
**DETERMINANTS OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN SMALL
NEIGHBORHOOD GROCERY STORES COMPARED TO
SUPERMARKET CHAINS: AN ANALYSIS OF MANAGEMENT
AND MARKETING STRATEGIES IN PUEBLA, MEXICO**

**DETERMINANTS OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN SMALL
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SUPERMARKET CHAINS: AN ANALYSIS OF MANAGERIAL
AND COMMERCIAL STRATEGIES IN PUEBLA, MEXICO**

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Abstract-- The rapid growth of mini-supermarket chains in Mexico has drastically displaced traditional corner stores, highlighting a knowledge gap regarding how these micro-enterprises can generate sustainable competitive advantages through strategic internal management in the face of large-scale competitors. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between administrative and commercial strategies and the generation of competitive advantage in convenience stores in the city of Puebla to identify factors of business resilience. To this end, a quantitative design with a correlational-causal scope was employed, using structured questionnaires administered to owners in the San Baltazar Campeche Auxiliary Board. The data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and the coefficient of determination (r^2) to measure the strength and direction of the variables. The findings reveal that administrative strategies have the strongest link to competitiveness ($r = 0.4029$; $r^2 = 0.2642$), with the management function ($r = 0.3640$) standing out as the factor with the greatest explanatory power. In the commercial sphere, branding ($r = 0.3482$) and differentiation ($r = 0.3455$) showed a moderate positive influence, while cost leadership proved to be the least determinative factor ($r = 0.0608$). It is concluded that the competitiveness of traditional retail does not lie in price competition, but rather in the professionalization of administrative management and the creation of value through a recognized brand identity. These results provide an empirical basis for the design of capacity-building programs for commercial microenterprises, suggesting that differentiation and strategic direction are the key pillars for their survival in globalized markets.

Keywords-- business administration, retail trade, marketing, small business, competitive advantage

Abstract-- The accelerated expansion of convenience store chains in Mexico has significantly displaced traditional neighborhood grocery retailers (misceláneas), revealing a critical knowledge gap regarding how these microenterprises can develop sustainable competitive advantages through internal strategic management when facing large-scale competitors. This study aimed to determine the relationship between administrative and commercial strategies and the generation of competitive advantage among neighborhood grocery stores in the city of Puebla, Mexico, in order to identify key drivers of business resilience. Differentiation ($r = 0.3455$) showed a moderate positive influence, whereas cost leadership emerged as the least determinant factor ($r = 0.0608$). It is concluded that the competitiveness of traditional retail does not primarily depend on price competition, but rather on the professionalization of administrative management and value creation through a clearly defined and recognizable brand identity.

These results provide an empirical basis for the design of strengthening programs targeted at commercial microenterprises, suggesting that strategic direction and differentiation constitute the central pillars for their survival in increasingly globalized markets. It is concluded that the competitiveness of traditional retail does not primarily depend on price competition, but rather on the professionalization of administrative management and value creation through a clearly defined and recognizable brand identity. These results provide an empirical basis for the design of strengthening programs targeted at commercial microenterprises, suggesting that strategic direction and differentiation constitute the

central pillars for their survival in increasingly globalized markets.

Keywords-- retail trade, business administration, commercialization, small enterprises, competitive advantage.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional retail in Mexico faces a structural transformation stemming from the rapid expansion of convenience store chains and mini-supermarkets, a phenomenon that has reduced the market share of general stores and intensified competition in urban areas such as Puebla. Despite their economic and social relevance as sources of self-employment and community cohesion, a theoretical and empirical gap persists regarding the internal factors that enable these microenterprises to maintain competitive advantages over larger competitors.

The literature on competitiveness and competitive advantage has emphasized the importance of strategic management, differentiation, and value creation as sources of superior performance; however, these approaches have been applied predominantly to medium and large firms, leaving limited evidence in the context of traditional retail. In particular, it is necessary to analyze how administrative strategies based on the process of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling, and commercial strategies oriented toward positioning, differentiation, and brand creation, affect the competitiveness of convenience stores. Within this framework, the present study aims to determine the relationship between administrative and commercial strategies and the generation of competitive advantage in general stores in the city of

Puebla, Mexico, in order to identify the strategic factors that explain their business resilience. The contribution of this article lies in providing empirical evidence from the microenterprise level, integrating management and strategic marketing approaches into the analysis of traditional retail competitiveness, and offering insights for the design of strengthening policies and programs aimed at this sector.

Rationale

This research is justified by the pressing need to address the structural transformation facing traditional retail in Mexico, where the rapid expansion of convenience store chains and mini-supermarkets has drastically displaced mom-and-pop stores, jeopardizing their continued presence in the market. Although these microenterprises are fundamental units of self-employment and community cohesion, there is a significant theoretical and empirical gap, as the literature on competitive advantage has focused predominantly on medium and large enterprises, overlooking the particularities of small-scale businesses.

From a theoretical perspective, this study is significant because it integrates management and strategic marketing approaches into the analysis of traditional commerce's competitiveness, demonstrating how internal management processes and value creation through branding and differentiation influence business resilience.

In practical and social terms, this research provides crucial empirical evidence at the microenterprise level. The findings offer valuable insights for the design of capacity-building programs and public policies targeting this sector, suggesting that the professionalization of administrative management and differentiation strategies are key to the survival of small neighborhood stores in the face of globalized markets. Therefore, the study not only contributes to the academic body of knowledge but also serves as a tool to support the development and sustainability of family-run microbusinesses in competitive urban environments.

Literature on

Commerce

Commerce is a fundamental economic activity that facilitates the exchange of goods and services, promoting efficiency and competitiveness in markets (Martínez-Prats, (2023); La Fuente, (2012). From a legal perspective, it is regulated by commercial law, which governs acts of intermediation (Barrera, (2000)).

Historically, commerce has evolved from ancient practices such as maritime routes and merchant commissions (Scherer, (1878); Vázquez, (1989)) to more complex forms such as the commenda (Rehme, (1941); De Sola, (1945)). In Mexico, its origins date back to pre-Hispanic civilizations, with the role of the *pochtecas* and the *tianguis* being particularly noteworthy (León-Portilla, 1962; Rovira, 2014; Velázquez, 2021).

Currently, the retail sector comprises various forms such as general stores, grocery stores, and mini-supermarkets, which fulfill important economic and social functions (Fernández, (2022); Mérida, (2023); INEGI, (2019)). These establishments not only meet consumer needs but also strengthen social cohesion (Gaitán, (2010); Rodríguez et al., (2019)).

Management Strategies

Management is a process aimed at optimizing resources and achieving organizational objectives through functions such as planning, organizing, directing, and controlling (Robbins et al., 2000; Stoner et al., 1996). Koontz (1999) expands this approach by including staff integration, while Reyes Ponce (1999) incorporates stages such as foresight and integration.

Administrative strategies are conceived as decisions and actions that guide the organization toward long-term objectives, being fundamental to competitiveness. Their proper implementation allows for improved efficiency, resource coordination, and adaptation to changing environments (Cortés-Gallardo, (2021); Méndez et al., (2018)).

Likewise, strategic management fosters innovation, productivity, and organizational sustainability (Arteaga-Coello, 2016; Recalde et al., 2024). In the case of SMEs, proactive and strategically oriented management is key to facing competition and responding to market demands (Pineda, 2013; Martínez et al., 2020).

Business Strategies

Business strategies are planned actions aimed at achieving market objectives, taking into account resources, capabilities, and environmental conditions (Arechavaleta, 2015). They enable the positioning of products, the generation of demand, and the increase of market share (Gamboa et al., 2017; Canedo, 2019).

Their importance lies in value creation, differentiation, and adaptation to dynamic markets. Furthermore, they contribute to improving profitability, strengthening the brand, and increasing customer loyalty (Burgess, 2021; Velásquez, 2023).

These strategies require proper alignment with organizational objectives and the competitive environment, being fundamental to business sustainability (Jerez et al., 2024). Together, they enable companies to better understand the consumer and build sustainable competitive advantages. **Competitiveness**

Competitiveness is a multidimensional concept that involves companies' ability to offer superior goods and services compared to their competitors (Tyson, 1992; Cabana et al., 2023). It relates both to market rivalry and to organizations' internal capabilities (Real Academia Española, 2023).

Various authors emphasize that competitiveness is based on competitive advantage, derived from quality, efficiency, and organizational strategies (Romo et al., 2005; Bernal et al., 2019). This advantage depends on the ability to generate value, innovate, and adapt to the environment (Ramírez et al., 2023; Trillo et al., 2022).

From Porter's perspective (2008), competitiveness is based on the value generated for the customer and the efficient use of resources, relying on tools such as generic strategies, the value chain, and the five forces. Likewise, innovation and technology are key factors for sustaining competitive advantages over time (Fuentes et al., 2003; Ordoñez et al., 2024).

In summary, business competitiveness depends on the integration of internal capabilities, organizational strategies, and adaptation to the environment, enabling companies to position themselves and remain competitive in dynamic markets.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The research was conducted using a mixed-methods (quantitative–qualitative) approach with a descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional design, aimed at analyzing the relationship between administrative and commercial strategies and the competitiveness of retail microenterprises. The unit of analysis consisted of small shops or family-run microbusinesses located in the San Baltazar Campeche Auxiliary Council, Puebla.

The study population consisted of 575 establishments, from which a sample of 231 owners was obtained, determined with a 95% confidence level. Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire with a Likert-type scale, comprising 28 items distributed across two sections: sociodemographic data and variables related to commercial and administrative strategies and competitiveness.

Data analysis was performed using descriptive and correlational statistics, employing SPSS and Excel. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a value of 0.814, indicating adequate internal consistency.

To construct the measurement instrument, variables were operationalized by breaking them down into dimensions and measurable indicators. This process was based on various theoretical models, including: the business strategy development model, Porter's three generic strategies, the administrative process management model, and the National Model for the Competitiveness of Micro and Small Enterprises. Based on these approaches, a hybrid model was developed that integrates administrative and business strategies with the competitiveness variable.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The results section first presents a descriptive analysis of the sample's sociodemographic variables, with the aim of characterizing the profile of the participants included in the study. To this end, percentages were calculated to describe relevant aspects such as age, gender, marital status, educational level, type of establishment, and other characteristics related to the respondents' business activities. This descriptive analysis provides an appropriate context for interpreting the subsequent results and allows for an understanding of the particularities of the analyzed population.

Secondarily, an inferential analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the variables considered in the research model. In this regard, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used, a statistical technique widely employed to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two quantitative variables. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (r^2) and a simple linear regression model were calculated to estimate the explanatory power of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

First Level: Descriptive Analysis of Sociodemographic Results

The sociodemographic results allow us to identify the main characteristics of the owners of the convenience stores and small shops surveyed. Regarding age, it is observed that 31.60% of the participants are in the 46–55 age range, while 31.17% are over 55 years old, indicating that more than 60% of the owners belong to older age groups, which suggests extensive experience in commercial activity. A smaller proportion belongs to the

age groups 36 to 45 (17.75%), 25 to 35 (12.55%), and under 25 (6.93%), indicating a limited participation of young people in the management of this type of establishment.

Regarding gender, a relatively balanced distribution is observed among owners, with 52.81% being men and 47.19% women. This result reflects that the management of small convenience stores and general stores involves significant participation from both genders within the retail sector.

Regarding marital status, the majority of respondents are married (73.16%), while 26.84% are single, suggesting that these businesses are often part of the family economy and represent an economic activity that contributes to household support.

Regarding working hours, it was found that 47.19% of owners work more than 10 hours a day, while another 47.19% devote between 6 and 10 hours to the business, and only 5.63% work between 1 and 5 hours. These results indicate that operating this type of business requires long workdays, which demonstrates the high level of dedication on the part of the owners.

With regard to educational attainment, 47.19% of business owners have completed high school, followed by 37.23% who have completed middle school, 8.66% who hold a bachelor's degree, and 6.93% who have completed elementary school. This indicates that the majority have a moderate level of education, which may influence how they manage their businesses and implement commercial and administrative strategies.

Regarding the number of years the business has been in operation, 42.86% of the stores have been in business for between 10 and 15 years, 27.71% for more than 20 years, 21.21% for between 5 and 10 years, and 8.23% for between 1 and 5 years. These data show that a significant portion of these establishments has a well-established track record in their community, which can foster customer retention and loyalty.

Regarding store type, 49.78% are general stores, 35.50% are small corner stores, and 14.72% are mini-supermarkets, confirming that retail trade in the analyzed area is dominated primarily by small traditional establishments.

Regarding perceptions of store revenue, 91.77% of respondents indicated that their business's revenue does not allow them to live decently, while only 8.23% believe it does, reflecting the economic constraints faced by many microbusinesses in the retail sector.

Finally, regarding whether the store represents the household's main source of income, 62.34% of owners indicated that their business is dependent on family income, while 37.66% stated that it is independent. This result suggests that, for a large portion of respondents, the store constitutes a fundamental economic activity for family sustenance and household stability.

Second Level: Statistical Analysis: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, Coefficient of Determination, and Linear Regression

First, the Pearson correlation coefficient obtained was $r = 0.484$, indicating the existence of a moderate positive correlation between business and administrative strategies and competitiveness. This means that, in general, as the level of implementation of these strategies within the organization increases, competitiveness also tends to increase. The relationship is direct, so both variables move in the same direction.

Second, the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.235$) shows that approximately 23.5% of the variation in competitiveness can be explained by the commercial and administrative strategies considered in the model. This implies that, although these strategies influence competitiveness, there are other additional factors such as market conditions, organizational resources, or internal capabilities that can also affect the organization's competitive level.

Furthermore, the linear regression analysis allowed us to estimate the model equation: $Y = 1.636 + 0.561X$

Where Y represents competitiveness and X represents the level of implementation of commercial and administrative strategies. The slope coefficient (0.561) indicates that for every unit increase in the application of strategies, competitiveness increases by an average of 0.561 units. This confirms the positive relationship between the variables and suggests that strengthening commercial and administrative strategies can contribute to improving the organization's competitive level.

Overall, the results show that there is a positive statistical relationship between the business strategies analyzed and competitiveness, although with moderate explanatory power, suggesting the advisability of considering other complementary variables to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing organizational competitiveness. See Table 1.

Table 1. *Interpretation of results.*

Variables analyzed	Statistical Statistical	Interpretation
Administrative business strategies and Competitiveness	Coefficient of Pearson (r = 0.484)	There is a moderate positive correlation between business and administrative strategies and competitiveness. This indicates that as the implementation of these strategies increases, competitiveness also tends to increase.
Commercial and administrative strategies and Competitiveness	Coefficient of determination (R ² = 0.235)	Approximately 23.5% of the variation in competitiveness can be explained by the business and administrative strategies included in the model. The remaining variation may be due to other organizational or environmental factors.
Commercial and administrative strategies and Competitiveness	Linear regression: Y = 1.636 + 0.561X	The model indicates that for every unit increase in the application of business and administrative strategies, competitiveness increases by an average of 0.561 units, confirming a positive relationship between the two variables.

Source: Author's own work.

The results show that there is a positive relationship between commercial and administrative strategies and organizational competitiveness. The correlation coefficient indicates a moderate association between the variables, while the coefficient of determination suggests that these strategies explain a significant, though not total, portion of the level of competitiveness. Likewise, the linear regression model confirms that greater development and implementation of commercial and administrative strategies is associated with an increase in competitiveness, which highlights the importance of these practices for strengthening the competitive performance of organizations.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained confirm the existence of a positive relationship between commercial and administrative strategies and the competitive advantage of general stores in the municipality of Puebla, which is consistent with the theoretical foundations proposed in the research.

First, it was found that commercial strategies exhibit a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.3767$), indicating that they significantly influence competitive advantage. This finding aligns with the findings of Medeiros et al. (2019), who note that business competitiveness depends on organizations' ability to adapt their commercial strategies to the competitive environment. In this regard, the empirical results confirm that, in the context of general stores, the implementation of effective business strategies contributes to market positioning.

Likewise, the role of branding ($r = 0.3482$) as one of the variables with the greatest impact supports the argument put forward by Fuentes et al. (2016), who maintain that the generation of added value is a key element for competitiveness. Brand identity and consumer perception serve as differentiation mechanisms that strengthen the position of general stores relative to mini-supermarkets, demonstrating that not only price but also perceived value is a determining factor in competition.

Regarding differentiation ($r = 0.3455$), the results directly confirm the propositions of Michael Porter (1980), who states that companies can achieve a competitive advantage through differentiated strategies that allow them to offer unique attributes in the market. In this study, differentiation emerges as one of the most relevant variables, indicating that convenience stores can compete effectively not necessarily on cost, but through distinctive attributes in their offerings.

In contrast, cost leadership showed a very low correlation ($r = 0.0608$), which partially contrasts with Porter's theoretical model, where this strategy is considered one of the main sources of competitive advantage. However, this result suggests that, in the specific context of general stores in Puebla, competing on price is not an effective strategy against mini-supermarkets, likely due to the economies of scale that these large chains possess.

With regard to administrative strategies, the results show the strongest relationship with competitive advantage ($r = 0.4029$), which is consistent with the findings of Robbins et al. (2000) and Stoner et al. (1996), who emphasize that the proper application of the administrative process (planning, organizing, directing, and controlling) is essential for achieving organizational objectives. This implies that efficient management of internal resources is a determining factor in improving competitiveness.

In particular, leadership ($r = 0.3640$) stands out as one of the most influential variables, which is consistent with Koontz (1999), who notes that leadership involves guiding, motivating, and supervising staff to ensure the fulfillment of organizational objectives. The results show that

leadership and decision-making directly impact the competitive performance of convenience stores.

On the other hand, planning ($r = 0.2991$) shows a positive relationship, which aligns with Reyes Ponce (1999), who states that planning allows for the definition of objectives and strategies that guide the organization's direction. Although its correlation is lower compared to management, it remains a key element in building competitive advantage.

In contrast, the variables of organization and control show weak correlations, suggesting that, although they are part of the administrative process, their individual impact is smaller. However, this does not contradict the theory, since, as Robbins et al. (2000) point out, these functions become more relevant when they are integrated systemically within the administrative process.

Finally, the overall results also align with the definition of competitiveness proposed by Mathews (2009), who states that competitiveness is an organization's ability to maintain advantages that allow it to improve its position in the environment. In this regard, the study demonstrates that this ability depends on both internal factors (administrative strategies) and external factors (commercial strategies), thereby validating the comprehensive theoretical approach proposed in the research.

The results obtained in this research allow us to clearly conclude that the general objective has been met and the proposed hypothesis has been confirmed, as the existence of a positive and direct relationship between administrative and commercial strategies and the competitive advantage of general stores in the city of Puebla has been demonstrated.

Indeed, the statistical analysis showed that both independent variables significantly influence the dependent variable, with administrative strategies standing out in particular, as they exhibited the highest correlation ($r = 0.4029$) and explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.2642$). This result confirms that efficient management based on planning, directing, organizing, and controlling constitutes a fundamental element for strengthening competitiveness, in accordance with the findings of Robbins et al. (2000), Stoner et al. (1996), and Koontz (1999), who establish that the proper development of the administrative process enables the achievement of organizational objectives.

Likewise, commercial strategies also showed a significant influence ($r = 0.3767$), particularly on variables such as branding and differentiation, confirming that the creation of perceived value and the generation of distinctive attributes are key factors for competing in the market. This finding aligns with the proposal by Michael Porter (1980), who notes that competitive advantage

is based on companies' ability to differentiate themselves or generate superior value compared to their competitors.

On the other hand, although all specific hypotheses were accepted, it was found that not all variables carry the same explanatory weight, with cost leadership having a minimal influence. This suggests that, in the context of general stores, competing solely on price is not an effective strategy, contrary to what classical theory partially posits.

In summary, the empirical findings confirm that the competitiveness of general stores does not depend on a single factor, but rather on the integration of sound management strategies and business strategies aimed at differentiation and value creation, thereby validating the theoretical approach of the research and providing relevant evidence for the retail sector.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study confirm that administrative and commercial strategies have a positive and significant influence on the generation of competitive advantage in general stores in the municipality of Puebla, thereby fulfilling the general objective and confirming the research hypothesis. In comparative terms, administrative strategies showed the greatest explanatory power for competitive advantage ($r^2 = 0.2642$), indicating that internal management is the primary determinant of competitive performance. This result is consistent with the findings of Robbins et al. (2000), Stoner et al. (1996), and Koontz (1999), who argue that the proper execution of administrative processes—particularly management and planning—allows for the optimization of resources and the alignment of organizational actions with strategic objectives.

For their part, commercial strategies also make a significant contribution ($r^2 = 0.1419$), with variables such as branding and differentiation standing out as having a greater impact on competitiveness. These results support Michael Porter's (1980) approach, who argues that competitive advantage is built on differentiation and the creation of perceived value for the customer, beyond competition based exclusively on price.

In contrast, cost leadership showed a marginal influence, suggesting a contextual limitation of Porter's classic model in the convenience store sector, where the economies of scale of mini-supermarkets reduce the viability of competing through low prices. This finding provides empirical evidence that qualifies the applicability of generic strategies in microenterprises in the retail sector.

Additionally, although all the variables analyzed show positive relationships, their individual explanatory power is limited, indicating that competitive advantage does not depend on isolated factors but rather on the strategic articulation of multiple administrative and commercial dimensions, in line with the proposals of Mathews (2009) and Medeiros et al. (2019), who highlight the systemic nature of organizational competitiveness.

In summary, the study provides evidence that the competitiveness of general stores in local contexts is based primarily on efficient administrative management and commercial strategies oriented toward differentiation and value creation, rather than on cost reduction, which represents a significant contribution to the literature on MSMEs in emerging economies.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study provides relevant empirical evidence on the determinants of competitive advantage in general stores; however, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results.

First, the research was conducted using a cross-sectional design, which prevents the establishment of definitive causal relationships between the analyzed variables. While significant associations were identified between administrative and commercial strategies and competitiveness, these relationships are limited to a specific point in time, and thus do not allow for the observation of the evolution of strategic effects over the long term.

Second, the study is confined to a specific geographic area, the San Baltazar Campeche Auxiliary Board in Puebla, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other regional or national contexts with different commercial dynamics. The socioeconomic, cultural, and competitive characteristics specific to the analyzed environment may influence how strategies impact competitiveness.

Furthermore, although the model explains a significant proportion of the variability in competitiveness ($r^2 = 0.235$), a considerable percentage remains unexplained, suggesting the presence of other factors not included in the study, such as innovation, the use of digital technologies, financial management, social capital, or conditions of the competitive environment.

Another limitation lies in the use of a perception-based instrument, which may introduce subjective biases into participants' responses, particularly in variables related to the self-assessment of administrative and commercial practices.

Based on these limitations, several avenues for future research are proposed. First, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to analyze the evolution of competitiveness over time and assess the sustained impact of implemented strategies. Second, it is pertinent to expand the analysis to other geographic contexts and business sectors to compare results and strengthen the external validity of the findings.

Similarly, future research could incorporate new explanatory variables, such as digitalization, e-commerce, organizational innovation, and the use of information technologies, given their growing relevance to business competitiveness. It is also suggested to explore mixed-methodological approaches with greater qualitative depth, which would allow for an understanding of the internal dynamics of microenterprises and strategic decision-making processes.

Finally, it is considered pertinent to analyze the impact of public policies and support programs targeting commercial microenterprises, with the aim of evaluating their effectiveness in strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of traditional retail trade.

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