A Comprehensive Literature Review in Competitive Advantages of Businesses

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Received: 24 August 2017, Revised: 30 September 2017, Accepted: 20 October 2017

ABSTRACT

The previous studies on the field of competitive advantages of businesses were reviewed. Competitive advantage refers to a set of factors or capabilities that enable the company to demonstrate better performance comparing to the competitors. Totally 59 articles in eight different fields (strategic management, strategic management of marketing, marketing management, information technology, knowledge management, resources-based theory, entrepreneurship, and human resource management) were reviewed. The results showed that among several available methods, majority of businesses employ Porter’s triple strategies (differentiation, centralization, and cost leadership) to gain competitive advantages. Among the triple strategies, the strategy of differentiation has drawn highest attention and simultaneous utilization of the three strategies is a rare case.

Keywords: Competitive Advantage, Resource-Based Theory, Differentiation Strategy, Centralization Strategy, Cost Leadership Strategy.

Introduction

Business world nowadays is featured with intensive competition with national and foreign rivals. As a result businesses that fail to deal with the changes surely lose considerable share of their market and profit. Finding a suitable place in the intensive competitive environment is the key for long-term profitability and survival of a business; a goal which is only attainable through creating and keeping competitive advantages. The term “competitive advantage” refers to a “set of capabilities that permanently enable the business to demonstrate better performance than its competitors” (Bobillo et al., 2010). According to Porter’s reasoning, there are three ways to achieve competitive advantage; cost leadership, centralization and creating differentiation of product. He argued that businesses should think about how they enter a market and then create and keep a proper competitive position for themselves. (Porter, 1980)

There are two general viewpoints for elaboration on stable competitive position in an organization; the first viewpoint is developed on the industrial organization theory introduced by Michel Porter in the 1980s as a prevailing viewpoint, in which attaining competitive advantage is caused by environmental opportunities. Analytical tools used in this viewpoint include analysis of organization value chain, analysis of
competitive forces, general strategies (cost leadership, differentiation, and centralization), competitiveness, clusters, competitive advantages of nations, and so on. The second viewpoint is the resource-based theory, in which it is argued that every business creates its own competencies, and capabilities which eventuate in competitive advantage. In fact, permanent competitive advantage and weakness and strength features of the business are mainly under consideration. (Moreno et al, 2012)

Methodology and Findings

Articles with the term “competitive advantage” in their title or keywords, which have been indexed in Science Direct and Emerald were adopted for analysis. It is noticeable that to have more accurate survey only articles published between 1980 and 2013 were adopted.

Sheng and Chang (2012) surveyed the effect of information and communication technology (ICT) on transfer of knowledge and its effect on achieving innovation in competitive advantages in medical sector of Taiwan. Obstacles ahead of transfer of knowledge were problems in an organization and ambiguity of the knowledge (i.e. ambiguity of cause and effect relations of the knowledge). The results of data analysis showed that capability of the organization in ICT field has positive and significant effect on transfer of knowledge and the transfer improves development of attaining innovation regarding competitive advantage in the organization.

Lew and Sinkovics (2013) concluded in their study that the stronger the IT ward managers regarding the structural power in organizational hierarchy, the stronger the IT role in the organization and the more the competitive advantages for the organization. Hazen and Byrd (2012) found that new information technologies such as electronic data interchange (EDI) and FRID technology have positive effect on attaining competitive advantages and expansion of innovation. They said that these technologies may bring differentiating features for the business.

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Rugraff (2012) conducted a study in car industry of Czech and found that two main factors of creating competitive advantages in the industry is to forward-looking and backward-looking merger or the suppliers in the industry (participation in and sharing resources of customers and suppliers)

Kim et al. (2012) stated in a study that recruitment of trained and skilled staff improves competitive advantage of the organization and differentiation among other industries.

Li and Zhou (2010) studied the effective factors on attaining competitive advantages in 179 foreign countries in China with the presumption that these companies have accepted market tendency and integrity of management. They found that market trend and management integrity create competitive advantage through attenuating costs, differentiation, and diversity in the market.

Oh and Rhee (2010) argued that Korean car industry has achieved competitive advantages in the world industry through combining capabilities of suppliers and merging (cost leadership strategy).
Feng et al. (2010) conducted a study in China between 2008 and 2009 and concluded that customer and suppliers’ participation throughout the process of attaining competitive advantages (cost leadership strategy) improves competitive advantages of the industry.

Bobillo et al. (2010) studied 1500 manufacturing firms in Germany, France, the UK, Spain, and Denmark and maintained that organizational factors (e.g. capital markets, financial liaison, and skilled work force) – differentiation strategies approaches- have positive effect on attaining competitive advantages.

Massa and Testa (2009) found through their surveys on competitive advantages of food industries found that knowledge management process is positively effective on attaining competitive advantages in the industry and enables utilization of differentiation, centralization, and cost leadership strategies.

Tan (2009) stated in a study that relation between the staff and the company is strengthen through creating common values in a company, which eventuates in competitive advantages.

Ling and Chen (2008) found in their study on a model for attaining competitive advantages that sharing knowledge and forward-looking/backward-looking mergers (with customers, suppliers, and distributers) – cost leadership strategy- improves competitive advantages in long-run.

Tan (2009) maintained that mutual relation between the staff and the company is improved through creation of common values in an organization; which is the source of competitive value.

Lin and Chen (2008) studied a model to gain competitive advantages and concluded that sharing knowledge and forward-looking/backward-looking mergers (with customers, suppliers, and distributers) (cost leadership strategy) lead to development of long-term competitive advantage.

Awuah and Gebrekidan (2008) found in their study on development of competitive advantages that recognition of key elements in competitive networks and establishment long-term relation with the elements (cost leadership strategy) creates competitive advantages for firms.

Koh et al. (2007) studied small and medium size businesses in the UK and found that electronic business and the Internet (differentiation and centralization strategy) were positively and significantly effective on competitive advantages of firms.

In a survey of 56 Thai firms in semiconductor industry, Liao and Chien Hu (2007) suggested that through affecting on central qualifications in an organization, transfer of knowledge eventuates in competitive advantage in the organization, while uncertainties in external environment negatively influences transfer of knowledge and acquisition of competitive advantages.

Swink and Song (2007) maintained in their study that development of new products (centralization strategy) creates and increases competitive advantages of businesses.

In their study Toppinen et al. (2007) concluded that keyfactors of success, organizational capabilities, and organizational resources (differentiation and centralization strategy) lead to acquisition of competitive advantages in businesses.

Silvi and Guganesan (2006) found that cost knowledge management (strategic cost management viewpoint) added to competitive advantages (through utilization of cost leadership strategy) in four Italian companies.

In their survey of the effects of electronic businesses on several real estate agencies in China, Hinton and Tao (2006) showed that electronic businesses were positively and significantly effective on performance and
competitive advantages of businesses and result in differentiation from the rivals.

Castro et al. (2006) maintained in their study that organizational capital (culture, structure, and learning) differentiate the firms that possess such capitals from their competitors and create competitive advantages.

Khandekar and Sharma (2005) polled 300 employees and managers in 9 Chinese companies in international market and found that ability of human resources poses positive and significant effect on competitive advantage.

Chuang (2004) found in a study that implementation of knowledge management improved competitive advantage of a business.

Hunt and Amett (2004) maintained that utilization of competitive-centered viewpoint and market sectoring (centralization strategy) bring competitive advantages to businesses.

Awaz (2004) concluded based on their results of study that utilization of informal networks increase competitive advantages through backward/forward-looking merger with partners (cost leadership strategy).

Adams and Lamont (2003) recommended in their study that knowledge management, organizational resources, innovation and differentiation of products, and organization learning improve competitive advantages of businesses.

Rigamampianina et al. (2003) maintained based on their data that Porter general strategies (differentiation, centralization, cost leadership strategy) result in competitive advantages for organization.

Based on their results of data analyses, Davis et al. (2003) concluded that utilization of IT based strategies attenuates costs of company, differentiate the products, and create innovation through which bring considerable competitive advantages to the organization.

In an article Erikson (2002) found that entrepreneurship capital consisting of entrepreneurship capabilities and commitment is positively and significantly effective on competitive advantage.

Longeneker and Ariss (2002) concluded in their study that learning and development indices improve skills management and performance of the organization, which result in competitive advantage.

Though surveying the available models regarding competitive advantages, Walters et al. (2002) argued that tangible and intangible values and value of materials and equipment, services, salary, wage, investment costs performance were effective on competitive advantages.

Fudson and Radnor (2002) concluded in their three dimension model of competitive advantage that organization, people, and practices are mutually interactive and positively affect competitive advantages through specific measures.

Kaleka (2002) maintained based on a proposed model that organizational resources and capabilities and utilization of Porter’s triple strategies improve competitive advantages in organizations.

Likewise many other researchers, Fahy (2002) suggested that resource-based viewpoints are effective on competitive advantages of an organization.

In their study on information systems and their effects on competitive advantages, Zhang and Lado (2001) found that information systems improve data-based/transfer-based/information-based merits and eventuate in competitive advantages.

In their study on medical treatment and tourism, Preble et al. (2000) concluded that strategic unions (cost leadership strategy) lead to sharing resources between two companies, innovation in new products and enter into new markets, as well as easy access to new markets and acquisition of competitive advantages.
Keams and Lederer (2000) argued in their study that strategic harmony between information systems and business plans have positive and significant effect on organizational performance and competitive advantage.

In one of their studies Reed et al. (2000) argued that through development of products with lower quality (achieving cost leadership strategy), variety of products to meet different tastes (differentiation strategy) and the way it deals with organizational complexities, comprehensive quality management leads the organizational toward competitive advantages.

In their model of competitive advantage, Mazzarol and Souter (1999) demonstrated that strategies to enter the market (cost leadership strategy), marketing strategies, industries structure and external market structure create competitive advantages for businesses in higher education field.

Morgan and Hung (1999) surveyed the effect of marketing strategies and communications using resource-centered viewpoint. Organizational resources under consideration in the study assumed that influence on competitive advantage through marketing relations are listed along with some examples in the table blew.

In their survey on Morgan and Hunt (1999) found that organizational based marketing relation was positively and significantly effective organizational resources.

Yamin et al. (1999) showed in their study on Australian manufacturing industries that Porter’s general strategies (cost leadership, differentiation, and centralization strategy) were effective on competitive advantages and performance of the company.

Olson et al. (1998) maintained in their research that organizations’ strategic design and marketing are positively and significantly effective on competitive advantages of organizations provided that key merits of the organization, strategy centralization level (centralization on business, sector, or line of product), pricing limitations, resource and production merits, preferences of consumer have been taken into account at product design along with issues such as market development and variety of mergers.

Following several supporters of resource-based approaches for realization of competitive advantages, Piercy et al. (1998) concluded that organizational resources and skills result in competitive advantages.

Porter (1997) argued in an article that structural features of an organization such as entry of new investors, threats of being replaced, customers’ negotiation power; suppliers’ negotiation power, and competition among rivals all are effective on realization of competitive advantages of a firm.

Whitehill (1997) argued that knowledge-based strategies, which are intangible and hardly achievable for the competitors, may be a source of competitive advantage for the company.

In their study Whiteley and Hessan (1996) maintained that implementation of customer-oriented approach leads the organization toward competitive advantage through differentiation and centralization strategies.

Slater (1996) named the methods to achieve competitive advantage including quality of services and products, provision of proper services throughout the process of introduction of products/purchase/after sale services, lower cost of production and services comparing with other competitors, pace of introduction of new and innovative products, innovation in provision of products and services, and promotion of learning culture throughout the organization (cost leadership, differentiation, and centralization strategies).

In a study on Japanese companies, Krause (1995) maintained that vertical merger strategy (upward and downward) (cost
leadership strategy) has positive effect on competitive advantages of organization.
Long and Koch (1995) and Juttner and Wehrli (1994) portrayed in their model that central advantages and strategic processes (cost leadership, differentiation, and centralization strategies) and organizational sources lead to competitive advantages.
Turner (1991) showed in a study that marketing information is positively and significantly effective on the three strategies of cost leadership, differentiation, and centralization.
In his well-known book in 1980 Porter named three competitive strategies for realization of competitive advantages in organization including cost leadership strategy, differentiation, and centralization; which are the bases of the studies named above (Porter, 1987).
Table 1 lists the summary of researchers’ viewpoints based on main and secondary factors pertinent to competitive advantages.

Table 1. Summary of literature review based on main and secondary factors in competitive advantages

| Main factor | Secondary factor | Author |
|-------------|------------------|--------|
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | IT capabilities, Knowledge obstacles, Transfer of knowledge, Strategic union, Control process | Sheng & Chang, 2013 |
| competitive advantages (centralization strategy) | Logistic new communication technologies: Environmental factors, Organizational factors, Brand identity, Marketing strategy creates brand identity, Forward merger, Backward merger | Lew & Sinkovics, 2013 |
| competitive advantages (cost leadership strategy) | Management of environmental human resources | Lim et al, 2012 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Management correlation, Market trend | Lim et al, 2012 |
| Competitive advantage competitive advantages (centralization, differentiation, and cost leadership strategy) and institutional competitive advantage | Customers’ role and participation in preparing and providing products, Suppliers’ role and participation in preparing and providing products | Feng et al, 2010 |
| competitive advantages (centralization, differentiation, and cost leadership strategy) | Capability process, R&D capabilities | Oh & Rhee, 2010 |
| competitive advantages (cost leadership strategy/merger) | Internal/external competitive advantage through: organizational factors (e.g. capital markets, financial agents and skillful workforce), Promotion of common value | Bobillo et al, 2010 |
| Int’l competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Promotion of common value | Tan, 2009 |
| Competitive advantage (human force) | Creating value in customer | Zhou et al, 2009 |
| Competitive advantage (demand-center viewpoint) | Emphasis on services, Emphasis on prices, Market trend | Zhou et al, 2009 |
| Competitive advantage through differentiation in | | |
| Competitive advantage | Acquisition or development of knowledge | Massa & Testa, 2009 |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Competitive advantage | Knowledge storage | Massa & Testa, 2009 |
| Competitive advantage | Knowledge transfer/sharing | Massa & Testa, 2009 |
| Competitive advantage | Utilization of knowledge | Massa & Testa, 2009 |
| Competitive advantage | Cost leadership strategy | Massa & Testa, 2009 |
| Competitive advantage | Differentiation of strategy | Massa & Testa, 2009 |
| Competitive advantage | Centralization strategy | Massa & Testa, 2009 |
| competitive advantages | Condition of competitive environment | Salavou & Halikias, 2009 |
| (differentiation and cost | Internal merger | Lin & Chen, 2008 |
| leadership strategy) | Knowledge sharing | Lin & Chen, 2008 |
| competitive advantages | External merger | Lin & Chen, 2008 |
| (differentiation and cost | Knowledge sharing | Lin & Chen, 2008 |
| leadership strategy) | Knowledge sharing | Lin & Chen, 2008 |
| competitive advantages (cost | Innovation capacity in organization | Awuah & Gebrekidan, 2008 |
| leadership strategy) | Identification of key elements in network and | Awuah & Gebrekidan, 2008 |
| competitive advantages (centralization | establishment of long-term communication through | Awuah & Gebrekidan, 2008 |
| strategy) | forward/backward communication | Awuah & Gebrekidan, 2008 |
| Competitive advantage | Production-marketing mixture through development of new products | Swink & Song, 2007 |
| Competitive advantage | Environmental uncertainty | Liao & Chien Hu, 2007 |
| Competitive advantage | Key factors of success of industry | Toppinen et al, 2007 |
| Competitive advantage (resource-centered approach) | Competition strategy | Toppinen et al, 2007 |
| competitive advantages (centralization, differentiation, and cost | Organization capabilities | Toppinen et al, 2007 |
| leadership strategy) | Utilization of the Internet and new information technologies | Koh et al, 2007 |
| competitive advantages (cost | cost knowledge management | Silvi & Cuganesan, 2006 |
| leadership strategy) | Organizational capitals: | Silvi & Cuganesan, 2006 |
| Competitive advantage (resource-centered approach) | Organizational culture | Castro et al, 2006 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation and cost | Organizational structure | Castro et al, 2006 |
| leadership strategy) | Organizational learning | Castro et al, 2006 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Electronic business: | Castro et al, 2006 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Electronic learning | Castro et al, 2006 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Customer relation management | Hinton & Tao, 2006 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Web-based marketing | Hinton & Tao, 2006 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Electronic services | Hinton & Tao, 2006 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Electronic supplies | Hinton & Tao, 2006 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Office automation | Hinton & Tao, 2006 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Human resource abilities | Khandekar & Sharma, 2005 |
| competitive advantages (differentiation strategy) | Industrial texture | Khandekar & Sharma, 2005 |
| Competitive advantage | Environmental uncertainties | Kearns & Lederer, 2004 |
| competitive advantages (centralization strategy) | Information intensity | Kearns & Lederer, 2004 |
| competitive advantages (centralization strategy) | Necessity of IT | Kearns & Lederer, 2004 |
| competitive advantages (cost leadership strategy) | Entrepreneurship intensity | Weerawardena & O'Cass, 2004 |
| competitive advantages (cost leadership strategy) | Learning capability of market concentration | Weerawardena & O'Cass, 2004 |
| competitive advantages (cost leadership strategy) | Marketing capability | Weerawardena & O'Cass, 2004 |
| competitive advantages (cost leadership strategy) | Knowledge capability merger through informal communication networks | Awaz, 2004 |
| Competitive advantage (ownership, accessibility, performance approach) | Acceptance as colleague (cost leadership/merger strategy) |
| | Type of competition (centralization) |
| | Innovation and creativity (differentiation strategy) |
| | Collaboration (merger) |
| | Knowledge management: |
| | Social science management including: human resources, innovation supporting organizational culture, structural resources |
| | Technical/technological knowledge management including: IT, hardware and software |
| | Competition centered viewpoint: utilization of competitive resources (cost leadership and differentiation) |
| | Market sectoring (concentration) |
| **Competitive advantage (resource-centered approach)** | **Competitive advantages (centralization, differentiation, and cost leadership strategy)** |
| | Knowledge management systems efficiency |
| | Resource-based organizational learning |
| | Financial resources of company |
| | IT based strategy |
| **Competitiveness advantages (differentiation strategy)** | Investment toward improvement of obstacles of copying: emphasis on variety and differentiation of products |
| **competitive advantages (differentiation and cost leadership strategy)** | Resources of organization |
| | Organization capabilities |
| **competitive advantages (differentiation and cost leadership strategy)** | Entrepreneurship capital: |
| | Entrepreneurship capabilities including: perceived flexibility, entrepreneurship creativity, entrepreneurship merits, organizational capabilities, self-efficiency to reach resources, perceived behavioral control, entrepreneurship commitment |
| | Sources of national competitive advantages: |
| | Fundamental resources |
| | Advanced resources |
| **Competitive advantage (resource-centered approach)** | Competitive advantages sources of company: |
| | Tangible and intangible assets |
| | Human resources capabilities |
| **competitive advantages (centralization, differentiation, and cost leadership strategy)** | Resources of organization |
| | Organization capabilities |
| **Triple aspects of competitive advantage** | Individuals |
| | Organization |
| | Scheduled organizational practices |
| **Competitive advantage (resource-centered approach)** | Value of company |
| | Value added |
| **Competitive advantage** | Skills management improvement and organizational performance management |
| | Information systems effects |
| | Information data-based merits |
| | Transfer-based merits |
| | Information-output merits |
| | Strategic unions |
| **competitive advantages (differentiation and cost leadership strategy)** | Coordination of information systems design and business plan |
| **Competitive advantage (resource-centered approach)** | __Ma, 2004__ |
| | __Chuang, 2004__ |
| | __Hunt & Arnett, 2004__ |
| | __Rigamampianina et al, 2003__ |
| | __Adams & Lamont, 2003__ |
| | __Davis et al, 2003__ |
| | __Erikson, 2002__ |
| | __Fahy, 2002__ |
| | __Kaleka, 2002__ |
| | __Fudson & Radnor, 2002__ |
| | __Walters et al, 2002__ |
| | __Longenecke & Ariss, 2002__ |
| | __Zhang & Lado, 2001__ |
| | __Preble et al, 2000__ |
| | __Kearns & Lederer, 2000__ |
| Coordination of business and information system design | Comprehensive quality management | Reed et al., 2000 |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Competitive advantages (centralization, differentiation, and cost leadership strategy) | Marketing strategies and communications (cost leadership strategy and differentiation strategy) | Morgan & Hunt, 1999 |
| Competitive advantage (resource-centered approach) | External market and industry structure: | Mazzarol & Soutar, 1999 |
| Intl competitive advantages (centralization, differentiation, and cost leadership strategy) | - Internal/external marketing strategy | |
| | - Different market entry strategy | |
| | Different merits | |
| | Copying obstacles | |
| | Cost leadership strategy | Yamin et al, 1999 |
| | - Differentiation strategy | |
| | - Centralization strategy | |
| Organizational resources: | Management technical knowledge | Ghingold & Johnson, 1998 |
| | - Physical | |
| | - Financial | Piercy et al, 1998 |
| Service competitive advantage (differentiation strategy) | - Exporting experience | |
| | - Human force skills | |
| | - Information skills | |
| Cost competitive advantage (cost leadership strategy) | - Customer communication skill | |
| | - Development of product (centralization strategy) | |
| | - Supply chain | |
| Competitive advantage (technological advantages of firm) | Competencies: | Hill & Jones, 1998 |
| | - Resources | |
| | - Competencies | |
| Effective factors in marketing strategy design and organization: | - Organization key merits | |
| | - Strategy centralization level (concentration on company, sector, or line of product) | |
| | - Connection between image of company and targets of company | |
| | Taking into account the factors in production (direct/indirect factors such as workers, suppliers, managers, etc.) | Olson et al, 1998 |
| | - Taking into account limitations of pricing, resource merits and production | |
| | - Taking into account preferences of consumers during product design | |
| | - Taking into account issues such as market development and different merger (upward/downward) | |
| | - Entry of new investors | |
| Competitive advantage (industry/structure-centered organization approach) | Purchasing negotiation power | Porter, 1997 |
| | Suppliers negotiation power | |
| | Competition among new rivals | Whitehill, 1997 |
| | Threat of new products | |
The literature review results imply that there are 8 distinct groups in the field of competitive management including strategic management, knowledge management, resource-based theory, entrepreneurship, IT, marketing management, marketing strategic management, and HR management. Diagram-1 pictures frequency of the studies on each one of these eight groups. These studies can be classified based on the specific variables that each study has dealt with. For instance, some works have focused on IT and some others on HR. Table 2 lists the studies based on their field of study. As illustrated in the figure above, two groups of strategic management and resource-based theory have the highest frequencies. The most dominant result of strategic management is the consistency between competitive advantage of a company and its capabilities. That is, the main task of the management is to exert harmony between
merits of the organization (skills and internal resources) and the opportunities and risks exerted by environmental changes. On the other hand, resource-based theory is one of the main theories introduced in strategic management literature concerning competitive advantage. The theory is in contrary with industrial organizational theory in which competitive advantage is the outcome of external factors. It actually takes internal resources of the organization as the source of competitive advantages and emphasizes on the fact that organizations may achieve competitive advantages based on inconsistency of the resources they posse; what several studies have expressed interest in. The majority of the studies have focused on Porter's triple competitive strategies; while some have focused on one, two, or all three strategies. One may conclude from these studies that Porter's model of competitive strategies, thanks to coordinating aspects for exports of oil products, suffices for measuring and achieving competitive advantages. Taking into account aspects of distinction - cost leadership, and centralization strategies (Porter's general strategies) - the present study also reviews the studies that have analyzed the aspects (Table 3 and diagram 3).

Table 2. Competitive advantages studies based on field of study

| No. | Reference | Field of study                        |
|-----|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| 1   | Preble et al, 2000 | Strategic management                  |
| 2   | Chuang, 2004 | Resource-based knowledge management |
| 3   | Erikson, 2002 | Entrepreneurship                      |
| 4   | Davis, et al, 2003 | IT                                     |
| 5   | Yamin et al, 1999 | Strategic management                  |
| 6   | Massa & Testa, 2009 | IT                                     |
| 7   | Rugraff, 2012 | Strategic management                  |
| 8   | Salavou & Halikias, 2009 | Strategic management                  |
| 9   | Awuah & Gebrekidan, 2008 | Strategic management                  |
| 10  | Silvi & Cuganesan, 2006 | Resource management                  |
| 11  | Castro et al, 2006 | Resource based                       |
| 12  | Khandekar & Sharma, 2005 | Resource-based strategic management |
| 13  | Morgan & Hunt, 1999 | Strategic management                  |
| 14  | Olson et al, 1998 | Knowledge-based strategic management  |
| 15  | Whitehill, 1997 | Strategic management                  |
| 16  | Krause, 1995 | IT                                    |
| 17  | Zhang & Lado, 2001 | Strategic management                  |
| 18  | Whiteley & Hessan, 1996 | Strategic management                  |
| 19  | Slater, 1996 | Marketing management                  |
| 20  | Hunt & Arnett, 2004 | Marketing management                  |
| 21  | Kim et al, 2012 | Marketing strategic management        |
| 22  | Moreno et al, 2012 | HR management                        |
| 23  | Koh et al, 2007 | IT                                    |
| 24  | Hinton & Tao, 2006 | IT                                    |
| 25  | Khandekar & Sharma, 2005 | HR management                        |
| 26  | Bobillo et al, 2010 | Marketing management                  |
| 27  | Lim et al, 2012 | IT                                    |
| 28  | Kearns & Lederer, 2004 | IT                                    |
| 29  | Swink & Song, 2007 | Marketing management                  |
| 30  | Kearns & Lederer, 2000 | IT                                    |
| 31  | Liao & Chien Hu, 2007 | Knowledge management                  |
| 32  | Fahy, 2002 | Resource based                       |
| 33  | Reed et al, 2000 | Marketing management                  |
| 34  | Tan, 2009 | HR management                        |
| 35  | Li & Zhou, 2010 | Marketing management                  |
| 36  | Lew & Sinkovics, 2013 | Marketing strategic management       |
| #  | Reference                                      | Field                          |
|----|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 37 | Weerawardena & O’Cass, 2004                   | Entrepreneurship               |
| 38 | Piercy et al, 1998                           | Resource based                 |
| 39 | Zhou et al, 2009                              | Marketing management           |
| 40 | Kaleka, 2002                                  | Marketing management           |
| 41 | Long & Koch, 1995                            | Resource based                 |
| 42 | Feng et al, 2010                              | Resource based                 |
| 43 | Mazzarol & Soutar, 1999                       | Strategic management           |
| 44 | Fudson & Radnor, 2002                         | Marketing strategic management |
| 45 | Turner, 1991                                  | Resource based                 |
| 46 | Jüttner & Wehrli, 1994                        | Marketing strategic management |
| 47 | Ghingold & Johnson, 1998                      | Knowledge management           |
| 48 | Rigamampionina et al, 2003                    | Marketing strategic management |
| 49 | Walters et al, 2002                           | Marketing strategic management |
| 50 | Walters et al, 2002                           | Resource based                 |
| 51 | Awaz, 2004                                    | Strategic management           |
| 52 | Ma, 2004                                      | Marketing strategic management |
| 53 | Sheng & Chang, 2013                           | Knowledge management           |
| 54 | Hazen & Byrd, 2012                            | IT                             |
| 55 | Oh & Rhee, 2010                               | Strategic management           |
| 56 | Lin & Chen, 2008                              | Resource based                 |
| 57 | Toppinen et al, 2007                          | Strategic management           |
| 58 | Hill & Jones, 1998                            | Knowledge management           |
| 59 | Porter, 1997                                  | Strategic management           |
| 60 | Porter, 1987                                  | Resource based                 |

**Figure 1.** Fields of study on competitive advantages

As pictured in Figure 2, there are few studies dealing with the three general strategies (cost leadership, differentiation, and centralization) in one work. The distinguishing feature of the present study is that these three strategies have been surveyed in one work. The reason for employing Porter’s general strategies in
A conceptual model for surveying competitive advantages is further explained in the conclusion.

Table 3. Aspects under study by previous studies

| Researchers                        | Element under study |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Hazen & Byrd, 2012                | Cost leadership     |
| Rugraff, 2012                     |                     |
| Li & Zhou, 2010                   |                     |
| Feng et al, 2010                  |                     |
| Oh & Rhee, 2010                   |                     |
| Salavou & Halikias, 2009          |                     |
| Lin & Chen, 2008                  |                     |
| Awuah & Gebrekidan, 2008          |                     |
| Koh et al, 2007                   |                     |
| Silvi & Cuganesan, 2006           |                     |
| Hinton & Tao, 2006                |                     |
| Awaz, 2004                        |                     |
| Ma, 2004                          |                     |
| Hunt & Arnett, 2004               |                     |
| Adams & Lamont, 2003              |                     |
| Davis, et al, 2003                |                     |
| Kaleka, 2002                      |                     |
| Preble et al, 2000                |                     |
| Reed et al, 2000                  |                     |
| Morgan & Hunt, 1999               |                     |
| Mazzarol & Soutar, 1999           |                     |
| Yamin, et al, 1999                |                     |
| Piercy et al, 1998                |                     |
| Olson et al, 1998                 |                     |
| Whiteley & Hessan, 1996           |                     |
| Slater, 1996                      |                     |
| Krause, 1995                      |                     |
| Turner, 1991                      |                     |
| Porter, 1987                      |                     |
| Sheng & Chang, 2013               |                     |
| Kim et al, 2012                   |                     |
| Moreno et al, 2012                |                     |
| Li & Zhou, 2010                   |                     |
| Feng et al, 2010                  |                     |
| Bobillo et al, 2010               |                     |
| Zhou et al, 2009                  |                     |
| Salavou & Halikias, 2009          |                     |
| Lin & Chen, 2008                  |                     |
| Koh et al, 2007                   |                     |
| Hinton & Tao, 2006                |                     |
| Khandekar & Sharma, 2005          |                     |
| Ma, 2004                          |                     |
| Hunt & Arnett, 2004               |                     |
| Rigamampionina et al, 2003        |                     |
| Adams & Lamont, 2003              |                     |
| Davis, et al, 2003                |                     |
| Erikson, 2002                     | Differentiation     |
| Kaleka, 2002                      |                     |
| Preble et al, 2000                |                     |
| Reed et al, 2000                  |                     |
Figure 2. The aspects under study in previous studies

Discussion and Conclusion

Through field analysis, creditable articles on competitive advantages and the aspects indexed in Emerald and Science Direct were surveyed in detail. The purpose of the survey was to find the causes of competitive advantages in an institute. Based on surveys on 59 articles, the main factors in realization of competitive advantages were the Porter’s general strategies (cost leadership, differentiation, and centralization strategies), among them differentiation strategy has been most used in other works and minimum
number of studies dealt with the three strategies at the same time. Moreover, the results showed that survey of competitive advantages in the fields of marketing strategic management, strategic management, marketing management, IT, knowledge management, entrepreneurship, and theory were based on resources and HR management. Furthermore, maximum and minimum frequencies in the studies were for strategic management and entrepreneurship. The results of this work may be helpful for studies on competitive studies, the aspects, and measurement at business level.

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How to cite this article: Manijeh Gareche, Seyed Mahmoud Hosseini, Masoud Taheri, A Comprehensive Literature Review in Competitive Advantages of Businesses. International Journal of Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Science, 2017, 6(4), 312-329. http://www.ijashssjournal.com/article_83946.html