

## COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs): A SYSTEMATIC MAPPING STUDY

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### Abstract

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is likely to have an advantage over competitors due to their strategic plans. Meanwhile, some of the strategic factors considered important to have a competitive advantage include human resource development, knowledge management, and Information and Communication Technology. They have been found to build and sustain a dominant position for rivals, but there is a need to consider the state of the art of competitive advantage by entrepreneurs or academics. Therefore, this study aimed to classify and identify scientific publications as well as to carry out a thematic review of recent literature to provide a comprehensive and thorough view of the competitive advantage in SMEs. This included the use of the Systematic Mapping Study (SMS) to review scientific articles related to competitive advantage depending on the focus, locus, and type of study. The results of this mapping are expected to contribute to both researchers and practitioners in determining the research focus gap and the next novelty of competitive advantage research. Thus, this study classified competitive advantage based on the overview of previous research topics and trends.

**Key words:** *competitive advantage, literature review, small and medium enterprises*

**JEL Codes:** *L81, G29, D12, D01, L83.*

### Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) contribute to the job market, have a positive impact on Indonesian society, and campaign to help create economic stability to ensure survival although other industries remain impacted by the global financial crisis in the 21st century (Febrian, Maulina, & Purnomo, 2018; Maslakhah, 2017; Utama & Darwanto, 2013).

Moreover, COVID-19 has been observed to be one of the reasons inhibiting the small and medium-sized enterprises development in 2020 which has previously been projected by the Indonesian Ministry of Finance (2020), to contribute 30.2% to the country's economy in 2024 and 61% to GDP in 2020 and 65% in 2024 while the entrepreneurial ratio was targeted to be 3.55% and 4% respectively.

Indonesia has attempted economic recovery through different schemes but the slow movement in the economy persists and this is in addition to other obstacles being faced by SMEs such as financial limitations (Ng & Rezaee, 2015), marketing factors, scarcity of raw material sources, and decreased consumer purchasing power due to lockdown factors and large-scale social distancing (Febrian et al., 2018). These tend to affect their sustainable competitiveness and leads to the inability to survive and subsequent failure (Andri et al., 2020; Heriyanto et al., 2021; Purnomo et al., 2019).

Teece (2007) proposed the building of entrepreneurial processes by companies based on capabilities and resources considered difficult to imitate to create competitiveness. This is related to the economic crisis being experienced in different countries and the business environment observed to be running through the digital economy era, thereby, making traditional competitive advantage strategies such as cost leadership, market differentiation, and niche orientation to be inappropriate (Porter, 1980b).

Previous studies have recommended the adoption of unique capabilities and resources as a key factor to ensure sustainable competitive advantage (Febrian et al., 2018; Heriyanto et al., 2021). This, therefore, shows competitive advantage has become a global trend in the 21st century and a new paradigm capable of resolving economic (Nenzhelele, 2015), environmental (Handoko et al., 2020), and social interests in different countries (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010).

The study of competitive advantage continues to evolve as the scope of research develops and this makes providing a brief overview and determining its network important. New methodologies to conduct research involving the use of secondary studies to determine the state of the art (B. Kitchenham et al., 2009; Petersen et al., 2008) and latest research trends have emerged due to the advancement of information technology

(Kuratko, 2010; Qosasi et al., 2019). Moreover, every academician has a role in supporting SMEs to survive obstacles, and the general trend towards evidence-based competitive advantage strategies is expected to lead to an increasing focus on new empirical research methods using systematic mapping studies (Banaeianjahromi & Smolander, 2016b; Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Kitchenham et al., 2009; Rizal, Maulina, Purnomo, & Febrian, 2017).

Systematic Mapping Studies (SMS) is one of the secondary study methods which is getting a lot of attention lately. It aims to explore existing scientific publications and examines the contents in depth from several perspectives. This method has more benefits than the typical literature review in other literary methods due to its ability to reduce bias, recognize a broader research context, and enable the production of new research maps (Rizal et al., 2017).

SMS is able to determine the state-of-the-art from existing research and also provides a map of current literature to produce useful findings for use in real life and for academics to identify future research gaps (Akkermans et al., 2003). Several literature studies related to competitive advantage have, however, been conducted in Indonesia (Ardyan *et al.*, 2017; Ginting, 2015; Handayani *et al.*, 2013; Hoque *et al.*, 2016; Lukiastruti *et al.*, 2017; Munizu, 2013; Ong & Ismail, 2012; Roostika *et al.*, 2015; Rufaidah, 2016; Budiarto *et al.*, 2017; Samsir *et al.*, 2017; Sulistyono & Siyamtinah, 2016; Susanti & Arief, 2015; Tjahjaningsih *et al.*, 2017; Widodo & Shahab, 2015) but only a few discussed the systematic mapping method.

The purpose of this research was to conduct initial research on SMS to build a further system. This involved the use of Scopus electronic database to retrieve articles on competitive advantage in the SMEs field and 1,435 publications were analyzed based on the following Research Questions (RQ):

1. RQ1. What is the focus and locus of research on the topic being studied?

2. RQ2. What are the paper type and research method used?

3. RQ3. How did the topic develop in each country over time?

### Methodology

This paper uses a Systematic Mapping Study (SMS) which is rooted in a popular literature review study in medical research. SLR aims to find, identify, evaluate, classify, and interpret all available and relevant literature related to the defined research questions. The Systematic Mapping Study (SMS) method was adapted and applied to Competitive Advantage in SMEs to review and analyze all current and applicable sources of literature relevant to the study issues found (Banaeianjahromi & Smolander, 2016a; Escandón-Barbosa, Hernandez-Espallardo, & Rodriguez, 2016; Kitchenham, 2004; Rizal et al., 2017). The most common reason for conducting systematic

reviews is to summarize the empirical proof on the desired topic.

Then, it identifies gaps in current research and provides suggestions for future observations, therefore it will provide a preliminary basis for new research (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). The process applied in this study was detailed while some options in the systematic map of Banaeianjahromi & Smolander (2014) were also discussed.

SMS is known to be a tool for interpreting the description of a given research field (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007) due to its ability to explore detailed information. The key stages of the procedure include the specification of the study issue, the scanning for appropriate documents, the filtering of articles, the abstract keywording as well as the extraction and mapping of data. Each of these steps has an individual result but the result is used as the systematic map.

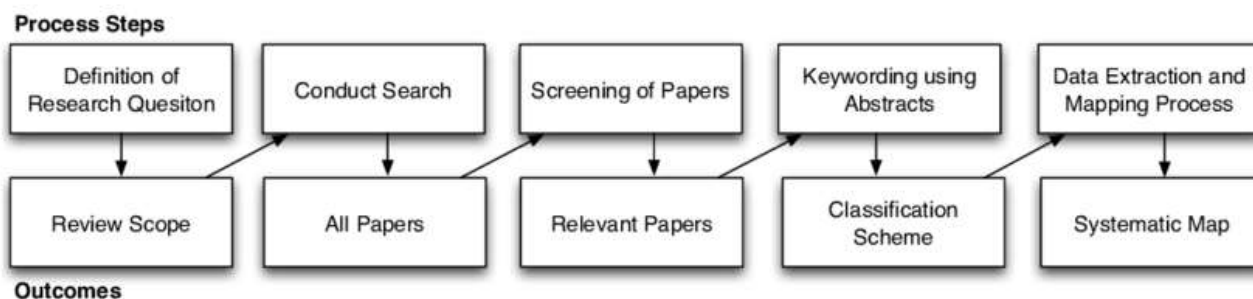


Figure 1. Systematic Mapping Process

### Searching Steps

An online search was conducted on Scopus indexed electronic database accurately as possible to improve the accuracy of the SMS results. This section defines the process to select data sources, specify search strings, and classify exclusion and inclusion criteria and for the purpose of this study, the search process from Petersen et al. (2008) and Banaeianjahromi & Smolander (2014) was adopted. Moreover, the complete process of

SMS used with reference to the suggestions from Kitchenham (2007) is presented in Figure 2.

Search strings were generated using recommendations from Banaeianjahromi & Smolander (2016) and Barbosa & Alves (2011) with the first step being the determination of the main keywords.

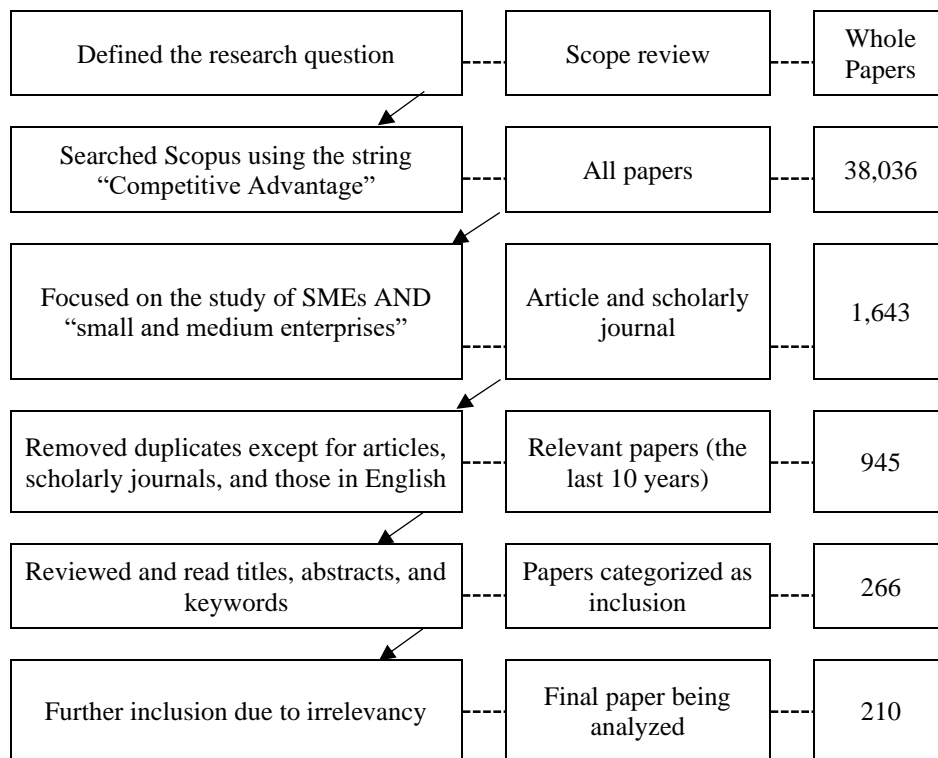
The second was to review well-known studies in competitive advantage.

The third was the discovery of alternate types of keywords to be used in the search

process. while the final step was to use Boolean operators to synthesize into a single search string.

In mathematics and logic, the arguments and functions of Boolean operators assume the value of the set of two elements (AND/OR). Boolean AND is a Boolean operator which gives the value one if and only if all the operands are one, and otherwise has a value of zero. Boolean OR is a Boolean operator that gives the value one if at least one operand (or input) has a value of one, and otherwise has a value of zero.

Meanwhile, AND or OR Boolean operators were not used in the second stage due to the application of the "search within results" feature in the Scopus search panel with a string "(SMEs OR small AND medium AND enterprises)" in the third stage and 1,643 results were discovered.



**Figure 2. SMS Process (Searching)**

The search strings were filtered based on titles, abstracts, and keywords while the types of articles, final publications, source type of journals, use of English, focus on the subject areas of Business, Management, and Accounting in the last 10 years were used to minimize the search.

This was followed by defining the categories of articles to be excluded through the concept of exclusion and inclusion criteria which involves deleting irrelevant articles as a reference to review articles with predetermined topics as classified in the following table.

**Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

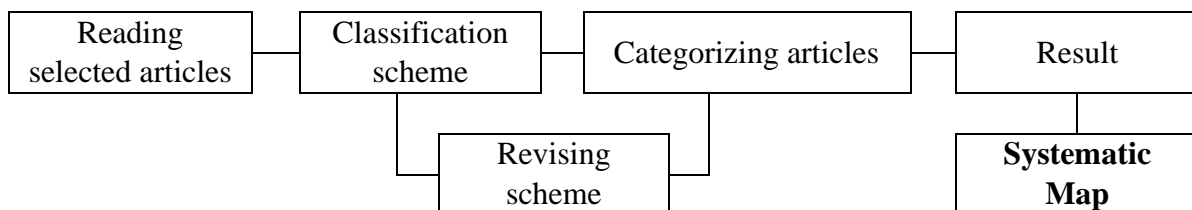
Inclusion	Exclusion
1. The research focusing on competitive advantage in SMEs	1. Papers that do not discuss competitive advantage in SMEs
2. In English	2. In languages other than English
3. Only articles in scholarly journals of Business, Management, and Accounting	3. Dissertation, thesis, book section, material summary, presentation, employment report, trade literature, editorial notes, unclear literature
4. Peer-reviewed papers	4. Papers that were not peer-reviewed
	5. Duplicate research

**Classification Steps**

In a systematic mapping process, to analyze and classify articles that have been selected based on criteria, we compile a classification scheme that refers to

Banaeianjahromi & Smolander (2014) and Petersen et al. (2008). The article classification process has been shortened in Figure 2. Inclusion articles are classified into

three categories as shown in Table 2. The first category involves articles based on research focus with reference to Petersen et al. (2008), the second defines paper types based on the classifications presented by Wieringa et al. (2006) while the third is based on the research method proposed by Musianto (2002). Table 2 describes the three categories in our classification process.



**Figure 3. Process of Classification**

**Table 2. Classification Category**

Paper Type	Explanation
Validation Research	A never been applied modern inquiry method (Experiment/observation)
Evaluation Research	The investigation approach is applied and is discussed in the assessment method
Solution Proposal	A new/applicable solution or an established approach.
Philosophical Paper	The study provides a new outlook on the concept using a taxonomy or logical structure.
<b>Methods</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Qualitative Method	Qualitative Methods include Rapid Assessment Process, secondary data, ethnography, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, diaries, and language analysis.
Quantitative Method	Quantitative Method includes sample design as well as hypotheses and tests in statistical formulations.
Mix Method	Mix-method research combines qualitative and quantitative approach in its methodology during the data collection phase and all stages of the research process (Abbas, 2010)
<b>Research focus</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Environmental Factor	These are characteristics in the environment affecting the operations and growth of an organization

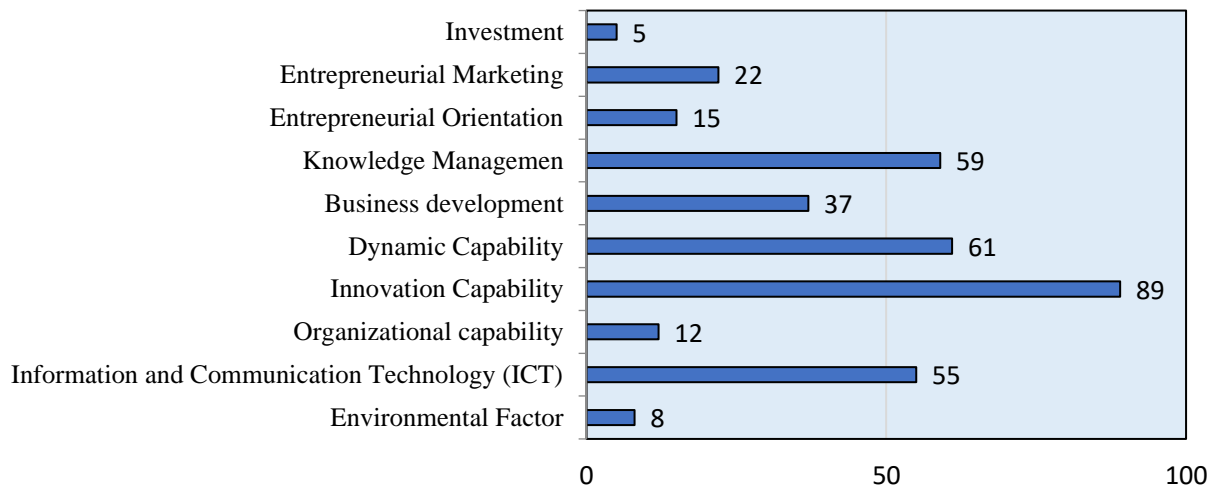
<b>Paper Type</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	A terminology covering all technological facilities for the collection and dissemination of information. It addresses two main fields of information technology and communication technology.
Organizational capability	The ability of corporate organizations to develop abilities such as skills, experience, and employee quality to achieve company goals.
Innovation Capability	The ability to create innovations, new ideas, and new concepts.
Dynamic Capability	This includes management, research and development, products, manufacturing, human resources, and organizations.
Business development	The development of the company through corporate parenting strategy, marketing strategy, and other things.
Knowledge Management	A collection of methods, processes and procedures used by people, teams, and organizations to handle 'knowledge'
Entrepreneurial Orientation	This includes dimensions such as autonomy, proactiveness, taking risk, and innovation.
Entrepreneurial Marketing	Marketing activities by new businesses and micro and small enterprises.
Investment	Capital support from Bank and Non-Bank financial institutions.

### **Result and discussion**

### **Focus and Research License (RQ1)**

This segment discusses the effects of the mapping-based research question and 210 articles retrieved on competitive advantage in SMEs were analyzed using the Microsoft Excel 365 application regarding the category, locus, method, type of paper, and development after which 15 types of article documents from Indonesia were found.

To answer RQ1, 210 articles were classified on research focus areas including environmental factors, information, and communication technology (ICT), organizational capability, innovation capability, dynamic capability, business development, knowledge management, entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial marketing, and investment.



**Figure 4. Research Focus (1)**

The percentage of the topics studied is presented in Figure 4 with the highest found to be innovation capability at 25% with 89 papers

followed by Dynamic Capability at 17% with 61, Knowledge management at 16% with 59, Information and Communication Technology

(ICT) at 15% with 55 while the least was found with environmental factor at 2%, investment at 1%.

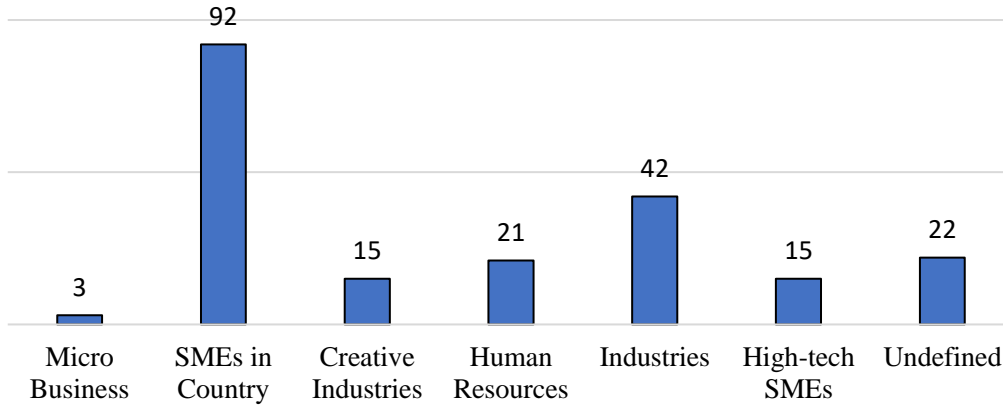


Figure 5. Research Focus (2)

Most of the studies on competitive advantage are focused on SMEs located in a region, both in a city and in a village, as observed from a total of 92 studies, 42 are focused on industries, and 15 on creative industries and High-tech SMEs such as technology companies as indicated in Figure 5. Meanwhile, some of the articles were discovered not to have a research locus in terms of the place being studied and this led to the conclusion that there are several studies which are philosophical.

**Type of Article and Research Method (RQ2)**

The articles were categorized according to Wieringa et al. (2006) classification which involves four categories including validation research, evaluation research, solution proposal, and philosophical papers. Therefore the 210 papers collected have been categorized to provide a response to RQ2.

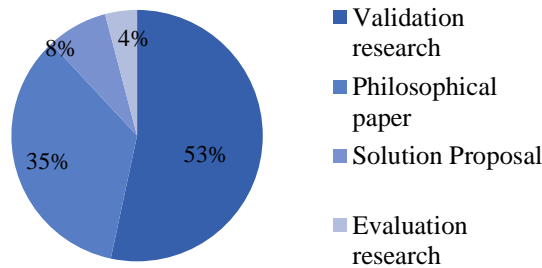
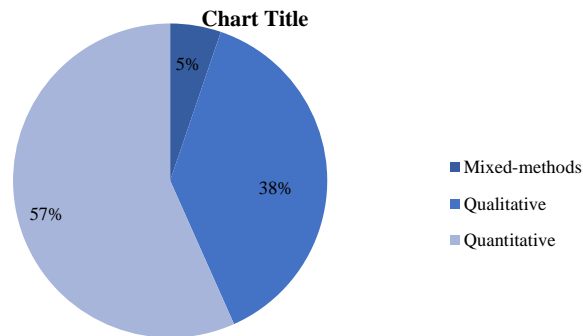


Figure 6. Paper Type

Figure 6 shows the most used paper type is validation research with a total of 143 studies represented by 53% followed by philosophical papers with 93 represented by 35%, solution proposal with 21 represented by 8% while the least is the evaluation research with 11 studies which is 4% of the total.

The research methods were classified according to Musianto (2002) and quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches were observed to have been used as indicated in Figure 7. The quantitative method was found to be the most common method applied as recorded with 57% representing 119 studies due to its ability to

test and evaluate followed by the qualitative method with 38% for 80 studies and mixed method with 5% representing 11 studies.

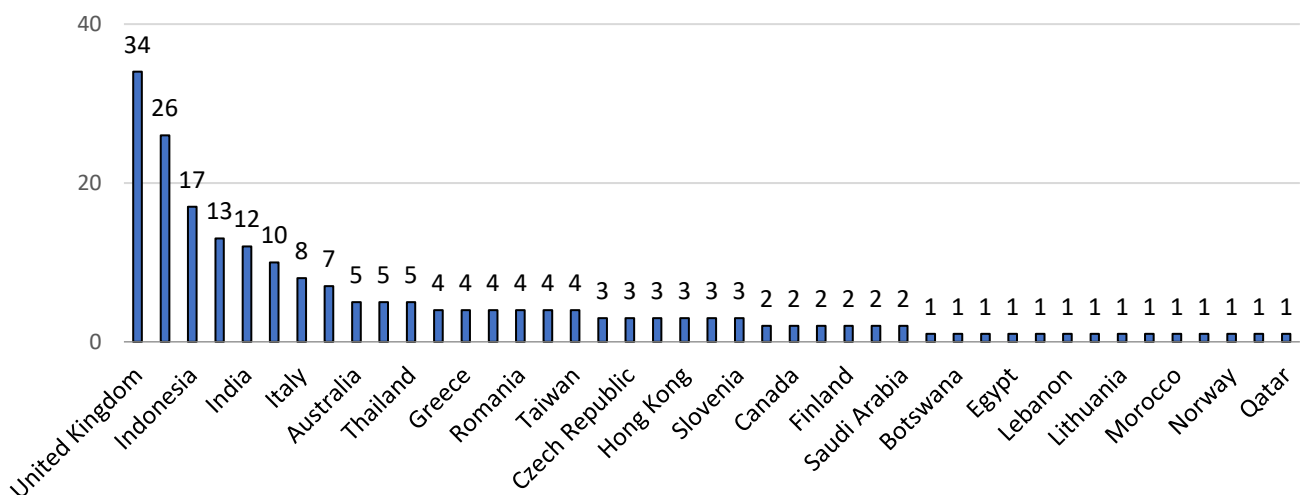


**Figure 7. Research Method**

***The trend of publication in each country over time (RQ3)***

The mapping showed the country with the most research on competitive advantage is the United Kingdom with a total of 35 publications

followed by Malaysia with 26 publications while an interesting part is the placement of Indonesia in the third position with 17 publications as shown in Figure 8.

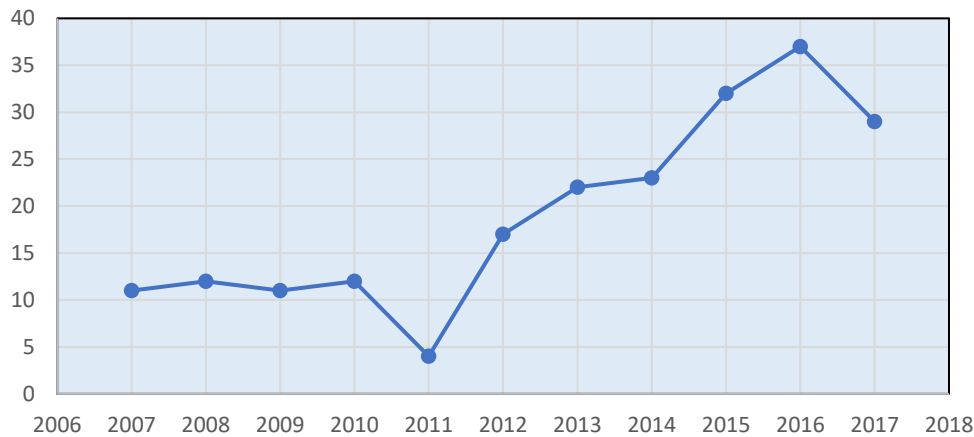


**Figure 8. The development of publications in each country**

Figure 9 shows the trend of articles published in electronic media databases for a period of ten years starting from 2007 and research on competitive advantage began to develop after the publication of research entitled Competitive Strategy by Porter in 1980.

Since then, the view of corporate competitive advantage has been discussed more deeply on the concept resource-based theory of the firm (Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984), which is one of the important factors in the field of strategic management.





**Figure 9. The development of publications over the years**

In the early 1980s, Michael Eugene Porter introduced the idea of a strategic group and structure-conduct-performance to create a firm's competitive advantage (Porter, 1979, 1980a, 1985). Porter's thinking contributed to strategic management until Wernerfelt and Barney introduced the Resources-Based Theory of the Firm (RBV). RBV is considered as a new perspective in strategic management (Wernerfelt, 1984). This perspective emphasizes the internal company as a source of competitive advantage in a company (Alvarez & Barney, 2007; Barney, 2001; Eshima & Anderson, 2017).

### **Conclusions and discussion**

The concept of strategic management has evolved because there have been external changes that have resulted in changes in business processes and consumer behavior in the future (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010; Chairpravit & Swierczek, 2011; Eshima & Anderson, 2017). Starting from Penrose pioneering the theory of competitive advantage in his scientific publication entitled *The Theory of the Growth of the Firm*, and until other researchers appeared such as Michael Porter (1979:1980;1985), Wernerfelt (1984), Stalk (1988), Ansoff (2005), Covin & Slevin (1989), Freeman (1984), Rumelt, Schendel, & Teece (1991), Teece et al. (1997) and other researchers who have conducted research on competitive advantage and continue to emerge new research today.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the focus of research shifted from external competitive advantage to a focus on the internal aspects of the

company (Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Stalk, 1988; Wernerfelt, 1984). This is different from the research conducted by Porter (1979, 1980, 1990) which analyzed competitive advantage based on external aspects and was not too focused on the internal aspects of the company. Based on the results of the SMS, the research focus that is most studied is innovation capabilities, dynamic capabilities, knowledge management, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), then environmental factors and investment. It was mostly researched from the early 2010s until it continued to increase in 2017 to 2020. Today, the development of competitive advantage research is shifting towards a more critical direction. Researchers have recently found that collaboration or business alliances are more important than conventional competitive advantages because they are not in line with current technological developments.

In this study, we conducted a literature study using the SMS method to see the research trends of competitive advantage in the last 10 years. Figure 4 shows the development of research topics that have been widely researched in competitive advantage research studies. Based on the data obtained, most of the research topics regarding the capabilities and resources of the company were carried out. This is in accordance with technological developments and consumer behavior who have switched to digital technology. Even artificial intelligence, robots, and automation of production machines have become a necessity for companies today. Future researchers will have the opportunity to examine

more deeply the relationship between technology, competencies, capabilities, and scarce resources as an antecedents and consequences of competitive advantage. But the challenge is the uncertainty of the business environment, especially since 2020 is a time of economic downturn for all countries, and will they rise in the tens and come back after the Covid-19 pandemic? or even new challenges such as changing marketing methods and changing business processes?

Scientific journals have become one of the most important processes for sustainable knowledge transfer. Scientific journals are a great place to discuss the latest findings. Due to the fast dissemination of information, scientific journals have more types such as validation research, evaluation research, philosophical and proposed solutions.

In fact, the number of scientific journals continues to increase, and most new scientists are emerging, the study and analysis of scientific journals are needed to find a state of art and novelty in future research.

This article provides a bibliographic overview of research published in Scopus over the past 10 years, starting from the data collected from Scopus and using bibliometric indicators. The results showed that the study of competitive advantage had gone through different stages.

The first phase of 2006 has captured a period in which the number of publications and their impact on the scientific community was low but by 2011 the amount of research interest in competitive advantage dropped dramatically. The second stage (2011-2018) is a period where the number of publications from journals increases rapidly. Since 2011, the results have changed greatly.

The application of competitive advantage is needed to increase the competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) because there

are millions of competitors who are a real threat and with the ability to close these businesses. This is also necessary because economic growth which is rooted in the resilience of the business world has encouraged several academics, practitioners, research institutions, and the government to develop studies related to competitive advantage through relationships with business actors, companies, and industry.

Several articles on competitive advantage available in the Scopus scientific database are mapped to provide an up-to-date literature review of concepts for ensuring SMEs survival in a competitive business environment. The process involves the application of systematic mapping to determine the concentration areas analyzed and the findings show:

1. The topics studied are broadly focused on Innovation Capability with 25%, Dynamic Capability with 17%, Knowledge Management with 16%, and Information and Communication Technology with 15% while small and medium enterprises with 44%.

2. The type of articles most often used is validation research with a total of 143 articles, namely 53% of the total number of articles, while the methodology most often used is the quantitative approach of 57%.

3. The country with the highest competitive advantage research in England with 35 publications followed by Malaysia with 26 publications, and Indonesia with 17 publications.

The SMS method is a literature review technique to identify suitable topics to study and select appropriate subject areas and the result is a map of future research that can provide a view for researchers to design future research by exploring the limitations of research. Then, new researchers will easily find antecedents and consequences of competitive advantage studies in the future.

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