

Chapter 22

The Diffusion of the Concept of Knowledge Management among African Scholars: A Bibliometrics Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge Management (KM) is a new phenomenon that is directly related to the recent emergence of the knowledge economy and technology advancement. It consists of the initiatives and systems that sustain and support the creation, storage, dissemination, assessment, application, refinement and exchange of relevant knowledge (UNDP, 2012). The application of Knowledge Management, generally, can assist to facilitate the capturing and sharing of various experiences by societies. Its acquisition can ensure that knowledge is converted to useful information which informs decision making. This sharing of experience and knowledge can take place through formal meetings or in informal encounters and should be managed through structured Knowledge Management processes. The understanding of what constitutes Knowledge Management (KM) has different meanings to different people. This paper investigates the diffusion of the concept of Knowledge Management in Africa in the last two decades using bibliometric techniques. The paper has investigated the total production of Knowledge Management related publications by African researchers. Furthermore, the paper has investigated the diffusion of KM concept through collaboration among institutions of higher learning (universities, colleges, and polytechnics). It also investigated the preferred channels of dissemination of KM research, the most prolific African researchers on KM, and the prominent journals in which these researchers publish their publications.

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INTRODUCTION

Xu, Sankaran, Sankaran, and Clarke, D. (2008) argued that knowledge management is not new. Human beings have been practicing knowledge management from the time when the earliest civilization evolved. They further observe that in the past several years a large body of literature on knowledge management has emerged, mainly resulting from great interest to researchers and scholars. Consequently, there is an abundance of literature on knowledge management covering diverse topics. While there are some studies analyzing knowledge management literature, providing frameworks for organizing this literature and discussing future research directions and research agenda of knowledge management, there has been no comprehensive review of knowledge management studies by African scholars and researchers. Most of the current knowledge management review studies have been conducted by scholars in the Western world. This study addresses this gap by looking at the knowledge management literature conducted by African scholars and researchers. The study was conducted from multiple perspectives and from different disciplines, including place of publication, frequency of publication, and research areas and topics.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the diffusion of the concept of knowledge management among African scholars. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Investigate the growth pattern of the knowledge management;
2. Find the geographical distribution of the knowledge management literature;
3. Investigate authorship patterns and degree of collaboration among scholars in knowledge management;
4. Identify the core journals that contains a substantial proportion of the total knowledge management literature and investigate the features of these nucleus journals; and
5. Identify the key research domains of KM and describe the key elements of each domain.

One well-known indicator of research productivity is the number of publications produced by the scientists, institutions and countries. It is, therefore, hoped that this study will

provide some insight into the complex dynamics of research activity of African scholars and researchers in the field of knowledge management. It is also hoped that the study will motivate African researchers, faculty, policy makers and administrators to make decisions that will further enhance research productivity in KM in the coming years. The study proposes a number of future research directions, which may stimulate more intensive research in this important field.

DEFINING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

KM in research has been defined in many ways. Snowden (1999) defines KM as the “identification, optimization, and active management of intellectual assets, either in the form of explicit knowledge held in artifacts or as trait knowledge possessed by individuals or communities” (p. 63) while Swan, Newell, Scarbrough, and Hislop (1999) explain that knowledge management is concerned with harnessing the “intellectual and social capital of individuals in order to improve organizational learning capabilities, recognizing that knowledge, and not simply information, is the primary source of an organization’s innovative potential” (p. 264). Alavi and Leidner (2001) view knowledge management as a process involving four basic processes of creating, storing/retrieving, transferring, and applying knowledge.

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