

Normative Pressure of Institutional Isomorphism: A recipe for Survivability of Telecommunication Firms in Nigeria

Chinonye C. Wobodo and Soye P. Asawo
Department of Management, Rivers State University
chinonvewobodo@gmail.com

Abstract

This study empirically investigated the interlace between normative pressure of institutional isomorphism and survivability of telecommunication firms in Nigeria. The theoretical foundation of the study was based on the organizational embeddedness. The study adopted the cross-sectional survey in its design. However, the population of the study covered 198 executive and managerial staff of the four telecommunication firms in Nigeria. Given the study population size, census was used to determine the sample size wherein the population was adopted as the sample size. The study data were gathered using structured questionnaire. In order to confirm the reliability of the study test of instrument, the Crumbach alpha value of 0.7 minimum bench-marks was utilized while its construct validity was based on the Multi-Trait Matrix Method. In presenting the study data, tables, frequencies and simple percentage were used while Pearson Product Moment was used to determine the level of between the study variable with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 21.0. The study discovered that normative pressure of institutional isomorphism positively and significantly interlace with survivability measures adopted. Consequently, the study concludes that through the adoption and application of normative pressures by management and staff of telecommunication firms in Nigeria as affirmed by various professional bodies within the confines of their operational requirements, telecommunication firms in Nigeria become progressively aware of global best practices in the world of business which in the long validate their social legitimacy standing which is recipe for survivability goal attainment. Thus, the study recommends that the managers of telecommunication firms in Nigeria should always encourage their staff members to regularly apply their respective professional ethical codes in the discharge of their daily work roles in the organization.

Keywords: *Normative Pressure, Survivability, Innovation, Growth, Telecoms Firms*

Introduction

Telecommunication firms may be referred to as organizations in the business of making communication possible through the adoption of various platforms such as phones, the internet, airwaves, cable, wires and wireless devices. In Nigeria, unlike some other sectors of the economy, the telecommunication sector has been acknowledged as one of the fast growing sectors. The reason for this rapid growth is attributed to the massive inflow of both local and foreign private investment into the sector. Similarly, Futter (2011) posits that telecommunication sector in the Sub-Saharan African region is growing at a faster pace than other sectors due to significant investment from the private sector. However, with this observable increase in private sector participation, one will think that the survivability of telecommunication firms is guaranteed to a large extent. This is because through significant shareholders' investments route, firms receive huge financial resources to pursue their outlined goals and objectives. These goals as stated in Drucker and Maciariello (2008) may be related to customer or value creation; Jaja, Gabriel and Wobodo (2019) profitability, growth and expansion, good corporate citizenship behavior, goodwill and survival; market share growth. But among these gamuts of goals, the goal of survivability is considered as the foundation on which every other goals rest.

This is because it is only a living business that can make a living (profit maximization, market share growth, expansion etc.). According to Ugwuzor (2017), as essential as survivability in pursuit of overall business performance, it is often difficult to realize without exertion of much organizational leadership interest to drive and sustain. This is as an ineffective management team could lead the organization into facilitated entropy even when every other organization's resources such as material, machine, money and human capital are well situated. Management's actions and inactions usually leave the organization with a given consequence, which is either positive or negative. Sadly, in Nigeria, many organizations within the telecommunication sector have experienced unplanned closure of operations due to poor managerial acumen. For instance, V-Mobile Nigeria did not last beyond two years in the Nigerian telecom sector as the company was bought over by Celtel at the tune of \$ 1.005 billion US dollars in 2006. Still in 2008, due to the inability of Celtel Nigeria to synchronize various

isomorphic pressures through quality management could not survive amid competition, thus, was sold to Zain at the tune of \$3 billion US dollars. In 2017, Zain Nigeria was out rightly handed over to Bharti Airtel Nigeria following the sale of Zain Africa to Bharti Airtel India.

According to Broad Communication, a major shareholder of Zain, the company could not survive in the industry because of unethical management practices such as fraud, mismanagement, capital flight by Zain Group, Kuwait amounting to the tune of #16.6 billion as well as the firm’s inability to pay shareholders’ dividends. Consequently, reinforcing the assertion of Ooghe and Waeyaert (2004) that survivability of business depends on management characteristics (motivation, qualities, skills, and personal characteristics) and corporate policy (strategy and investments, commercial, operational, personnel, finance and administration, corporate governance). Therefore, in an effort to achieve survivability goal amid other goals, a responsible management team must be able to respond to various normative institutional isomorphic pressures within the length and breadth of its operations a primary source of social legitimacy. As a social system, responding to these pressures as they emerge is considered as a precondition for survivability goal attainment, especially no organization is internally sufficient. Together with the fact that institutional isomorphism is one of the theoretical ingredients that characterize the new institutional theory (Scott, 2014).

In organizations’ quest for survivability, different predictor variables have been adopted by scholars and managers in practice, incidentally, no study has leaned on the efficacy of objective response to normative pressure of institutional isomorphism within the purview of Nigerian telecommunication firms. For instance, Vanalle, Ganga, Filho and Lucato (2017) examined the impact of institutional pressures on the adoption of green supply chain management in Brazil. Gabriel and Arboló (2015) examined the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and survivability of banks in Nigeria while Buddelmeyer, Jensen and Webster (2010) investigated the relationship between innovation and their determinants of company survival within the manufacturing industry. Given this literature gap, this study empirically examined the interlace between normative pressure of institutional isomorphism and survivability of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

In alignment with the purpose of the study, a conceptual framework was developed to graphically enunciate the interlace between normative pressure and survivability as depicted in figure 1 below:

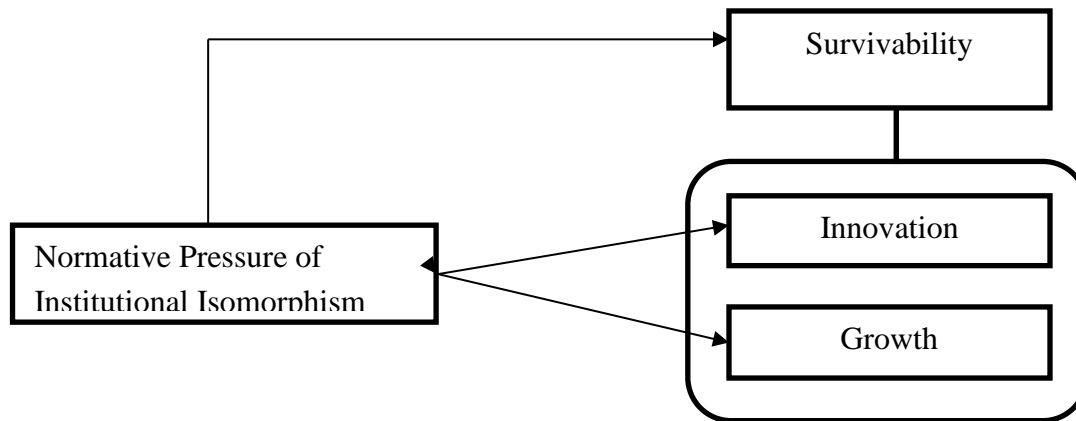


Fig.1: Conceptual Framework of Normative Pressure of Institutional Isomorphism and Survivability
 Source: Desk Research, 2020.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to establish the interlace between normative pressure of institutional isomorphism and survivability of telecommunication firms in Nigeria. In consonance with this, the objectives are as follows:

- (i) To examine the interlace between normative pressure of institutional isomorphism and innovation of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.
- (ii) To examine the interlace between normative pressure of institutional isomorphism and growth of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

Research Questions

- i) How does normative pressure of institutional isomorphism interlace with innovation of telecoms firms in Nigeria?
- ii) How does normative pressure of institutional isomorphism interlace with growth of telecommunication firms in Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

- H0₁:** There is no significant interlace between normative pressure of institutional isomorphism and innovation of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.
- H0₂:** There is no significant interlace between normative pressure of institutional isomorphism and growth of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this study is built on the organizational embeddedness theory. Organizational embeddedness theory was advanced by Granovetter (1985) to showcase the power of the external environment in the determination of business survivability. Since then, the idea of organizational embeddedness of economic action has been recurrently used to explain economic behavior in different contexts (Huggins, 2000; Grabher, 1993). According to Granovetter (1985), embeddedness explains that all economic actions are entrenched in social relationship. Similarly, Uzzi (2000) averred that embeddedness is associated with the process through which social connection influence economic actions of people in manners that some mainstream economic arrangements is overlooked when they assume that social linkages affect economic behavior marginally. The above views suggest that organizational action is premised on affiliation with other organizations. In other words, it means that for any organization operating within a population of organizations to survive, such organization must as a matter of necessity maintain strategic ties with other organizations.

Concept of Normative Pressure of Institutional Isomorphism

The phenomenon of normative pressures on organizations in a specific industry occurs as a result of similar orientations, trainings and development processes organizations' employees went through in their unique area of disciplines even though they studied in different locations across national frontiers. Biloslavo and Lynn (2007) described normative pressure as the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and patterns in which their work can be executed and to institute a cognitive base for their occupational autonomy. Ashworth *et al.* (2007) referred it as pressures that capture the means in which organizations are expected to conform to standards of professionalism and to adopt systems and techniques considered to be legitimate by relevant professional groupings. Similarly, Popadiuk *et al.* (2014) allude that it is associated with the adoption of structures and patterns considered superior in line with professionalization standard. Additionally, Seyfried *et al.* (2019) in their recent conceptualization iterate that normative pressures are forces that emanate from the values of professionalism and the emergence of legitimate professional practices that result to isomorphism.

In accordance with the above views, Decramer, Smolders, Vanderstraeten and Christiaens (2012), and George and Desmidt (2014) solidified these assertions when they posit that normative pressure emerges through formal education and advice from professional organization. While, Mizruchi and Fein (1999) maintained that normative pressure is a product of professionalization, involving two pressures. First, it is believed that members of professions acquire the same trainings which socialize them into similar approach in their task performance. Second, is that members of professions interacts through professional and trade

associations, which further circulates uniform ideas among them. According to Caravella (2015), professionalism is associated with members of an organization with their desire to maintain autonomy over work procedures. Normative pressure is in fact, a powerful vehicle through which organizations are conveyed toward convergence practices. This is as professionals engaged by their respective organizations strive to perform their task in accordance with the ethical codes of their professions in order to avoid sanction and possible withdrawal of their certification. This opinion is in line with the postulation of George, Baekgaard, Decramer, Audenaert and Goeminne (2018) that professional organizations are specific example of a normative pressure that is especially relevant to public organizations.

Within Nigeria business milieu, there are different professional organizations which members of different organizations belong to, and by reason of their membership of such professional bodies, any organization they find themselves in, they strive to reflect the image of their professional bodies by performing their tasks in relation to established standards. This is also in line with Katopol (2016) observation that professional personnel go from one organization to another, bringing in their wealth of experience and their assumptions of how things are done, and not done; which in effect imposes a great deal of homogenization within the field. Typical example of professional bodies in Nigeria include Nigerian Medical Association, Nigerian Institute of Management, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria, Nigerian Society of Engineers, Nigeria Bar Association, Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria, Nigeria Institute of Quantity Surveyors, Chartered Institute of Stockbrokers, Pharmacist Council of Nigeria, Institute of Chartered Economists of Nigeria, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria, Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria, Nigeria Institute of Estate Surveyors & Valuers etc. Each of the forgoing professional bodies has its own laid out standards of task performance that its members must apply wherever they may work, thus, resulting in sameness of work practices across the organizational field.

Survivability

According to Gabriel and Arboló (2015), survivability refers to the capability of an organization to continuously meet with the demands of the market, its workforce, shareholders, investors, host communities, the government and other relevant stakeholders. Drawing from the authors' definition, it shows that for an organization to remain operationally alive, it must continuously ensure that all of its stakeholders' needs or interests are protected, and by so doing, the organization gains their commitment towards its goals attainment which in turn leads to corporate survival. In the same manner, Akindele *et al.* (2012) viewed the subject of survivability as the process of running a business organization as a going concern which is often referred to as manage to stay in business. By implication, this means that when individuals set up a business, one of their primary objectives is to ensure its perpetuity; and they achieve this through quality leadership and succession planning. Here, entrepreneurs see corporate survival as the process of an organization existing beyond its founders. In support of this, Ugwuzor (2017) contends that firms always expect that they will remain viable and continue to exist and operate in the foreseeable future. Similarly, Nwosu (2014) referred survivability as successful organizations which are capable of achieving their goals and maintain same over a long period of time. Furthermore, Recker (2002) alludes that it involves living over possible setbacks and organizational deaths accordingly.

Drawing from the forgoing definitions, in our view, survivability can be referred to as a state of continuous business existence even in the face of unforeseen environmental threats capable of breaking the organization. In line with our definition, we believe that survivability is not something that can be given to an organization like a loan obtained from a bank. It is a phenomenon that can only be earned by an organization through its hard work and resilience capacity in the face of the storm. Survivability is primarily important because it contributes to the satisfaction and execution of other business objectives. This is as literature shows that among all that an organization is set out to achieve; survivability appears to be the building block or the bridge on which other goals are met. Thus, upholding the view of Gabriel and Arboló (2015) wherein they argued that the concept of survival is an essential aspect of every business objectives. Similarly, Jaja *et al.* (2019) added that survival objective is the key among business objectives in that it is only a living organization that can display ambitiousness. This therefore implies that it is only living organization that can make a living or motivated to pursue other business goals such as customer creation, profit maximization, growth and expansion, goodwill etc., and achieve them in the long run. In fact, it is on the basis of its essentiality that it is embedded in the going concern principle which holds that a business will continue to exist and function with no defined date of liquidation.

Innovation

In modern business management, continuous improvement of processes and practices are considered strategic to continuous survivability. And studies have shown that one way organizations achieve this is through continuous innovation practice. The term innovation was originally conceptualized by Schumpeter (1949) wherein he leaned on the role of economic forces in technical advancement, and underscored that innovation is a necessary driver of economic growth. Thus, Erengwa *et al.* (2017) added that this economic growth is mainly achieved as a result of changes made to the existing market structure through the creation of new goods and services. Similarly, McFadzean, O'Loughon and Shaw (2005) referred innovation as a process that creates added value and novelty to the business, its suppliers and customers through the development of new procedures, solutions, products and services as well as new methods of commercialization. Furthermore, Babalola (2006) perceived it as the generation, acceptance and application of ideas which may be novel or a modification of existing processes, products or services. However, while we acknowledge the relevance of these definitions in the development of innovation literature, to us in this study, innovation is viewed as an organizational action associated with the development of new ideas to enhance the functionality of its existing products or services amid competition or an introduction of something completely novel in relation to its line of products and services. Our definition can be seen as sharing similar views with Covin, Green and Slevin (2006) as they observed that innovation is associated with the organizations' willingness to depart from existing technologies or practices and venture beyond the current state of market demand.

Growth

The concept of growth has over the years been identified as one of the primary indicators of sustainable business performance, and its ultimate survivability. For instance, early scholars on organizational growth and survival have argued that a fast-growing organization that receives a favorable market response and accumulates a resource base is more likely to survive (Mata, Portugal & Guimarães, 1995; Jovanovic, 1982). However, Satyendra (2019) reinforced this assertion in his recent work, wherein he opined that the quest for organizational growth has continued to be a desirable, and of course, a necessary objective for any organization. According to Laosebikan, Oginni and Ogunlusi (2013), organizational growth means different things to different organizations because there are different indicators organizations may use to determine their growth. This is so because the ultimate goal of most organizations is profitability, most organizations will measure their growth in terms of net profit and revenue (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). Thus, Lipton and Mark (2003) asserted that growth is a reflection of firms' volume of sales, number of employees, physical expansion, success of a product line, or increased market share.

Given this observation, we referred organizational growth to as any observable increase in firms' number of production line, staff strength, profitability and other assets. Noting the essentiality of growth in determining survivability, Darna, Sule, Kusman and Yunizar (2016) argued that the survivability of any organization is to a large extent dependent on its growth rate; and, it is an indication that the organization is doing pretty good in the face of intense competition. An organization grows if it grows in economic performance and economic results. Similarly, Maverick (2020) contends that to be successful and remain in business, both profitability and growth are important and perquisites indicators for an organization to survive, and remain attractive to investors and analysts. In furtherance to this, he maintained that focusing on profitability at the beginning is good but the growth of market and sales should always be seen as the means to achieving that initial profitability target. Thus, organizational growth is primarily linked to an expansion, making the business bigger, increasing its market, and ultimately making it more profitable on all shades.

Normative Pressure of Institutional Isomorphism and Survivability

Normative pressures as observed in Munene (2006) are the effect of professional codes of conduct, and the influence of professional communities on organizational characteristics. These standards or codes are usually conveyed through the education and training of professionals and certification processes accredited by professional bodies. As a form of regulatory pressure, obedience to professional codes of practice projects the image of an organization in a positive light; thus, giving credence to their corporate existence in the eyes of the society. This is because these professional bodies determine what is an acceptable behavior (Scott, 2007), and what is unacceptable (Glover, Champion, Daniels & Dainty, 2014). The implication of this on survivability is that if the

society sees the actions of the organization as being in line with the regulatory body of their profession, they feel safe transacting with such organization without fear, thus, enhancing the survivability of the organization through continuous patronage. This can also be seen in the view of Sarkis, Zhu and Lai (2011), that normative pressures ensure organizations conform to rules in order to be perceived as partaking in legitimate actions, which also ensure their survivability in the long run. In fact, this is why Munene (2006) argued that where rules and ethics of professional conduct exist in an organization, motivations for new organizations to pattern as the older organization exist too.

Furthermore, Amran and Haniffa (2011) found that normative pressures are significant drivers of sustainability reporting in Malaysia. This finding reinforces the statement that the external auditor is responsible for gathering reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or error (Nyahas *et al.*, 2017). It is therefore thinkable to state that such action is a product of strict adherence to professional standards of practice by members of Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and the Association of National Accountants of Nigeria (ANAN) in the discharge of their accounting functions within their organization. Indeed, telecommunication firms in Nigeria, such as MTN, Globacom, 9Mobile and Airtel are typically filled with members of professional organizations (e.g. Nigerian Institute of Chartered Accountants, Nigerian Society of Engineers, and Nigeria Bar Association) that work for them. Accordingly, Blair and Janousek (2014) argued that based on institutional isomorphism, one can expect these organizations to impact the activities of their members. This is because the standards or codes of conduct set up by professional organizations are usually adopted by the society as yardsticks for organizational legitimation. In the same manner, Ball and Craig (2010) in their study discovered that adherence to normative pressures, such as professional norms and ethics compel organizations to be more environmentally sensitive, and argued that institutional study such as this, is continuously needed to understand new social rules (e.g. ethical values and ecological thinking) and organizational responses to environmental matters.

In view of this, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H0₁: There is no significant level of association between normative pressure and innovation of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

H0₂: There is no significant level of association between normative pressure and growth of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

Methodology

A research design is referred to as the development of strategies in finding out something (Anyanwu, 2000). In the light of this view, Ahiauzu (2006) opined that a good research design should capture the type of research the researcher is undertaking, the unit of analysis, as well as the time frame for the study. According to Baridam (2001), there are two approaches through which a research can be conducted; this he referred to as the experimental and the quasi-experimental research. The experimental approach is concerned with the investigation of a phenomenon through rigorous processes and scientific procedures within some contrived and controlled environments. Quasi-experimental research on the other hand, is more concerned with data collection, and the results generated from variables are examined within a less rigorous process and within non-contrived settings. However, the type of research design adopted for this study was cross-sectional survey design which is a form of quasi-experimental approach. The population of this study covers four (4) telecoms firm in Nigeria with 198 participants drawn from the firms. Given the size of the population, the study adopted census sampling approach. The study data was obtained using structured self-administered questionnaire approach. In relation to data analysis, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation was utilized to test the hypotheses earlier stated at 0.05 level of significance. This was aided by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20). Also, a five (5) point likert scale was used to measure the participants' choices and opinions, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree and a minimum of four (4) items were extracted from each of the variables.

Table 1: Cronbach's alpha of Study Variables

No. of items	Variables	Alpha (α)
5	Normative Pressure of Institutional Isomorphism	0.837
8	Survivability	0.806

Source: Research data, 2020.

Data Analyses

Test of Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant interlace between normative pressure and innovation of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlation Result for Normative Pressure and Innovation

			Normative Pressure	Innovation
Pearson Correlation	Normative Pressure	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.623**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	189	189
	Innovation	Correlation Coefficient	.623**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	189	189

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2020

In view of the result displayed in table 2, the rho value of 0.623 indicates that there is a strong interlace between normative pressure of institutional isomorphism and innovation. However, this interlace is significant at $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ significance level. Thus, the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate accepted thereby confirming the existence of a significant level of interlaces between normative pressure of institutional isomorphism and innovation of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

Test of Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant interlace between normative pressure and innovation of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

Table 3 Correlation Result for Normative Pressure and Growth

			Normative Pressure	Growth
Pearson Correlation	Normative Pressure	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.703**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	189	189
	Growth	Correlation Coefficient	.703**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	189	189

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2020

The result presented in Table 3 shows that the ρ value of 0.703 is a reflection very strong interlace between normative pressure of institutional isomorphism and growth of telecommunication firms in Nigeria. However, this observed interlace is considered to be significant at $p = .000 < 0.05$ significance level. Thus, the earlier stated null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate accepted.

Discussion of Findings

Unlike regulatory pressure that is concerned with government and regulatory requirements, normative pressures are borne out of professional associations' standards passed on to members through formal education. But irrespective of this dichotomy, their concurrent adherence greatly magnifies firms' social legitimacy status and survivability. However, in this study, our findings affirmed that normative pressure of professionalization has a positive and significant relationship with Nigeria telecommunication firms' survivability goal. Thus, illuminating that telecom firms in Nigeria are law abiding organizations. This findings is not surprising to us because, when firms' operational pattern conforms to professionalization standards, organizational legitimacy is enhanced while survivability is achieved through goodwill. This is because the operational impact of normative pressures on organizations provides benefits to both society and the firm. For instance, May (2004) argued that informal social forces such as normative pressures influence those firms concerned with maintaining their legitimacy among other industry members and external stakeholders, in order to achieve survivability. Dacin, Oliver and Roy (2007) argued that firms' behavior and activities are largely influenced by their quest for social justification, which in the long run fosters their survivability. Our finding also confirms the findings of Sarkis *et al.* (2011), that normative pressures makes firms conform to rules in order to be seeing as partaking in legitimate activity, which then boost their survivability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Leaning on the findings, the study concludes that through the adoption and application of normative pressures by management and staff of telecommunication firms in Nigeria as affirmed by various professional bodies within the confines of their operational requirements, telecommunication firms in Nigeria become progressively aware of global best practices in the world of business which in the long validate their social legitimacy standing which is recipe for survivability goal attainment. Thus, the study recommends that the managers of telecommunication firms in Nigeria should always encourage their staff members to regularly apply their respective professional ethical codes in the discharge of their daily work roles in the organization. This is as the application of such professional ethics impact positively on the firms' general wellbeing, especially in terms of excellent quality service delivery across SBUs.

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