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IMPACT OF COMPETITIVE STRATEGY ON BUSINESS PERFORMANCE OF VIETNAMESE FOOD ENTERPRISES

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This study investigates the inpact of competitive strategy on business performance of Vietnam food enterprises. Based on a sample of 130 Vietnamese food enterprises, this study confirms the hypothesis that the competitive strategy has a positive effect on business performance. The results indicate that competitive strategy bases on some competitive compentencies. These findings will support Vietnamese food enterprises in selecting and developing competitive strategy to be more effective.

Keywords: *Business performance; Competitive strategy; Differentiation strategy; Focus strategy; Low cost strategy; Vietnamese food enterprises.*

1. Introduction

Several previous studies on stratey have pointed out two necessary conditions for the success of an enterprise, which is competitive position to help the business stay in the leading position; and business performance of an enterprise. In which some studies emphasize the existence of many factors affecting business performance, but one of the factors that has significant impact and improve business performance is competitive strategy of enterprise. According to research by M.Porter (1980), competitive strategy is the method and effort of enterprise to attract customers and improve competitive position of enterprise in a certain business field. The author argues that enterprises with clear competitive strategy will easily overcome ones without strategy and business performance. They can be decided by implementing one or several competitive strategies including: low- cost strategy, differentiated strategy and centralized strategy.

Many later studies have strengthened the role and impact of competitive strategies on business performance of enterprises. Specifically, Dess and Davis (1984) argue that competitive strategy at least helps businesses achieve higher business efficiency than others. Karnani (1984) assessed that the difference in cost or competitive position help businesses get higher profits. White (1987) stated that strategic business units of enterprise are able to achieve higher return on investment (ROI) when applying cost leadership strategies while differentiation strategy helps enterprises get higher sale revenue thanks to

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the coordination of important functional parts within the enterprise. Wright (1991) argues that businesses applying both differentiation and low cost strategies bring the highest business performance. Bush and Sinclair (1992) conducted practical researches and said that successful enterprises in the market are flexible and successful between low-cost and differentiation. Yamin (1999) examines the relationship among competitive strategy, competitive advantage and business efficiency, thereby assessing business performance of enterprises through profit target. Tehrani (2003) gives a view on the impact of five types of competitive strategies (product differentiation, low cost, marketing difference, product differentiation focus and low cost focus) of each geographic area are completely different. Kaya (2004) examines the relationship between advanced production technology, competitive strategy and business performance of a business and shows a dual strategy including both low cost and differentiation that brings high business performance.

Through empirical research in Vietnamese food trading enterprises, this study aims to assess the impact of competitive strategies on business performance of enterprises, and considering corresponding constitutive competitive capacity of each type of competitive strategy. The study results will be the basis for businesses to choose the type of competitive strategy and corresponding competitive capacity in an appropriate way and improve business performance.

2. Theoretical basis and research hypotheses

The main purpose of an enterprise is to optimize revenue and profit and build competitive advantage in the market. One of the typical competitive advantages that enterprise can establish in the industry is to control cost structure and market products and services so that cost is less than the competitors in the market. This is a popular way of competition also known as low-cost strategy, referring to competitive advantage through significantly lower pricing than other competitors (Porter, 2001). Low-cost strategy is a competitive strategy based on the lowest cost in the market, allowing businesses to compete effectively with price of products or services (Woodruff, 2007). Enterprises applying this type of strategy must create products of the same quality as competitors' products at significantly lower price.

According to Baack and Boggs (2008), low-cost strategy is primarily created not by a focus on efficiency but by many different factors of production process such as economy of scale, material, labor productivity, marketing, human resources, etc. M.Porter (1980, 1985) takes a view on low-cost strategy that is a competitive strategy with product of the same standard with low price to help businesses achieve optimal efficiency. This is one of the effective methods to help businesses succeed in building sustainable competitive advantage through the ability to cut and control production costs. Using technology, economy of scale, experience curve and appropriate production process combines with controlling administrative cost to gain cost advantage to help businesses achieve high business performance. M. Porter is one of the first authors to emphasize the low-cost competitive strategy that positively affects the business performance of enterprise, particularly to help businesses improve market share, revenue, profit and ROE with the evidence of enterprises without competitive strategy or unclear competitive strategy (also known as stuck strategy) makes enterprises achieve low profit margins, and the number of customers decreases. Based on this view, some authors such as Dess & Dvis (1984), Wright (1987), Madara M.Ogot (2014) also studied and confirmed the impact of low-cost strategy on business performance of enterprises in some specific sectors. From the above arguments, the first hypothesis is set as follows:

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Hypothesis H1: Low-cost competitive strategy has an effect on the business performance of Vietnamese food processing enterprises.

Differentiation is one of the important competitive strategies of enterprise in competition (Allens & Helms, 2006). According to Koskela (2000), enterprises implement differentiation strategy to distinguish themselves from competitors in a certain value for customers. Murphy (2011) argues that the difference occurs when an enterprise tries to make products/ services more attractive to customers than competitors, thus they are able to impose a higher price. Therfore, the difference is related to creating a unique customer (Cheah et al., 2007). Porter (1985) points out that differentiation strategy can be explained based on differences in technology, brand, distribution, quality or innovation. Differentiation strategies involve developing strengths that can give a business an advantage of differences on other competitors.

An enterprise can distinguish itself from its competitors through innovation, effective promotion programs and developing a strong brand (Li & Zhou, 2010). Aaker & Joa (2010) emphasized role of brands in reflecting the nature of competitive strategy, so the enterprise needs to invest in brand development to meet customer expectation, and also needs to have understanding of customers' beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and competitors to build a reputable brand and create customer loyalty. Creating new products and services is servic important competitive advantage to help businesses improve their efficiency. Products can be new in terms of location, space, design, features, display, not just simply about features and utilities, so businesses need to constantly develop new products to create differences (Olegube, 2014). According to Porter (2008), differentiated enterprise often have strengths in accessing new, modern, skilled and creative employees, smart sales teams and good and reputable communication of enterprises, product quality and innovation. Since then, the hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis H2: Differentiation strategy has an impact on the business performance of Vietnamese food trading enterprises.

According to Porter (2001), centralized strategy pursues a specific market segment through the advantage of cost leadership or differentiation rather than participating in the entire market. It involves market segments and product positioning on that target market to bring a competitive advantage to businesses. Enterprises can choose to focus on a selected group of customers, products, geographic areas or services (Darrow, 2001). Enterprises implementing strategies focus on developing market share through activities in a niche market, less attractive market or being ignored by larger competitors. A successful centralized strategy depends on a market segment that the company chooses is large enough to have good growth potential, but not important for large competitors. Centralized strategy is most effective when customers have different preferences and when competitors do not exploit (David, 2000).

Centralized strategy is often in line with the need to build a competitive advantage of small businesses in a certain market or market segment. Different markets require different cost structures as well as differentiated need; therefore, companies that implement centralized strategies need to take advantage of this difference to create different, specific products to satisfy customers' needs (Waiyaki, 2014). This is also a factor that makes characteristic of centralized strategy enterprise. Hahn (2003) emphasized that enterprises focus on developing market research capacity in a mass manner, thereby bringing in a variety of products, focusing on investment capacity to product and service promote activities on a certain market to be able to retain successful products. Saif (2015) also agrees that the promo-

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tion programs focusing on customer have great influence on the strategic efficiency of enterprises. Based on these evidences, the following hypothesis can be developed:

Hypothesis H3: Centralized strategy has an impact on business performance of Vietnamese food businesses.

From the studies of M. Porter (1981), Dess & Dvis (1984) and Madara M.Ogot (2014), the research model of the thesis is as follows:

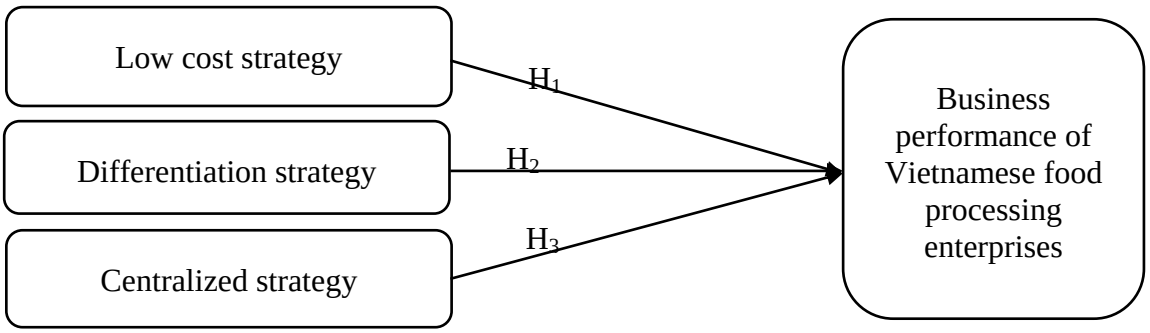

Figure 1: *Research model*

Low cost strategy: Based on Porter's low cost strategy scale (1980); Dess & Dvis (1984), Hansen et al (2015); Banker & Associates (2014); Caxton Munyoki (2015); Richard S. Allen & Marilyn M. Helms (2013), the low-cost strategic scale used for this study includes 8 elements: Administrative capacity; Pricing capacity; Proactive capacity of input materials; Distribution capacity; Capacity of modern production technology application; Financial capacity; Large-scale production capacity.

Differentiation strategy: Based on research scales developed from Porter's studies (1985); Kotler et al (2006); John A. Parnell (2011); Richard S. Allen & Marilyn M.Helms (2013); Caxton Munyoki (2015); Faith Muia (2017), identifies 10 groups of factors including: Innovative capacity for products; Different capacities of customer service compared to competitors; Capacity to develop internal supply chains and participate in industry supply chains; Human resource capacity of enterprise; Customer relationship management capacity; Brand capacity of enterprise; Product quality and safety management capacity of enterprise; Communication capacity of product marketing; Corporate social responsibility of enterprise; Capacity to innovate and create new technology processes in business and production of enterprise.

Centralized strategy: Combining the research of Tahir & Bakar (2007); Josephat Mutabuzi Justinian) 2015); Faith Muia (2017); Porter (1980); Morrill (2007); Fatih Yasar (2010), the study uses the scale including 6 capacity groups: Market research capacity of enterprise; Product supply capacity in the market segment of high-priced products (or low price); Differentiated marketing capabilities for each market segment of the enterprise; Ability to meet individual needs of customers; Capacity of new market development of enterprise; Capacity of product diversification of enterprise.

Business performance: Two indicators of business performance include financial and market efficiency. In which financial efficiency is measured by a number of criteria such as revenue growth rate, profit growth, return on equity (ROE) and return on investment (ROI), etc. There is a tendency to easily

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control and more easily measure market performance (Waal & Coevert (2013).This study uses financial criteria to measure business performance of enterprises including: Increase revenue growth, profit growth, ROA, and ROE.

Research model is as follows: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_3 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon_i$

In which:

Y: Business performance of Vietnamese food processing enterprises

X_1: Low cost strategy

X_2: Differentiation strategy

X_3: Centralized strategy

β_0: is slope coefficient Y when dependent variables equal 0, show the impact of the factors other than the factors determined in the model.

3. Research method

This study was implemented by developing hypotheses and re-testing by quantitative methods. The author builds a questionnaire including questions corresponding to each hypothesis (independent variables) to assess the impact on business performance of Vietnamese food businesses (dependent variable). The questionnaire consists of two parts, the first part is general information such as (gender, age, experience and current position, etc.); the second part is questions to assess the impact of competitivr strategy on business performance. Variables are measured according to Likert 5 scale (from level 1: completely disagree to level 5: completely agree).

The study uses a method of random sampling stratified by location and by type of business, business activities of enterprises. The official investigation process is conducted from February 2017 to October 2017. With 200 questionnaires, 141 were collected, corresponding to 70.5%. Of the 141 questionnaires, 11 were invalid and rejected because the respondents left more than 30% of the questions or answered the same plan for all questions. As a result, 130 valid votes were used as official research data, ensuring representation. The sample structure is shown in Table 1 below:

4. Research results

SPSS 22.0 software is used to analyze data including average value (M), standard deviation (SD) and coefficient of variation (CV) for statistical description of variables. CFA testing and regression analysis are used to test hypotheses (Table 2).

Cronbach's Alpha coefficients show that all factors achieve reliability with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient greater than 0.6; If any of the observed variables in this factor are removed, the Alpha coefficients are reduced, and the correlation coefficients are greater than 0.3 so all observations are retained. Specifically, in the scales, differentiation strategy with the largest Cronbach's Alpha (0.957) shows the close correlation between observed variables. The lowest is Centralized strategy scale with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.868 and the correlation of the highest total of this scale is 62.4%.

There is a positive correlation between low cost strategy and business performance of Vietnamese food trading enterprises ($r = 0.53$, p-value = 0.004). Regarding differentiation strategies, correlation coefficient is also positive ($r = 0.374$, p-value <0.001). This means that differentiation strategy also lead to an increase in business performance of Vietnamese food businesses. The results of this study also show that there is a positive correlation between Centralized strategyand business performance of enterprises ($r = 0.251$, p-value = 0.005), indicating the use of Centralized strategyalso improve the business performance, although the impact is not as high as cost leadership and differentiation strategies.

Result of variance analysis (ANOVA) as shown in Table 4 check the meaning of the model at 5% significance level. With p-value = 0.000 means hypothesis is accepted and three types of competitive strategies have a positive relationship

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Table 1: *Structure of survey sample*

Location	Percentge	Labor scale	Percentage	Company type	Percentage
1. Hanoi	23.08%	Under 5 employees	31.54%	Joint stock	27.69%
2. Bac Ninh	6.15%	5 - 9 employees	22.31%	Company limited	63.08%
3. Hai Duong	10.00%	10 - 49 employees	17.69%	Private	9.23%
4. Hung Yen	4.62%	50 - 199 employees	13.85%	**Total**	**100%**
6. Vinh Phuc	2.31%	200 – 299employees	6.92%		
7. Da Nang	4.62%	300 - 499 employees	3.85%		
8. Hue	4.62%	500 - 999 employees	3.08%		
9. Ho Chi Minh city	23.08%	Above 1000 employees	0.77%		
10. Dong Nai	8.46%	**Total**	**100%**		
11. Son La	2.31%				
12. Da Lat	3.85%				
13. Lao Cai	2.31%				
14. Bac Giang	4.62%				
Total	**100%**				

Source: Summary of survey results

Table 2: *Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of scales*

Variable	Symbol	Variable correlation - lowest total	Highest Cronbach's Alpha if variable is removed	Cronbach's Alpha	Assessment
Low cost strategy	X_1	0.645	0.901	0.904	Approved
Differentiation strategy	X_2	0.669	0.956	0.957	Approved
Centralized strategy	X_3	0.624	0.853	0.868	Approved
Business performance	Y	0.587	0.934	0.933	Approved

Source: Data analysis result

with the business performance of Vietnamese food enterprises.

Next, multivariate regression model is used to test the influence of core competence on competitive advantage. The multicollinearity phenomenon between 5 independent variables is measured by tolerance and magnification coefficient variance (VIF). VIF values range from 1.2 to 1.6, values <10

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Table 3: *Results of correlation analysis*

		X_1	X_2	X_3	Y
X_1	Pearson Correlation	1	.571**	.317**	.253**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.004
	N	131	130	130	127
X_2	Pearson Correlation	.571**	1	.560**	.374**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	130	130	130	126
X_3	Pearson Correlation	.317**	.560**	1	.251**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	130	130	130	126
Y	Pearson Correlation	.253**	.374**	.251**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	127	127	126	127

Source: Survey data analysis result

Table 4: *Results of synthetic ANOVA analysis*

Model		Total squared	Df	Total mean squared	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.993	3	2.998	6.802	.000a
	Residuals	53.769	122	.441		
	Total	62.763	125			

Source: Survey data analysis result

show that the multicollinearity phenomenon is unnoticeable and the variables are stable. In Table 5, beta X1 (β = 0.044, p-0.747), X2 (β = 0.412, p-value = 0.007) and X3 (0.075, p-value 0.545) are shown, representing the impact between competitive strategies and business performance of enterprises.

Regression analysis with selected reliability is 95% corresponding to the independent variables is less than 0.05 and positive Beta coefficient. Thus the independent variables X1, X2, X3 are significantly correlated with the dependent variable Y. The results show that all variables are satisfied and the model is consistent with the research orientation. The regression equation has the following formula:

Y (HQKD) = 1.880 + $0.044X_1$+ $0.412X_1$+ 0.075 X_1

5. Comment on the results and some implications

The results of this study are consistent with previous studies on the impact of competitive strategies on business performance of enterprises. Research results of Dess & Dvis (1984) on the positive impact of competitive strategy on ROA and revenue of enterprises or Marques and partner

Table 5: *Results of synthetic regression analysis*

Variable		Not standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	T	Sig.
		B	Standard error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.880	0.500		3.761	0.000
	X_1	0.044	0.135	0.033	0.323	0.747
	X_2	0.412	0.150	0.321	2.738	0.007
	X_3	0.075	0.123	0.061	0.607	0.545
a. Dependent Variable: Y						

Source: Survey data analysis result

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(2000) through survey of 12 industrial manufacturing enterprises in Portugal found that profit and ROE of enterprises with differentiation strategy are the highest, followed by Centralized strategy and finally the low-cost strategy. Shah and partner (2000) also pointed out that Japanese companies by adopting differentiation strategies have better business performance than US enterprises deploying low-cost or focus strategies. This result is similar to the findings of Power & Hahn (2004) when examining the relationship between competitive strategy and business performance and showing competitive strategy to generate higher profit and revenue than businesses without strategic competition. This is also consistent with Porter's (1985) and Wright (1988) assertions about the impact of competitive strategies on profit, revenue and ROE of enterprises. These results are testament to the role and importance of competitive strategy and acceptance of research hypotheses.

The differentiation strategy (X2) has coefficient of 0.412 in the same direction as dependent variable. This is the strategy that has the strongest impact on business performance of Vietnamese food trading enterprises. The focus of differentiation strategy is to create unique and outstanding quality product for customer based on the company's foundation to promote the strengths of product innovation and branding, improve product or technology quality that is superior to competitors in the industry. Based on the findings of this study, it is possible to accept the differentiation strategy hypothesis that positively affects the business performance of Vietnamese food businesses. Specifically, 23.9% of Vietnamese food business enterprises pursue differentiation strategy. Compared to the other two competitive strategies of low cost and centralized strategy, food companies mainly adopt different strategies that are able to achieve significantly higher business efficiency (0.412).

Results of regression analysis show that the centralized strategy has a positive relationship with solid effectiveness. Increased use of focus strategic indicators improves business performance of food businesses by 0.075 times. The research results show that 23% of food companies in Vietnam pursue a Centralized strategy.

Based on the study results, the low-cost strategy affects business performance of food businesses. In particular, the results indicate that Vietnamese food companies can increase business performance to 0.044 times when applying low-cost strategy. In order to pursue this strategy, enterprises need to pay more attention to and focus on effective management capacity, financial capacity, distribution system, adapting to the changes of the environment, managing materials.◆

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Summary

Bài viết này nghiên cứu tác động của chiến lược cạnh tranh đến hiệu quả kinh doanh của các doanh nghiệp (DN) kinh doanh thực phẩm Việt Nam. Dựa trên dữ liệu nghiên cứu được thu thập từ 130 DN kinh doanh thực phẩm đang hoạt động trên thị trường Việt Nam cho thấy loại hình chiến lược cạnh tranh được sử dụng đều có ảnh hưởng tích cực đến hiệu quả kinh doanh của các DN này. Kết quả nghiên cứu là căn cứ cho các DN lựa chọn chiến lược cạnh tranh và phát triển các năng lực cạnh tranh phù hợp để cải thiện tốt hơn hiệu quả kinh doanh.

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