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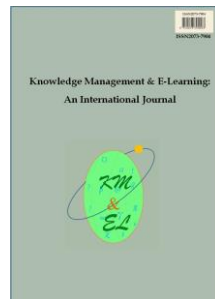
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## The nexus of acolytes' competencies and the knowledge-receiving firms' performance

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**Abstract:** Is organizational performance likely to improve when an organization employs acolytes (i.e., individuals with considerable experience of working with high-reputation industry leaders)? Firms with able, motivated, and opportunity-seeking acolytes are likely to benefit more in terms of unobtrusive access to quality knowledge and improved performance. Through a detailed qualitative treatment, this work identifies high-reputation leaders, acolytes and 312 beauty salons that employed acolytes. An analysis of lagged survey responses of 286 senior managers at these beauty salons showed that the performance of salons improves, when acolytes high in knowledge-sharing competencies—i.e., ability, motivation, and opportunity-seeking—are employed. In line with social learning theory, acolytes acquire and display knowledge-sharing competencies due to their association and work experience with industry greats. This study found that these knowledge-sharing competencies help acolytes overcome the barriers to knowledge-sharing and make knowledge more deployable and redeemable for better performance. We also found that with high homophily between acolytes and fellow employees, knowledge-sharing competencies of acolytes work better and more knowledge is received by the firms.

**Keywords:** Knowledge sharing; Acolytes; Homophily; Absorptive capacity; Performance

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Mehwish Naeem has worked as a research associate with Prof. Shahzad Khurram and is currently working as a Procurement and Business Development Officer with Mint Color USA.

## 1. Introduction

Knowledge as an organizational resource makes some organizations more competitive and productive, with a higher chance of survival as compared to their competitors who are inept at knowledge-sharing (Argote et al., 2003). Therefore, scholars have increasingly focused on investigating the factors that explain variations in the knowledge sharing process and outcomes (e.g., Argote et al., 2003; Castaneda & Durán, 2018; Adeyelu et al., 2019; Azizi et al., 2023; Usmani, 2023). Of the factors considered, there has been sufficient consideration of staff heterogeneity in sharing knowledge (Kogut & Zander, 1996; Gaur et al., 2007; Colakoglu & Caligiuri, 2008). Whereas individuals as a source of knowledge—e.g., employees, expatriates, consultants, returnee entrepreneurs, subject matter experts, etc. (Gaur et al., 2007; Colakoglu & Caligiuri, 2008) have won some attention from scholars, an important dimension of staff heterogeneity i.e., acolytes—remains unaddressed.

Acolytes are “*subordinates with work connections to industry leaders who possess high reputations derived from prior performance. High-reputation leaders are those who are esteemed above their peers on actual quality or merit in terms of quantifiable performance indicators*” (Kilduff et al., 2016, p. 353). The effect of strong ties with industry greats ameliorates the authenticity of the knowledge possessed by the acolytes. This guarantees that acolytes are actually heard and that their recommendations are well-regarded. Furthermore, by working closely with industry leaders, acolytes ought to carry sector specialism, proactive thinking, social capital, monitoring ability, and skills that, in turn, guarantee the prospects of knowledge-sharing and execution of their recommendations (Fee et al., 2006). In view of this, there is an ample reason to expect that just as knowledge shared from other sources leads to higher firm performance (Delios & Beamish, 2001), acolytes (as a knowledge source) may also lead towards better organizational performance.

In line with the knowledge-based view and knowledge management theory (Szulanski, 1996; Grant, 1997), we argue that acolytes are depots of professional knowledge and may act as knowledge-sharing agents. However, knowledge received by a firm is contingent on the knowledge-sharing competencies of acolytes (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). According to the knowledge management theory, researchers have identified three dimensions of knowledge-sharing competencies—ability, motivation, and opportunity-seeking (Chang et al., 2012). We argue that the extent to which knowledge is received by the employees at a firm depends on these competencies of the knowledge source (i.e., acolytes). Our baseline hypothesis is that the higher knowledge-sharing

competencies of the acolytes enhance knowledge received by the employees, which, in turn, improve the firm's performance.

Since the process of knowledge-sharing involves both sources (acolytes) and receivers (fellow employees), the quality of their relationships matters a lot. One way to express the degree of quality relations is homophily. The degree of homophily between organizational members may potentially affect the knowledge-sharing process. Homophily describes the readiness of a source to communicate with receivers in a group (Wright, 2004), based on an individual's inclination to form connections and engage with others who possess similar features or ideas (Dong et al., 2022). Extant research has not integrated homophily and acolytes into knowledge management literature. There is a need, therefore, to expand the extant knowledge management literature by examining how acolytes' competencies and homophily (between acolytes and their fellow employees) influence the knowledge received and the performance of a firm.

These relationships were examined in a highly revelatory personal care services sector. In procedures, we first conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with fifteen industry experts, guided by a standardized and structured protocol. These interviews helped us to develop *seven reputational milestones* to identify industry leaders and to prepare a broader list of leading beauticians, who our respondents viewed as reputed industry leaders. Next, we interviewed these industry leaders to collect data on seven reputational milestones. The analysis of these interviews helped us select 40 highly reputed industry leaders. In the interviews, these leaders also identified 312 acolytes and their current employers (salons). The next natural step was to survey managers at these salons. But before conducting the survey, we also modified and validated the adapted questionnaires to better fit our research needs. For this purpose, we relied on Hinkin and Tracey's (1999) recommendations. Three subject specialists reviewed and assessed the modified items to ensure their content validity (Pradhan & Panda, 2021). Next, 160 undergraduate students were employed to assess the content validity of the modified items. Finally, we collected longitudinal (with one temporal separation) survey data with the help of two research assistants to test our hypotheses.

This study is organized as follows: first, we explain the theoretical background of the research. Next, we discuss in detail the methodology with a special focus on the empirical setting and procedures to identify salons with acolytes, measures etc. Then, we present our results along with their implications. Finally, we explain the limitations of our work and the avenues for the future research.

## 2. Theoretical background

In organizations, knowledge transfer refers to the *knowledge transferred from the source to the knowledge-receiving firm* (Grant, 1997; Chang et al., 2012). Extant literature explains the way the legacy of the leaders is shared by individuals (e.g., acolytes) with the employees of the knowledge-receiving organizations, who first learn from their mentors and then share knowledge (Lowe, 2009; Kilduff et al., 2016). Acolytes may be seen as being a vital knowledge source to develop the perceptions and attitudes of novelty and creativity among their fellow employees. Therefore, we propose that staffing organizations with acolytes having unique and valuable knowledge and experience owing to working with reputable industry leaders may play a part as ancillaries to knowledge-sharing that, in turn, would enhance the performance of knowledge-receiving firms.

### 2.1. *Acolytes' competencies and knowledge received by salons*

Successful knowledge transfer is not just the flow of valuable knowledge from pillar to post; rather it is far more complex and difficult. This is because i) knowledge is intangible and involves causal ambiguity owing to the greater degree of codification, specificity, and complexity that can hinder efficient knowledge transfer, known as viscosity (Reed & DeFilippi, 1990; Szulanski, 1996); ii) it is also tacit and is submerged in the behavior, attitude, and actions of an individual and his or her adherence to a specific contextual setting (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995); iii) it is built over time, after months and years of experience, thus, it cannot be facilely coded and remains usually implicit (Song et al., 2003); and iv) it is not easily deployable and redeemable at all times (Whitehead, 1929). Therefore, the role of an individual's competencies in effectively removing barriers to knowledge-sharing becomes relevant.

Extant research acknowledges the significance of certain knowledge-sharing competencies—i.e., *ability, motivation, and opportunity-seeking*—in terms of overcoming barriers and successfully sharing knowledge (Argote et al., 2003). *Ability* refers to the experience, skills, and knowledge required to complete a task (Chang et al., 2012). We argue that the *ability* of acolytes to act as knowledge conveyors plays a paramount role in knowledge-sharing. Acolytes high in physical, emotional, intellectual, and psychological aptitude would successfully address the problems hindering the knowledge-sharing process (Drori et al., 2009). *Motivation* is a coalescence of psychological procedures that peaks up in accepting and aiming to behave and perform in a certain way. Simply put, motivation implies a willingness on the part of an individual to perform a task (Chang et al., 2012). In line with Chang et al. (2012), we expect that acolytes who make a choice to exert high levels of effort and show persistence in knowledge-sharing may lead to the transfer of significant amounts of knowledge. *Opportunity-seeking* refers to rightfully utilizing social resources in a workplace, which are essential for removing barriers in the knowledge-sharing process (Chang et al., 2012). We view *opportunity-seeking* as a competency that helps in successfully utilizing social and communal relations (Argote et al., 2003). Knowledge sharing would be successful, if acolytes know how to utilize their social ties at the workplace and beyond (Tsai, 2001; Argote et al., 2003).

Previous research has found that when individuals possess stronger knowledge-sharing competencies (ability, motivation, and opportunity seeking), firms will get more updated and advanced knowledge (Wang & Noe, 2010). Another study has also asserted that knowledge-sharing of individuals will depend on their ability, motivation, and opportunity-seeking to share knowledge (Argote et al., 2003). Building on previous research, we expect that acolytes possessing knowledge-sharing competencies can overcome the barriers to successful knowledge-sharing, which can subsequently influence the knowledge received by the beauty salons. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**H1:** Acolytes' ability to share knowledge positively affects the knowledge received by the beauty salons.

**H2:** Acolytes' motivation to share knowledge positively affects the knowledge received by the beauty salons.

**H3:** Acolytes' opportunity-seeking to share knowledge positively affects the knowledge received by the beauty salons.

## 2.2. Moderating effect of attitudinal homophily

Several scholars have examined the moderating effects of homophily in a variety of associations (e.g., Park et al., 2021). One prominent exception is the link between acolytes' competencies and knowledge received at a firm. Homophily—i.e., the inclination of individuals to connect with comparative others—is a prevalent phenomenon that has been examined in a wide range of fields of organizational studies (Dong et al., 2022). People in a social system are inclined to form stronger bonds with comparable individuals than with different individuals (Lee, 2015; Bucur, 2019). Homophily signifies the tendency of people to associate with those who are like them. It has a crucial role in building societal bonds over time and determining the strength of interactions (Koveshnikov et al., 2023).

Importantly, perceived homophily promotes a sense of relationship security among the persons involved (Prisbell & Andersen, 1980) and decreases psychological uneasiness resulting from cognitive or emotional discrepancies (Monge & Contractor, 2003). Therefore, higher attitudinal homophily signifies more relationship security and ease of interactions, which may result in less knowledge hiding and the sincere sharing of professional knowledge from source to receivers. Therefore, we expect that higher degrees of attitudinal homophily between the source of knowledge (acolytes) and their fellow employees (receivers) at the firm will give rise to knowledge-sharing intention and behavior, thus amplifying the effect of the acolytes' competencies on knowledge received by the firm. Based on aforesaid discussion, the first stage moderated-mediation nexus is hypothesized in the following ways:

**H4:** The relationship between acolytes' ability to share knowledge and the knowledge received by the salons is stronger when the homophily (between acolytes and fellow employees at salons) is greater.

**H5:** The relationship between acolytes' motivation to share knowledge and the knowledge received by the salons is stronger when the homophily (between acolytes and fellow employees at salons) is greater.

**H6:** The relationship between acolytes' opportunity-seeking to share knowledge and the knowledge received by the salons is stronger when the homophily (between acolytes and employees at salons) is greater.

## 2.3. Mediating effect of knowledge received

The knowledge-based approach has presented knowledge assimilation and dissemination as keys to organizational performance (Kogut & Zander, 1996). So, an organization needs to reorganize, reuse, and share experience-based knowledge that it has received from various sources, such as acolytes (Kogut & Zander, 1996). Knowledge is received, assimilated, and used in the form of procedures, formulae, data, and/or universal principles (Nonaka, 1994). More importantly, its transmission is dynamic in nature and involves interpreting, reshaping, and sustaining complex routines dynamically with every new piece of knowledge (Chen et al., 2014). Therefore, for better organizational performance, employees at firms ought to constantly receive and apply knowledge from acolytes (Ko et al., 2005).

Performance is “a degree of overall success, market success, growth rate profitability, innovativeness in comparison with major competitors” (Lee & Choi, 2003: 189). More and more empirical evidence shows that organizations capable of efficient

knowledge management (receiving and applying) are more productive (Levine & Prietula, 2012), more enduring, have better and more innovative business processes, products, and services (Abdullah & Musa, 2014), sustainable competitive advantages (Oyemomi et al., 2019), and thus perform better and win survival (Paulin & Suneson, 2012). Acolytes with knowledge-sharing competencies cause an unobtrusive supply of knowledge to their firms. The knowledge received by the firms is put into practice and leads to their superior performance. Therefore, we expect that knowledge received by salons from acolytes mediates the relationship between acolytes’ competencies in knowledge-sharing and the salon’s performance (Fig. 1). Following is, therefore, hypothesized:

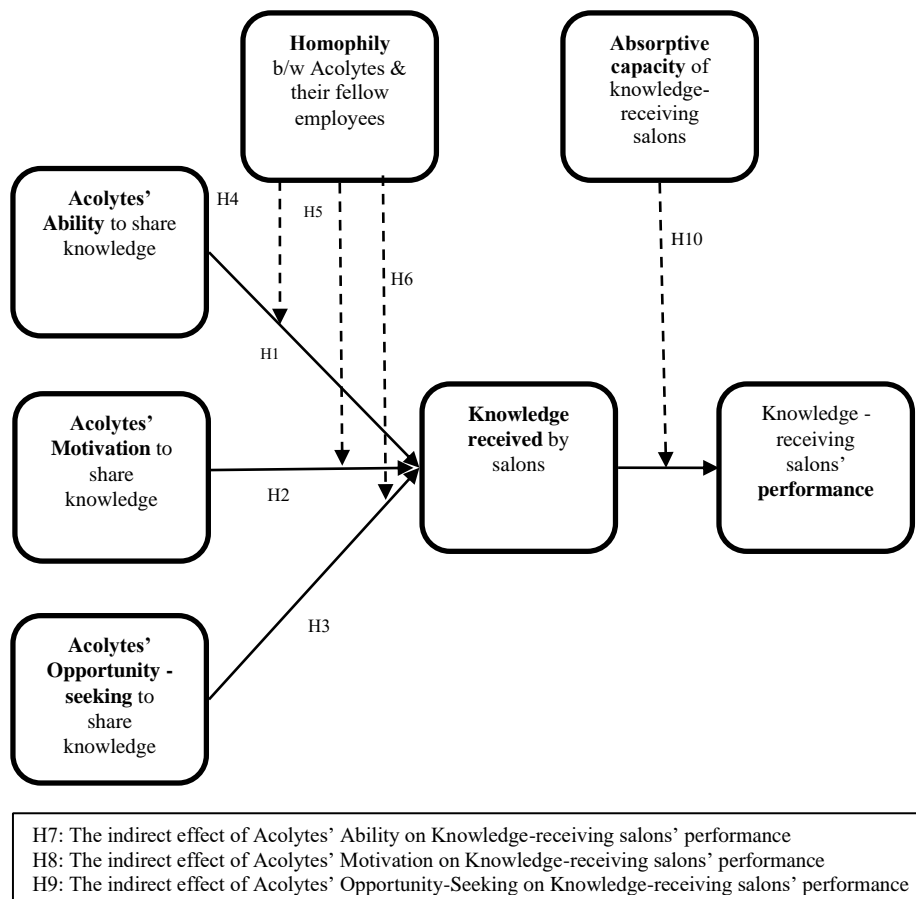


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

**H7:** Acolyte’s ability to share knowledge has an indirect and positive relationship with the salons’ performance, via the knowledge received by the salons.

**H8:** Acolyte’s motivation to share knowledge has an indirect and positive relationship with the salons’ performance, via the knowledge received by the salons.

**H9:** Acolyte’s opportunity-seeking to share knowledge has an indirect and positive relationship with the salons’ performance, via the knowledge received by the salons.

#### 2.4. Moderating effect of absorptive capacity

Knowledge should not only be successfully received (Szulanski, 1996; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008), but it should also be absorbed effectively. The absorption of shared knowledge is crucial to avoiding the “knowing-doing gap” (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Here, absorptive capacity does not refer to the mere integration of knowledge, but to the capability of a firm to make use of external knowledge (Boxall, 2003). Simply put, it would mean that individuals at knowledge-receiving firms possess the capability to comprehend, retain, and apply learned knowledge. Well-absorbed new knowledge may lead to the best and most efficient practices and may enhance the knowledge-receiving firm’s performance. Extending the existing line of research (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000), we propose that the absorptive capacity moderates the impact of knowledge received by the firm on its performance in such a way that the moderating effect is stronger, when absorptive capacity is greater. This study employs a second-stage moderated-mediation nexus and hypothesizes the following:

**H10:** The relationship between the knowledge received and the performance of a knowledge-receiving salon is stronger when the absorptive capacity of the salon is greater.

### 3. Research design

#### 3.1. Empirical setting

This research has been carried out in the beauty salons (personal care services sector) in Pakistan. As a part of the services sector, beauty salons constitute a highly revelatory research site (Khan, 2018), because a) salons represent a variety of other small and medium enterprises where reputational ties of the individual(s) with the leader(s) of a sector are reaffirmed in knowledge transfer-related social interactions; b) work in salons is highly interdependent as employees interact more continuously with one another while working with clients; and c) there is an unobtrusive access to primary data as employees of salons are easily accessible.

Senior make-up artists prepare unskilled and less-skilled employees by actively communicating what they know. Skilled artists also actively observe and consult senior masters to gain more knowledge (Van Den Hoof & De Ridder, 2004). Knowledge transfer outside the organization is expensive. Thus, a majority of salons rely on an in-house knowledge transfer (State Bank of Pakistan, 2015) through continuous mutual interaction between the provider and the recipient of knowledge in a working environment (Agyemang & Boateng, 2019). Therefore, the presence of such experts who carry a stock of tacit and explicit knowledge (Sternberg et al., 1995) is a key to superior performance. The name of reputed senior artists of salons builds customers’ trust. Customers wish to look superior to others in terms of the usage of the prestigious premium brands and salons (Johnston & Taylor, 2008). As a small and medium enterprise, 60% of the beauty salons have fewer than 20 employees, while 40% of them have more than 20 employees (State Bank of Pakistan, 2015).



### 3.2. Procedures

The first step in our procedures was to identify reputed industry leaders and their acolytes. For this purpose, we began by interviewing fifteen (15) respondents related to the industry. We conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews until reaching the saturation point. The interviews were conducted after seeking the consent of the respondents in their preferred language, either English or Urdu. The audio-taped interviews have been translated and transcribed by an author proficient in both languages. This transcription resulted in a total of 100,005 spoken words. In line with Khurram and Charreire Petit (2017), these interviews have been guided by a standardized, structured protocol, aiming at asking about what criteria, in their opinion, are important to consider a makeup artist a well-reputed leader in his or her field.

Analysis of interviews suggests that if any makeup artist has reached at least one of the following *seven (7) reputational milestones*, she or he could be considered a high-reputation leader: winning one or more 1) international awards and/or 2) domestic awards; getting nominated for one or more 3) international awards and/or 4) domestic awards; 5) providing distinguished services in fashion shows; 6) getting featured in magazines, blogs, and newspapers more than once a year; and 7) having more than 10,000 social media followers. In interviews, these 15 respondents also identified, in total, 60 leading beauticians who they viewed as reputed industry leaders. Acknowledging their support, we must state that these respondents also referred us to these reputed leaders for further investigation.

In the second step, we interviewed these reputed leaders telephonically and in person to collect data based on the above-mentioned seven (7) reputational milestones. This has helped us draw a cut-off line for 40 leading beauticians. In interviews, these top 40 reputed industry leaders also proudly identified 312 acolytes (in total) working at various salons.

In the next step, we have collected primary longitudinal data through surveys of 312 beauty salons employees in Pakistan with the help of two research assistants. The non-probability judgmental (purposive) sampling technique has been used in this work, because we have to limit our examination to salons with acolytes. Investigators have visited these beauty salons in person to identify the presence of acolyte(s) and conduct surveys. A temporal separation of 12 weeks was included to minimize the effect of transient sources of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In the first moment, data from 312 respondents about independent and mediating variables was collected. However, in the second moment, we could reach 286 respondents only to get the data for dependent and moderating variables. Respondents in our study were the senior managers—one from each salon. Being executive workers and technical experts, these managers possessed sufficient information to respond to our survey questions. Informed consent has been obtained from all participants to ensure their voluntary participation by assuring them of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

### 3.3. Measurement

Before data collection, the adapted instruments were modified to better fit the context of the study (Stewart et al., 2012). Instruments were modified and validated using Hinkin and Tracey's (1999) recommendations. Three subject specialists—including the lead author—have reviewed and assessed the modified items to ensure their content validity (Pradhan &

Panda, 2021). Next, 160 undergraduate Pakistani students assessed quantitatively the degree to which all the items correctly match the conceptual definitions provided for each variable. This type of content validation requires sufficient intellectual power to assess the correspondence between instruments and definitions, which makes the university undergraduates a relevant sample for the process (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999). The mean values of all modified items depict definitional correspondence, confirming their content validity (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999).

Once the validation process is completed, next challenge is to make the survey items fully comprehensible for all respondents. Although official language of country is English, but the majority of populace speaks and understands Urdu language. Therefore, surveys have been conducted in the preferred language (English or Urdu) of the respondents. To do so, questionnaires were not only modified but also translated in Urdu using reverse translation techniques (Robine & Jagger, 2003), reviewing and resolving all discrepancies.

To measure acolytes’ competencies, a 9-item scale from Chang et al. (2012) has been modified and adapted. *Acolytes’ ability*: The study employs a 2-item scale to measure the acolytes’ ability to share knowledge ( $\alpha = 0.867$ ). *Acolytes’ motivation*: The modified 5-item scale measures the acolytes’ motivation to share knowledge ( $\alpha = 0.880$ ). *Acolytes’ opportunity-seeking*: A 2-item scale has been used to measure acolytes’ opportunity-seeking to share knowledge ( $\alpha = 0.868$ ). *Attitudinal homophily*: It has been measured using a 4-item scale, adapted from McCroskey et al. (2013) ( $\alpha = 0.892$ ) *Knowledge received by the salon*: It has been measured using a 7-item scale, adapted from Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) ( $\alpha = 0.943$ ).

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics and pearson’s correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Acolytes’ Ability	5.60	0.91						
Acolytes’ Motivation	5.30	0.80	0.61**					
Acolytes’ Opportunity-Seeking	5.73	0.93	0.44**	0.64**				
Knowledge Received	5.60	0.87	0.39**	0.51**	0.42**			
Absorptive Capacity	5.60	0.97	0.34**	0.28**	0.24**	0.31**		
Performance	5.40	1.12	0.49**	0.52**	0.43**	0.74**	0.36**	
Homophily	4.54	0.60	0.27**	0.32**	0.29**	0.22**	0.27**	0.18**

Note.  $N = 286$ . \*\*  $p < 0.01$

*Salons’ absorptive capacity*: It has been measured using a 6-item scale adapted from Jansen et al. (2005) ( $\alpha = 0.924$ ). *Salons’ performance*: A 5-item scale by Lee and Choi (2003) has been adopted to measure the knowledge-receiving firm’s performance ( $\alpha = 0.948$ ). *Control variables*: The age of the leader’s firm, the age of the beauty salon, the number of acolytes and the employees at a beauty salon have been taken as control variables for this study.

#### 4. Results

The descriptive statistics—means, standard deviations, and correlations—are measured using SPSS 26.0 (Table 1). The competencies—ability, motivation, and opportunity

seeking of the acolytes—significantly correlate with the salons' performance. Similarly, the salons' absorptive capacity and homophily also significantly correlate with the salons' performance ( $r = 0.169, p < 0.01$ ;  $r = 0.275, p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, knowledge received also significantly correlates with salons' performance ( $r = 0.698, p < 0.01$ ).

All control variables are significantly correlated with the dependent variable. Therefore, we have run a hierarchical analysis to control the effects of the four control variables on the dependent variable of the study. An R square value of 0.058 in Model 1 shows that control variables together account for 5.8% of the variance in salons' performance. When the independent variables are added in Model 2, the value of R square has increased to 0.290 from 0.058, showing that independent variables now account for 29% of the variance in salons' performance, which is 23.2% additional variance (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
Model summary of hierarchical regression

Model	R	R Sq	Std. error of the estimate	Change statistics				
				R Sq Change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	0.242 <sup>a</sup>	0.058	0.9047	0.058	4.401	4	281	.002
2	0.538 <sup>b</sup>	0.290	0.7898	0.232	30.212	3	278	< 0.001

*Note.* a. Predictors: (Constant), Acolytes in a salon, Age of leader's firm, Age of the salon, Employees in a salon; b. Predictors: (Constant), Acolytes in a salon, Age of leader's firm, Age of the salon, Employees in a salon, Acolytes' ability, Acolytes' motivation, Acolytes' opportunity seeking, Absorptive capacity, Homophily, Knowledge received, Knowledge receiving salons' performance

**Table 3**  
Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Acolytes' Ability	0.877						
Acolytes' Motivation	0.628**	0.774					
Acolytes' Opportunity-Seeking	0.500**	0.654**	0.878				
Knowledge received by Salons	0.403**	0.508**	0.391**	0.842			
Salons' Absorptive Capacity	0.379**	0.387**	0.274**	0.629**	0.836		
Salons' Performance	0.440**	0.476**	0.353**	0.698**	0.639**	0.887	
Homophily	0.259**	0.326**	0.292**	0.316**	0.069**	0.275**	0.820

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) has been conducted using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS 26 to measure the adequacy of the items of the constructs. The result of Harman's single factor test to measure common method bias shows that the Total Variance Explained (TVE) by factor analysis for all variables is 41.183%, showing that no single factor accounts for more than 50% of the total variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). CFA shows (Appendix I) that factor loadings of all items exceed the threshold of 0.4, demonstrating the convergent validity of the measures (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Similarly, the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values of all variables exceed the threshold values of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively (Table 3) confirming the convergent validity and discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010). Likewise, the square root of AVE of each variable is greater than

its correlations with other variables (Table 3), thus, multicollinearity is not an issue. This also supports discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The hypotheses of the study have been tested using path analysis and moderated regression analysis (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). This procedure allows simultaneous testing of the first stage moderation between acolytes’ competencies and knowledge received by the salons and the second stage moderation between knowledge received by the salons and their performance. It also allows the testing of the direct link between acolytes’ competencies and salon’s performance, the indirect link between acolytes’ competencies and salon’s performance via knowledge received and the total effects at a specific level of the moderators such as homophily and salon’s absorptive capacity.

**Table 4**  
Analysis of the moderation effects

Relationship	Coeff.	SE	<i>t</i>	P	LLCI	ULCI
Acolytes’ Ability→ Knowledge Received	0.366	0.052	7.010	0.000	0.263	0.468
Acolytes’ Motivation→ Knowledge Received	0.559	0.054	10.19	0.000	0.451	0.667
Acolytes’ Opportunity-Seeking → Knowledge Received	0.299	0.053	5.634	0.000	0.195	0.404
Acolytes’ Ability→ Salons’ Performance	0.301	0.053	5.678	0.000	0.196	0.405
Acolytes’ Motivation → Salons’ Performance	0.307	0.069	4.441	0.000	0.171	0.444
Acolytes’ Opportunity Seeking → Salons’ Performance	0.170	0.053	3.158	0.001	0.064	0.276
Knowledge Received→ Salons’ Performance	0.774	0.057	13.55	0.000	0.662	0.887
Acolytes’ Ability × Homophily→ Knowledge Received	0.277	0.065	4.209	0.000	0.147	0.406
Acolytes’ Motivation × Homophily Behavior→ Knowledge Received	0.234	0.066	3.156	0.005	0.103	0.365
Acolytes’ Opportunity Seeking × Homophily Behavior→ Knowledge Received	0.204	0.063	3.204	0.001	0.078	0.330
Knowledge Received × Absorptive Capacity→ Salons’ Performance	0.105	0.041	2.514	0.012	0.022	0.187

**Table 5**  
Moderator analysis: conditional effects at values of the homophily & absorptive capacity

		Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Acolytes’ Ability→ Knowledge Received at values of the Homophily	Low (-0.582)	0.1398	0.0615	0.0188	0.2607
	Mean (0.000)	0.3012	0.0530	0.1968	0.4056
	High (0.582)	0.4626	0.0692	0.3264	0.5989
Acolytes’ Motivation → Knowledge Received at values of the Homophily	Low (-0.582)	0.1713	0.0707	0.0322	0.3104
	Mean (0.000)	0.3079	0.0693	0.1714	0.4443
	High (0.582)	0.4445	0.0874	0.2725	0.6164
Acolytes’ Opportunity Seeking → Knowledge Received at values of the Homophily	Low (-0.582)	0.0510	0.0624	-0.0718	0.1738
	Mean (0.000)	0.1701	0.0539	0.0641	0.2762
	High (0.582)	0.2893	0.0684	0.1547	0.4239
Knowledge Received→ Salons’ Performance at values of the Absorptive Capacity	Low (-0.990)	0.6709	0.0781	0.5171	0.8247
	Mean (0.000)	0.7748	0.0572	0.6623	0.8873
	High (0.990)	0.8788	0.0620	0.7568	1.0008

Note. SE=Standard Error; LLCI= Lower Limit Confidence Interval; ULCI= Upper Limit Confidence Interval

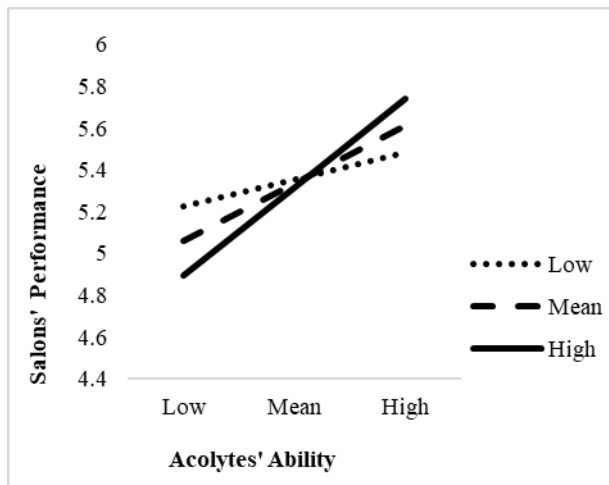
A multiple moderated-mediation analysis has been conducted to assess the model of the study using the PROCESS macro for SPSS with the mean composite scores on the

items for each construct (Hayes & Preacher, 2013). The analysis has been conducted separately for each independent variable. The statistical significance of the direct and indirect effects of each independent variable has been calculated using 5000 bootstrap samples to create bias-corrected confidence intervals (BCCIs; 95%) (Hayes, 2018).

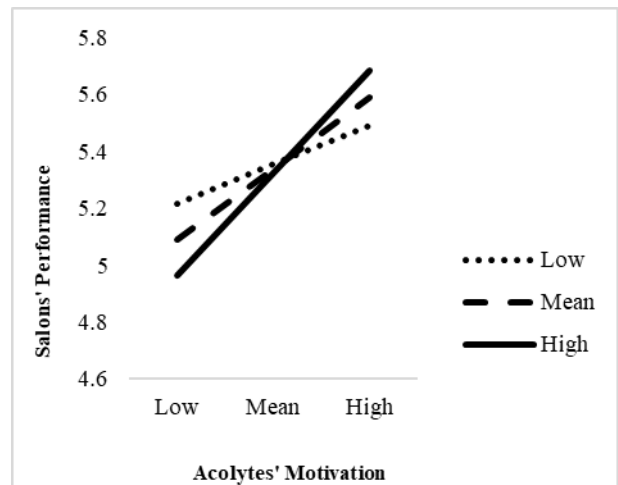
The results (Table 4) show that acolytes' ability (Effect = 0.3661,  $p < 0.001$ ) and acolytes' motivation (Effect = 0.5592,  $p < 0.001$ ) are statistically correlated with knowledge received by salons. Acolytes' opportunity-seeking is also significantly correlated with the amount of knowledge received by salons (Effect = 0.2997,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, H1, H2, and H3 are supported (Table 4).

As proposed in Hypothesis 4, homophily significantly moderates the effect of acolytes' ability on knowledge received by the salons (Effect = 0.2770, BCCI (0.1267; 0.2387)) (Table 4). The relationship between acolytes' motivation and knowledge received, as proposed in Hypothesis 5 is also positively moderated by homophily (Effect = 0.2344, BCCI (0.1032; 0.3656)). Homophily moderates acolytes' opportunity-seeking and knowledge received as well, supporting Hypothesis 6 (Effect = 0.2045, BCCI (0.0789; 0.3302)). The relationship between knowledge received and salons' performance is moderated positively by salons' absorptive capacity, supporting Hypothesis 10 (Table 4).

Table 5 depicts the interaction effects of both moderators at all levels (low, medium, and high). The moderating effects of both moderators have been graphically represented in plots. The interaction plot (Fig. 2) indicates that the moderation effect of homophily is significant at all levels. The slope is positive for a higher value of moderation. This signifies that higher homophily results in a more positive effect of acolytes' ability on knowledge received by salons. Similarly, the moderating effect of homophily on acolytes' motivation and acolytes' opportunity-seeking are shown in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4, respectively. Likewise, Fig. 5 depicts the moderating effect of absorptive capacity on the dyad between knowledge received by salons and their performance.



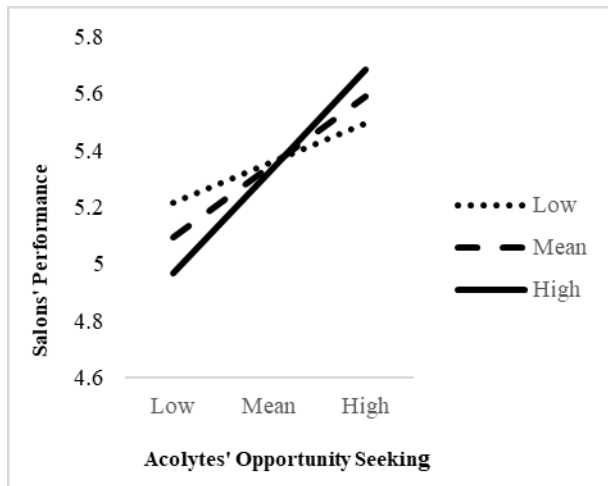
**Fig.2.** Interaction plot of acolytes' ability: Homophilic behavior & salons' performance



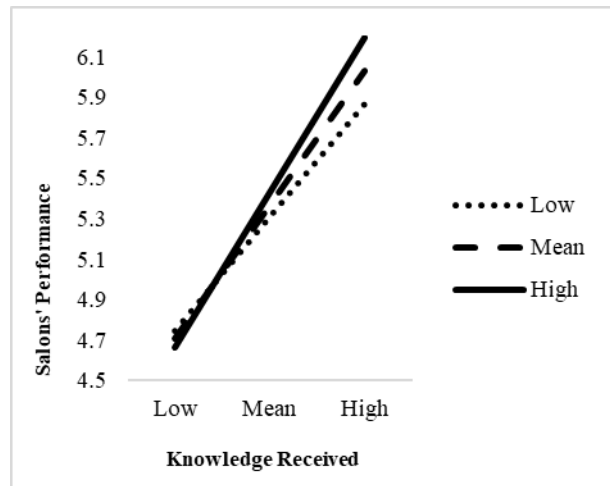
**Fig. 3.** Interaction plot of acolytes' motivation: Homophilic behavior & salons' performance

Table 6 indicates that the indirect effects of mediation vary significantly in the presence of a moderator at low, mean, and high values. For this study, the presence of both

direct and indirect mediation effects signifies partial mediation. The significant values in Table 6 support hypothesis 7 showing that the knowledge received by the salons mediates the relationship between acolytes’ ability to share knowledge and the salons’ performance.



**Fig. 4.** Interaction plot of acolytes’ opportunity seeking: Homophilic behavior & salons’ performance



**Fig. 5.** Interaction plot of knowledge received: Absorptive capacity & salons’ performance

**Table 6**

Moderated mediation results: conditional indirect effects at the levels of moderators

		Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
<i>Moderated by Homophily Behavior</i>					
Acolytes’ Ability→ Knowledge Received →Salons’ Performance	Low	0.139	0.061	0.018	0.260
	Mean	0.301	0.053	0.196	0.405
	High	0.462	0.069	0.326	0.598
Acolytes’ Motivation→ Knowledge Received →Salons’ Performance	Low	0.171	0.070	0.032	0.310
	Mean	0.307	0.069	0.171	0.444
	High	0.444	0.087	0.272	0.616
Acolytes’ Opportunity Seeking → Knowledge Received → Salons’ Performance	Low	0.051	0.062	0.071	0.173
	Mean	0.170	0.053	0.064	0.276
	High	0.289	0.068	0.154	0.423
<i>Moderated by Absorptive Capacity</i>					
Acolytes’ Ability→ Knowledge Received →Salons’ Performance	Low	0.245	0.083	0.098	0.425
	Mean	0.283	0.075	0.149	0.446
	High	0.321	0.075	0.181	0.481
Acolytes’ Motivation→ Knowledge Received →Salons’ Performance	Low	0.360	0.130	0.134	0.642
	Mean	0.425	0.114	0.225	0.674
	High	0.490	0.111	0.291	0.728
Acolytes’ Opportunity Seeking → Knowledge Received → Salons’ Performance	Low	0.256	0.081	0.107	0.430
	Mean	0.301	0.072	0.168	0.454
	High	0.345	0.075	0.206	0.497

Likewise, the knowledge received by the salons mediates the positive relationship between the acolyte's motivation and the salons' performance, supporting Hypothesis 8. Similarly, there is a mediation effect of knowledge received between the acolytes' opportunity-seeking and the performance of salons in line with Hypothesis 9 (Table 6).

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

This study examines the performance of acolytes' salons (i.e., salons that have employed such employees that had earlier worked alongside highly reputed industry leaders) through the nexus of acolytes' knowledge-sharing competencies, homophily (between acolytes and fellow employees), absorptive capacity, and the knowledge received by the salons. Primarily, we examine the relationship between acolytes' competencies to share knowledge—i.e., ability, motivation, and opportunity seeking—with the performance of salons through knowledge received by the salons. Another major focus here is to understand if the homophily (readiness of the source to communicate with receivers based on actors' inclination to form connections and engage with others who possess similar features and ideas (Dong et al., 2022) moderates the effects of acolytes knowledge-sharing competencies on knowledge received by the salons. Likewise, we also examine the moderating effects of a salon's absorptive capacity on the relationship between knowledge received by salons and their performance.

The study finds that salons with acolytes having greater knowledge sharing competencies are likely to receive more knowledge that will translate into superior performance. This mediated relationship is moderated by homophily (between acolytes and their fellow employees), such that high homophily would enhance the amount of knowledge received by salons. Our results are in line with Chang et al., (2012) and Wang and Noe (2010) who found that when knowledge-sharing competencies are strong, the firms will receive more professional knowledge, leading to superior performance. Moreover, the interaction effects support the hypothesized moderating effects of homophily between the knowledge-sharing competencies of acolytes and the knowledge received by the salons. These findings are also supported by previous research (e.g., Chang et al., 2012). We find, therefore, that when acolytes and their fellow employees are willing to communicate and form connections with each other, more knowledge will be received by the salons. Confirming the findings of previous research (Chang et al., 2012; Escribano et al., 2009) in a new context, we also find that absorptive capacity moderates the relationship between knowledge received by the salons and their performance. We also found that the link between acolytes' knowledge-sharing competencies and salons' performance is mediated by knowledge received by the salons.

### 5.1. Theoretical and empirical implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to extant literature in five ways: firstly, this study introduces a novel dimension of staff heterogeneity—in the form of acolytes—to knowledge management literature. Previous research in knowledge management literature has not considered acolytes as a source of knowledge—especially, knowledge sharing competencies of acolytes remain uncovered. Based on social learning theory, we assert that acolytes acquire and develop superior knowledge sharing competencies by their long working association with reputed industry leaders. Secondly, previous research has focused more on the traits of the receiver (e.g., absorptive capacity) and that of the source (e.g.,

competencies) in understanding knowledge transfer, however, cooperation being a part of social interactions between employees at a firm stands neglected. Therefore, this study examines the moderating effect of homophily (between source and receiver) on the relationship between acolytes' competencies and knowledge received by the salons. Thirdly, we have chosen the personal care services sector of a South Asian developing country. This sector is highly revelatory because workers interact and communicate continuously, and knowledge-sharing is a perpetual process. Since the country is poor, junior artists learn more from fellow senior artists, and reliance on training outside the organization is rare. Fourthly, previous research has mainly conceptualized and operationalized performance in terms of financial indicators. Many intangible aspects of performance—e.g., customer satisfaction rate, product development, etc.—are seldom considered. We maintain that performance should not merely be viewed as wholly absolute; rather it must be seen relative to other firms, as this helps us capture firm-specific advantages. Therefore, we introduce performance as a relative construct in knowledge management literature. Finally, we develop detailed criteria to identify high-reputation industry leaders. The criteria that we have developed here can be used by future researchers to identify high-reputation leaders in similar sectors.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend staffing the organizations with acolytes as they ought to carry high-quality professional knowledge, knowledge-sharing competencies and are centrally positioned on the network of key stakeholders. Organizations that promote consulting and participatory work culture will help employees develop stronger homophily and thus receive and deploy knowledge effectively for superior performance.

### *5.2. Limitations and future research*

Some limitations merit discussion. Firstly, this study has examined the moderating role of attitudinal homophily in the relationship between acolytes' competencies and knowledge received by salons. Another type of homophily that warrants the attention of future researchers is background homophily i.e., the degree to which two employees share commonalities in their status, experiences, social class, etc. (Wright, 2004). Moreover, since homophily is grounded in the cooperation part of social interaction, future research may examine the moderating effects of other types of social interaction, e.g., competition, conflict, and accommodation. Secondly, the moderating effects of organized proximity, time to talk, and advice-centring negative consequences are yet to be examined. Thirdly, though our findings may be generalized to salons and similar contexts such as fashion, entertainment, drama, and filmmaking, where network endorsement is considered important—the other contexts are quite different. They may differ, for example, based on the extent to which high-reputation leaders are respected and regarded in an inter-organizational context (Kilduff et al., 2016). This salient scope condition needs a revisit in the future.

### **Author Statement**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.



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**Appendix I**

Analysis of measurement model

Variables	Item Codes	FL >0.4	AVE >0.5	CR >0.7	Cronbach's Alpha
Acolytes' Ability	AA1	0.911	0.770	0.870	0.867
	AA2	0.843			
Acolytes' Motivation	AM1	0.753	0.593	0.882	0.880
	AM2	0.840			
	AM3	0.791			
	AM4	0.765			
	AM5	0.715			
Acolytes' Opportunity Seeking	AOS1	0.831	0.777	0.871	0.868
	AOS2	0.923			
Knowledge Received by Salons	KR1	0.900	0.583	0.945	0.943
	KR2	0.892			
	KR3	0.816			
	KR4	0.835			
	KR5	0.822			
	KR6	0.822			
	KR7	0.802			
Homophily	H1	0.811	0.654	0.892	0.892
	H2	0.818			
	H3	0.819			
	H4	0.835			
Salons' Absorptive Capacity	AC1	0.885	0.600	0.933	0.924
	AC2	0.823			
	AC3	0.782			
	AC4	0.858			
	AC5	0.864			
	AC6	0.800			
Salons' Performance	P1	0.905	0.708	0.949	0.984
	P2	0.895			
	P3	0.847			
	P4	0.898			
	P5	0.890			