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Review: The Competitive Advantage In Light Of The Modern Manufacturing Environment

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Abstract: *Competition has become the language of the modern era, the focus of everyone's attention, being the catalyst that controls everyone's steps. It motivates them to work for more creativity, innovation, and giving, achieve a degree or other competitive advantage, excel and excel over their competitors, and complete the highest level of return or profitability. The current study sheds light on the concept and importance of competitive advantage in light of the modern manufacturing environment by providing an extensive review of the concepts, strategies, types, and measures of competitive advantage and the factors that affect the creation of this competitive advantage. This study found that the only way for industrial sectors to achieve their goal is to adopt "competitive strategies" that enable them to distinguish between differences in meeting the needs and desires of customers, which leads to encouraging customers to pay a premium that helps improve the performance of companies.*

Keywords: the concept and importance of competitive advantage, competitive advantage strategies, indicators of competitive advantage.

Introduction

Due to the rapid changes that institutions face today in their internal and external environment, as a result of agreements imposed by the World Trade Organization, and the shift from a strategy of competitiveness to a method of containment applied by international multinational companies. Competition has become the language of the modern era, the focus of everyone's attention, from individuals, units, organizations alike, being the catalyst that controls everyone's steps, motivates them to work, for more creativity, innovation, and giving, achieving some degree or another of competitive advantage, or distinction and superiority over their competitors, to achieve the highest level of return or profitability.

The concept of competitive advantage in our present time is the basis on which the developed world relies on building economic strategies at the macro and micro levels. This concept emerged in the mid-seventies of the twentieth century to replace the comparative advantage, as it became the biggest challenge facing economists and management "on converting the comparative advantage into a competitive advantage," Bin Al-Din, and Bouhna. (2013).

Although there is excellent agreement in the administrative literature about competitive advantage, there is a difference to a large extent regarding this concept. This difference lies in the type of activity carried out by the institution, sector, or state. In comparison, competitiveness at the company's level means gaining a larger share of the local or international market. In contrast, there is a different competition in the sector, which represents a group of companies operating in a particular industry. There is also a difference in the country's competitiveness seeking a sustainable high per capita income rate (Hisham and Bushmal. (2014).

Therefore, in this topic, the light will be shed on "the concept and importance of competitive advantage in light of the modern manufacturing environment."

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

In a globalized competitive economy, the competitive advantage is no longer confined to production at the lowest costs but rather to establish the principle of (quality and excellence). While integration or openness to the world within the global economic system was an imperative for developing and least developed countries, taking advantage of the opportunities it provides to achieve supportive growth and prosperity is not an inevitable result but rather is subject to the proposed competition laws at the level of states, companies, and even individuals where the most significant challenges posed by the new global environment are to enhance the ability to generate income and the continuity of growth in this international environment whose motto has become survival for the better, which calls for modernizing productive structures, improving their efficiency, adapting durability, improving the human element, improving the business environment, and attracting foreign capital (Arab Planning Institute 2003).

Therefore, the primary and best way for developed and developing economies alike is to support competitiveness to raise the challenges mentioned above, thus making competitiveness a concern of countries, international organizations, and companies. As these countries have councils, bodies, and administrations and have their policies, strategies, and indicators, for example, "The Competitiveness Policy Council in the United States considers the decline in economic competitiveness to be one of the elements that threaten the national security of the country."

Moreover, possessing and developing a competitive advantage is a strategic goal that economic institutions seek to achieve in light of the new economic climate's severe competitive challenges. The competitive advantage is seen as the institution's ability to fulfill the consumer's needs or the value it wishes to obtain from the product, such as high quality. Therefore, it is an investment of financial, human, and technological assets to produce value for customers that meet their needs and distinguish them from competitors in the competitive market (Smlali, J. 2003).

(Porter 2006) also indicated that the competitive advantage arises from its value to its customers. It can take the form of low price or provide distinct benefits in the product compared to competitors. The importance of competitiveness lies in maximizing the global economy's benefits and minimizing its disadvantages. The Global Competitiveness Report indicates that small countries can benefit from the concept of competitiveness than large countries, as competitiveness gives companies in small countries an opportunity to get out of the small market's limitations to the global spaciousness market. Whether we agree with this saying or not, it must face this system as one of the twenty-first-century imperatives at the end of confronting this system (Miftah 2012).

While the importance of competition in all sectors with different activities can be summarized as follows: **(**Miftah 2012).

i. It is maximizing the benefits provided by the global economy and reducing its disadvantages.
ii. The new global economic order represented by the liberalization of international trade restrictions provides a great challenge and potential danger to the world's countries and its companies. Still, that system simultaneously represents an opportunity for developing countries if it can be taken advantage of.
iii. The importance of competitiveness lies in maximizing the benefit from the new economic situation. It is known that companies are competing, not countries.

The companies that possess highly competitive capabilities can raise the standard of living of their countries' members, and as international reports have indicated, the standard of living of a country is closely related to the success of the companies operating in it and their ability to penetrate international markets, through export or direct foreign investment. In recent decades, global trade and foreign direct investment have been growing faster than global product growth.

While the importance of competition in industrial enterprises can be summarized as follows: **(**Bin Al-Din and Bouhna 2013).

1. The higher the return, the lower the risk, thus ensuring better income levels and a good living standard.
2. They are penetrating foreign markets effectively and competently and settling in them with firm and well-established rules through marketing and selling centers.
3. High level of employment and achieving stability in the country.
4. They ensured the institutions' survival and continuity. They improved their performance through the optimal use of all areas and competition fields.
5. Having a competitive advantage in any organization leads to achieving high profitability, as profitability depends on three factors, which are:

i. The value that consumers attach to the products of the enterprise.
ii. The price charged by the organization for its products.
iii. Customer value creation costs.

It can be said that the organization has a competitive advantage if it can create value for its customers through an innovative and effective competitive strategy, which confirms its distinction and difference from its competitors, enables it to confront it as well as increase its market share, and achieve profits that guarantee its survival and continuity. Thus, the importance of the entity's competitive advantage lies in the following: (Jamal 2010).

i. Creating customer value that meets their needs ensures their loyalty, supports, and improves their minds' corporate image.
ii. It is achieving strategic distinction from competitors in the goods and services provided to customers, with the ability to distinguish in resources, competencies, and strategies followed in a very competitive environment.
iii. We are achieving market share for the organization and high profitability to stay and continue in the market.

From another perspective, one of the authors believes that the importance of the organization's competitive advantages is embodied in the following: (Wael and Al-Ghalbi 2011).

i. It gives the organization qualitative, quantitative, and preference superiority over competitors, thus achieving high-performance results.
ii. It makes the business organization superior in performance or its value to clients, or both.
iii. It contributes to the positive impact of customer perceptions and those dealing with the organization. It motivates them to continue developing the deal.
iv. The fact that the competitive advantages are characterized by continuity and renewal allows the organization to follow development and progress long-term.
v. Given that the competitive advantages are based on the organization's resources, capacity, and capabilities, it gives mobility and dynamism to its internal operations.

It is evident from those mentioned above that the contemporary economy's competitive advantage has become more critical. It affects companies that need development and provides survival and individuals who want to preserve their work jobs.

Moreover, the competitive advantage affects countries that want to sustain and increase the living standards of their members, and what strengthened the climate of competition, and established conviction in the importance of competitiveness, those changes occurring in human activity in its various aspects in economic organization, and in social and political organization, in addition to developments practical and technological.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The interest in the concept of competitive advantage appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, specifically in (1911). At that time, there were many attempts by many authors to answer the question of "What are the reasons that lead to the difference in the performance of organizations, and why some of them excel the other" Barny & Arikan (2010).

While many explanations were provided through the literature related to strategic management, which clarifies the sources of competitive advantage since the inception of the concept of strategic management in (1950), it focuses these interpretations on two main perspectives that draw attention to the necessity of creating a correlation between the organization's internal situation and the external variables to implement the organization's policy as a social system. This concept was subsequently promoted to what is currently known as the SWAT analysis to create a match between strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Kong, E. 2008).

There are many opinions that many authors have put forward regarding defining the concept of competitive advantage, this diversity is due to the different angle from which this concept was launched, Which imposes the need to study the new conditions carefully, the resulting opportunities, and the restrictions and risks set, (Porter 2006).

As it was defined as the areas in which the corporation can compete with others through it, in a more effective way, and thus it represents a strong point that characterizes the organization without its competitors, in one of its production, marketing, or financing activities, compared to its competitors in the market (Dunk 2004). While it has been referred to as an advantage or an element by which the institution excels from its competitors if it follows and achieves a particular strategy for the competition (Porter 1993). It is also the unique, long-term position that the institution develops by performing its activities distinctly and effectively and using its internal strengths to provide outstanding value benefits to its customers. Its competitors cannot offer (Yusef 2006). In the opinion of (Goldsmith 2013), the competitive advantage of companies is determined by a feature distinct from the rest of the competing companies, which allows them to outperform them, and among these features access to natural resources, such as high-quality and inexpensive materials, and access to trained human resources and qualified employees The high level and the use of the latest technological mechanisms.

(Wang 2014) indicates that it is "the advantage through which the organization or company can be developed, through improving its performance and implementing procedures that allow it to outperform its competitors. The essential competencies related to close link with strategic resources, as the competitive advantage relies heavily on developing appropriate strategies and implementing them correctly. Thus, to achieve a competitive advantage, it must pay attention to its internal position and external capabilities (Ghatebi et al., 2013).

Therefore, by reviewing many of the concepts that dealt with a competitive advantage, it can be said that there is no specific definition of the idea of competitive advantage, as it is a multifaceted concept and has a dynamic nature that develops and changes continuously with changing times. The concept of competitive advantage at the enterprise level includes many indicators such as the ability to export, meet market needs, efficient use of resources in production, increase productivity, and the linkage of this with time and the ability to develop in it.

Moreover, some authors emphasized that achieving competitive advantage in the industry is not through protectionist policies for some sectors and self-isolation, but rather by competition in the global market and by innovation and diversification.

Accordingly, the competitive advantage can be expressed as a set of characteristics, benefits, or elements that the organization excels in over its competitors, through continuous improvement in performance and the exploitation of the resources it possesses efficiently and effectively, which leads to the possession of products with unique characteristics that distinguish them from Competitors' products. These products meet the needs and expectations of customers. At the same time, they can be measured by a set of measures, the most important of which are: market share, net profits, the volume of sales, cost reduction, differentiation, and others.

TYPES OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

There are many types of competitive advantage. Many authors have emphasized the kinds of competitive advantage. Still, there is excellent agreement between the main types that include two types: (Hajjaj 2015).

First I: lower cost or comprehensive cost leadership:

It means the organization's ability to design, manufacture, and market a product at a lower cost than competing organizations, ultimately leading to greater returns. On the other hand, the organization can produce and sell its products at a price lower than the average price of the competing organizations, which does not mean that the products or services are provided at less than their cost levels. Still, it can be done through achieving a lower variable cost or achieving a lower level of expenditures. Marketing or conducting a lower level of operating and administrative expenses, and each type of these costs can be a source of cost advantage.

Ways to get the lowest cost advantage: To obtain a lower cost advantage, it is imperative to monitor the factors of cost development, which are as follows: (Porter 2011).

i. ***Control of volume:*** That is, tracking the work of products produced by the institution as a result of its expansion, and thus the increase in the markets, as well as obtaining new means of production, which leads to a reduction in costs.

ii. ***Control of education:*** That is, its monitoring and setting of its goals, this is done by comparing the degree of learning in the institution with the standards in force in the sector, but it is not necessary to focus on labor costs only, but rather the need to look at the employees of the institution as a source of knowledge and creativity.
iii. ***Control of the links:*** What is meant by the links here are those that exist between value-producing activities to exploit and reduce costs, thus obtaining a competitive advantage.
iv. ***Control of attachments:*** What is meant by appending is the grouping (appending) of some critical and value-producing activities. The goal is to exploit the standard potentials or transfer knowledge of how to work in running a value-producing activity.

In addition to the previous four factors, there are other factors which are: monitoring procedures, monitoring integration, monitoring the exploitation of the available energies of the institution, monitoring location (positioning) such as geographical location, proximity to suppliers, consumers, and others, monitoring institutional factors the (role of the state), Laws and legislation. (Hajjaj 2015).

Second II: Distinguished Value or Product Excellence:

It means the organization's ability to offer a distinct, unique, or high value from the consumer point of view (higher quality, individual characteristics of the product, use characteristics, after-sales services, etc.). Therefore, it becomes necessary to understand product differentiation's potential sources through the following: quality, delivery, flexibility, innovation, and value chain activities. (Porter 2011).

Factors helping to get the advantage product highlight (value):

For the institution to be able to obtain a product of a distinct character, a set of factors must be available, called the elements of distinction, and they are as follows: (Porter 2011);

1. ***Traditional procedures:*** These are represented in choosing the activities that must be relied upon and how they are practiced.
2. ***Links:*** These links take two forms, ties between the activities of the institution and associations with suppliers:
    - ***Links between the institution's activities:*** coordination between the activities related to each other to meet consumers' needs.
    - ***Links with suppliers:*** The organization can be unique in the particular product, as a result of the existing ties between the organization and its suppliers, as it is possible to reduce the time for developing a new model through coordination between them or better utilization of joint activities between the organization and distribution channels, and from these links can be formed Distributors, financing investments through distribution and complementary activities.
3. ***Appropriate timing:*** the time of entry and practice of the institution's activity may be an essential factor in achieving product differentiation.
4. ***Location (position):*** Its proximity to consumers can provide products that consumers need and after-sales services.
5. ***Integration:*** As the institution is heading towards new value-producing activities, this integration may be backward, through the institution's production of raw materials by its means, or forward: through the institution's distribution operations by its standards, thus avoiding resorting to others.

According to the sector of activity to which the institution belongs, these factors are the guarantor of the establishment obtaining the distinct advantage, according to the sector of activity. These factors differ according to the action institution (Hajjaj 2015).

STRATEGIES OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Institutions are based on a specific strategy to compete to achieve precedence over their competitors through the possession of competitive advantage or competitive advantages, relying on systems that enable them to raise productivity and improve customer service, increasing sales achieving higher profitability. The institution takes them to achieve precise goals, which depend on the degree to which it achieves better success for the organization. According to (Porter 2011), competitive advantage strategies are classified into three categories:

i. ***Cost leadership strategy:*** It is also called a cost-cutting strategy. It means the ability of an organization to design products and market them with higher efficiency than competitors. It is a competitive strategy that depends on low cost in the industry through operational policies such as setting up an enterprise of high volume. It is efficient, requiring relentless cost reduction with expertise and tight control over fixed costs and expenses. This strategy aims to reduce the cost and sale at a lower price than the competitors' prices through tangible and intangible resources, available competencies, and cost reduction. (Hajjaj 2015).
ii. ***Differentiation strategy:*** It is distinguishing the product or service offered by the institution by creating something that known in the entire industry as unique, i.e., with high quality and distinctive, impressive specifications, and after-sales services to customers, in a manner that is perceived by the consumer, and this strategy does not allow costs to ignore, but it is not a strategic goal. Mainly. Product design, branding, quality and specifications, technology, features, and other dimensions can take many forms. This strategy enables lower costs (Al-Salem 2009).

This strategy's competitive advantage is achieved once many customers are convinced of the product's characteristics. The more attractive the distinctive features that the institution puts in the product, the more customers are attached to it.

iii. ***Focus strategy:*** This strategy means combining both the cost leadership strategy and the differentiation strategy, which is a competitive strategy directed at a limited target market sector or to a specific group of buyers without others, rather than dealing with the market as a whole. The focus strategy aims to build a competitive advantage and reach a better position in the market by satisfying a specific group of consumers' unique needs or focusing on particular product uses.

Also, a distinction must be made between two types of focus strategy, which are:
- ***Cost focus strategy:*** The Company seeks to gain a competitive advantage by reducing costs in the target market.
- ***The strategy of focusing on diversification (Differentiation):*** The institution aims to distinguish its products through diversification, which worries competitors in the target market.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE CREATION OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE.

To achieve a competitive advantage, three essential strategies are factors that positively affect the competitive advantage. The competitiveness strategy relies on distinguishing differences in meeting customers' and customers' desires for a particular product, which encourages customers to pay a premium that helps Improve companies' performance. Competitive strategies depend on the company itself, including cost, management, focus, improving employee skills, and sustainability. Competitiveness strategies give the company the continuity of taking opportunities, enhancing performance, and defending itself against other competing companies. This strategy often achieves success, progress and increases company profits. It creates obstacles and barriers that help make its products or services not easy to imitate.

One of the essential factors in achieving a competitive advantage is to ensure that the service or product is provided in the market at a convenient and appropriate time without any delay by consulting experts specializing in extension services in the company. Also, many factors affect competitive advantages, such as obtaining sufficient information on the market, using the latest technologies in production, activating the communication and extension system, and adopting modern production methods to reduce production costs.

IMPEDIMENTS TO THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN THE INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES

According to (Al-Astal and Isa. 2013), business enterprises face a set of obstacles that lead to weakening the competitive advantage of these organizations, the most important of which are:

i. Weak organizational structures in society.
ii. A decline in the level of human resources and backwardness in administrative communication.
iii. Absence of team spirit and quality rings.
iv. The absence of a database and an executive information system.
v. The absence of the organizational environment and effective organizational behavior.
vi. The absence of directors' freedom and the lack of independence of decisions and powers granted to directors.
vii. Lack of better performance of operations.
viii. Failure to measure opportunities and to recognize environmental threats.

A MEASURE OR INDICATOR OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE.

Economic analysts rely on their assessment of each institution's competitive situation on several indicators, which is to provide more information so that many comparisons can be identified between industries and organizations in different countries. While these indicators are used to indicate the organization's possession of competitive advantages, such as profitability, market share, sales volume, consumer satisfaction, share value, product diversity, ability to export, and effectiveness. (Ben Ammar and Zainab 2015), (Silva and Tadahsi 2005) and (Chang and Sinclair 2003).

(Al-Bakri 2008) indicates that every company needs to know the size of the competitive advantage that it possesses, and this is done through a set of measures, which are as follows:

***First I: Qualitative measures*:**

It measures the degree of customer satisfaction with the company's products compared to other competitors. Customers can realize the quality of the products provided to them by distinguishing between the different levels of quality, which are as follows:
- ***Expected Qualitative*:** it is the degree of quality that the customer thinks should be present in the product (service or commodity), and this is often difficult to achieve due to the different characteristics, desires, and needs of customers.
- ***Perceived Qualitative*:** It is this degree of Qualitative that the client or customer discovers when he receives the service, and this perceived Qualitative may be less or greater than he expected, which is reflected in the degree of his satisfaction or not.
- ***Standard Qualitative*:** That degree from qualitative provided by the institution corresponded to its specifications in advance and planned.

***Second II: Quantitative Measures*:**

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These are the measures most adopted by the company in measuring its competitive advantages, and this is done through a set of indicators of the most important, most used, and familiar: the annual growth of sales, profitability, and the market share of the advantages that these indicators enjoy such as the availability of the necessary data for their calculation, and ease of use, get it (Day and Wensley 1989). Moreover, all of these indicators are quantitative. They can be calculated accurately and quickly, unlike consumer satisfaction indicators (Al-Atoum 2009).

1. ***Profitability scale*****:** The profitability index is sufficient for the institution's current competitiveness. The market share is another indicator of competitiveness if the institution is working to maximize its profits. That is, it does not give up the gain to achieve the purpose of increasing its market share. Suppose the institution's profitability that wants to remain in the market should extend for a while. In that case, the current value of the institution's profits is related to its market value. (Ben Ammar and Zainab 2015).

   Profitability is also considered one of the financial measures that express the results of the work carried out by the institution, and among the most important of these ratios are the following**: (**Al-Bakri 2008)**.**

$$\text{The profit margin from sales} = \frac{\text{Net income}}{\text{Total sales value}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Return on equity}= \frac{\text{Net profit}}{\text{Total equity}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Return on investment}= \frac{\text{[illegible]}}{\text{Total assets}} \times 100$$

   It should be noted that the high percentage compared to competitors give an essential indication of achieving the institution's competitive advantage.

2. ***The scale of Market share*****:** It is an essential indicator in estimating the institution's percentage of sales to total sales in the same industry, meaning that the market share is a numerical translation of the company's business volume by value, as it represents the percentage of its stake (share) in the active market in it compared to competitors. The higher this percentage, the more the company appears in the market. This can be explained as follows (Al-Bakri 2008)**.**

At the same time, the competitive strength can be measured through the power of the company to the strongest competitors in the market, as follows:

$$\text{Competitive strength}= \frac{\text{The total value of the enterprise's sales in the market}}{\text{The total sales value of the largest competitors in the market}}$$

$$\text{Market share}= \frac{\text{The company's total}}{\text{Total industry sales}}$$

This result is closer to one, which means that the corporation has great competitive power in the market and vice versa. Still, suppose the product is equal to the one. The corporation is the strongest and dominant in the market since its sales are similar to its most important deals.

3. ***Annual sales growth scale*****:** This indicator reflects the success of the corporation's business and the increase in its market share, which supports its competitive position in the market. Therefore, while undertaking the strategic planning process, many companies seek to set a specific target for sales growth as one of the success criteria. This indicator is calculated by subtracting the sales of the reference year from the current year's sales and dividing it by the reference year's sales, which can be explained as follows: (Mahdi 2010).

$$\text{Growth in sales} = \frac{\text{Current year sales - Sales Year Reference}}{\text{Sales Year Reference}}$$

Moreover, there are several indicators by which a firm's competitive advantage can be measured (Al-Najjar 2013).

i. Productivity standards, profitability standards, value-added criteria, activity indicators, growth rates, and market share increase. A set of quantitative metrics: market share, customer loyalty and satisfaction, customer profitability, relative product quality measures, comparable new products, and marketing costs.
ii. Job satisfaction, job turnover (Al-Fiqi 2010).
iii. Market share, mental image, competition (Nazzal et al. 2011).
iv. Total productivity index, costs (Rafafi 2011).
v. Measuring competitive advantage (Al fuqaha 2010).
    - Profitability (increase in return on investment)
    - It is reducing transaction costs and increasing the number of transacting clients.
    - Excellence in presenting what is different or in the way of presentation.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the modern manufacturing environment, the industrial sectors no longer depend on building their reputation on their financial position only. Still, current concepts have emerged that help creates a work environment capable of dealing with the rapid developments in various aspects of life, perhaps the most prominent of these concepts is the concept of "achieving excellence and distinction, To survive and continue, in light of the great openness to global markets and the rapid technological developments that led to the intensity of competition. This study concluded that the only way for industrial sectors to achieve this goal is to adopt "competitive strategies" that enable them to distinguish between differences in meeting the needs and desires of customers, which leads to encouraging customers to pay a premium that helps improve companies' performance. Focus on self-competitive strategies: cost reduction, employee performance improvement management, sustainability, continuity of seizing opportunities, improving performance, and defending itself against other competing companies. This strategy often brings success, progress and increases the company's profits. It creates obstacles and barriers that help make their products or services challenging to imitate.

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