledge management is a crucial element. Such a fundamental shift has significant implications for mid-level and lower-level processes within organizations. In reality, the absorption and application of knowledge management concepts, tools, techniques, and strategies for establishing knowledge-based companies are not easily achievable, as it requires the careful selection of tools and techniques that are applied in a coordinated manner.

Knowledge management is a vast field with various classifications based on different perspectives, focusing on the assessment of knowledge management within organizations. It includes both technical and non-technical mechanisms, each of which is essential for improving knowledge management within organizations. Increasing any of these mechanisms leads to an enhancement of knowledge management in the organization.

One of the objectives of knowledge management is to establish communication among individuals with knowledge so that individual knowledge gradually transforms into organizational knowledge. Another objective is to foster and enhance knowledge among employees. To achieve this, it is essential to learn information technology and understand its fundamental impacts on this process. In essence, the ultimate goal of knowledge management is to increase the organization's intelligence and intellectual capacity.

The findings of this study align with previous studies [2, 6, 11, 15, 17-21].

Based on the research results, the following suggestions are presented: Organizations should continuously review and address deficiencies in processes, procedures, and guidelines within their organizational structure. Additionally, it is recommended to utilize new systems and technologies within the organizational structure. Given the importance of information technology as a significant factor in establishing and implementing knowledge management, it is recommended to conduct short-term and long-term training programs to teach related skills to employees in various departments. Increasing investment in expanding information technology infrastructure should also be prioritized by management. Effective communication and idea exchange within the company's knowledge management team are essential and beneficial, as valuable knowledge emerges from the ideas and capabilities of each individual. One way to enhance team spirit and collaboration is for the organization's leader or manager to have a positive attitude towards teamwork and act as a facilitator in creating team-oriented organizations.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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