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Building Competitive Advantage Through Strategic Management Practices: A Qualitative Study of Service Firms

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Abstract :

Building competitive advantage has become a critical objective for service firms operating in highly competitive and dynamic markets. Strategic management practices play a significant role in enabling organizations to align internal capabilities with external opportunities in order to sustain long-term performance. This study aims to explore how competitive advantage is developed through strategic management practices within a service firm, focusing on PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang, an outsourcing company based in Surabaya, Indonesia. The research employed a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of managerial strategies and organizational practices implemented by the company. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with company managers and operational staff, supported by field observations and document analysis. The collected data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that competitive advantage in the company is primarily built through the integration of human resource quality, responsive service delivery, and strong client relationship management. The organization emphasizes workforce discipline, service reliability, and continuous performance monitoring to maintain client trust and service quality. The study contributes to the strategic management literature by highlighting the importance of intangible organizational capabilities—such as service responsiveness and human capital management—in shaping competitive advantage in labor-intensive service industries. Practically, the findings provide insights for managers in outsourcing and other service sectors to strengthen strategic management practices that support sustainable organizational competitiveness.

Keywords : *Competitive Advantage, Strategic Management Practices, Service Firms, Outsourcing Industry, Qualitative Case Study*

Abstrak :

Membangun keunggulan kompetitif telah menjadi tujuan penting bagi perusahaan jasa yang beroperasi di pasar yang sangat kompetitif dan dinamis. Praktik manajemen strategis memainkan peran penting dalam memungkinkan organisasi untuk menyelaraskan kemampuan internal dengan peluang eksternal guna mempertahankan kinerja jangka panjang. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana keunggulan kompetitif dikembangkan melalui praktik manajemen

strategis dalam sebuah perusahaan jasa, dengan fokus pada PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang, sebuah perusahaan outsourcing yang berbasis di Surabaya, Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif untuk mendapatkan pemahaman mendalam tentang strategi manajerial dan praktik organisasi yang diterapkan oleh perusahaan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan manajer perusahaan dan staf operasional, didukung oleh observasi lapangan dan analisis dokumen. Data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis menggunakan model analisis kualitatif interaktif yang terdiri dari kondensasi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa keunggulan kompetitif di perusahaan terutama dibangun melalui integrasi kualitas sumber daya manusia, penyampaian layanan yang responsif, dan manajemen hubungan klien yang kuat. Organisasi menekankan disiplin tenaga kerja, keandalan layanan, dan pemantauan kinerja berkelanjutan untuk menjaga kepercayaan klien dan kualitas layanan. Studi ini berkontribusi pada literatur manajemen strategis dengan menyoroti pentingnya kemampuan organisasi yang tidak berwujud—seperti daya tanggap layanan dan manajemen modal manusia—dalam membentuk keunggulan kompetitif di industri jasa padat karya. Secara praktis, temuan ini memberikan wawasan bagi para manajer di sektor outsourcing dan sektor jasa lainnya untuk memperkuat praktik manajemen strategis yang mendukung daya saing organisasi yang berkelanjutan.
Kata Kunci: *Keunggulan Kompetitif, Praktik Manajemen Strategis, Perusahaan Jasa, Industri Alih Daya, Studi Kasus Kualitatif*

INTRODUCTION

Strategic management has become an essential approach for organizations seeking to build sustainable competitive advantage in increasingly dynamic and competitive markets (Fan, et al, 2025). In modern economies, service firms play a significant role in supporting business operations across multiple industries, particularly through outsourcing services that provide flexibility, efficiency, and specialized expertise (Gede, & Huluka,. 2023). The relevance of strategic management in service organizations lies in its ability to guide firms in aligning internal capabilities with external opportunities (Holm, et al., 2025). When companies successfully implement strategic management practices, they are better positioned to adapt to environmental changes, improve service quality, and strengthen long-term competitiveness (Uygun, et al., 2022). Empirical evidence indicates that firms with clear strategic orientation tend to achieve higher performance levels and maintain stronger market positions compared to those operating without structured strategic planning (Rigtering, et al., 2017). Therefore, studying how service firms develop competitive advantage through strategic management practices is important not only for improving organizational performance but also for strengthening the sustainability and resilience of service industries in modern economies (Al-Ansaari, et al., 2015).

Despite the recognized importance of strategic management, many service firms still struggle to implement effective strategies that can generate sustainable competitive advantage (Ali, 2018). Service industries often face intense competition, rapidly changing customer expectations, and the need to continuously improve service quality while maintaining operational efficiency (Zhou, & Park,. 2020). In the outsourcing sector, companies must compete not only in terms of cost but also in reliability, service responsiveness, and workforce quality (Schweiger, et al., 2019). These challenges are particularly evident in developing economies where organizational resources, managerial expertise, and technological capabilities may be limited (McKenny, et al., 2018). As a result, some service firms rely heavily on short-term operational decisions rather than long-term strategic planning (Al-Surmi, et al., 2020). This situation can hinder the firm's ability to differentiate itself in the market and maintain consistent service performance (Baumgartner, & Rauter,. 2017). Consequently, understanding how strategic management practices are implemented in service firms becomes essential to identify mechanisms that enable organizations to achieve competitive advantage (Laukkanen, et al., 2016).

In the Indonesian outsourcing industry, similar challenges are experienced by many service providers, including PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang, an outsourcing company based in Surabaya. As a service firm that provides workforce management and outsourcing solutions, the company operates in a highly competitive environment where service quality, reliability, and client trust are critical factors for business sustainability (Masa'deh, et al,. 2018). Field observations indicate that outsourcing companies must constantly adapt their strategies to meet client expectations, manage workforce performance, and respond to changes in labor regulations and market demands (Yuan, et al., 2020). In practice, strategic decisions within such organizations involve balancing operational efficiency with service excellence while maintaining long-term client relationships (Saebi, et al., 2017). These conditions create a complex managerial environment where strategic management practices play a central role in shaping organizational competitiveness (Habib, et al., 2021). Therefore, examining how PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang develops and implements strategic management practices provides an important opportunity to understand how service firms build competitive advantage in real business contexts (Husted, et al., 2015).

Previous studies on strategic management and competitive advantage have emphasized the importance of organizational capabilities, leadership, and strategic alignment in enhancing firm performance (Tajeddini, & Ratten,. 2020). Research in strategic management literature suggests that competitive advantage is often achieved through effective resource utilization, innovation capability, and the development of unique organizational competencies (Gemünden, et al., 2018). In service industries, scholars have highlighted the importance of service quality, human resource management, and customer relationship strategies in building sustainable competitive positions (Ardito, & Dangelico,. 2018). While these studies provide valuable insights into strategic management practices, many of them primarily focus on large corporations or manufacturing industries (Chang, et al., 2018). Consequently, the specific dynamics of strategic management in service-based organizations, particularly outsourcing firms, remain relatively underexplored in the literature (Parnell, et al., 2015).

Furthermore, existing research often employs quantitative approaches that focus on measuring relationships between strategic variables and organizational performance (Cabrilo, & Dahms,. 2018). While such approaches provide useful statistical insights, they may overlook the deeper processes through which strategies are formulated, interpreted, and implemented within organizations (Rosenberg, & Ferlie,. 2016). In service firms, strategic decisions are often influenced by organizational culture, leadership perspectives, client relationships, and operational constraints (Aboelmaged, & Hashem,. 2019). These contextual factors require qualitative investigation to capture the complexity of managerial practices in real organizational settings (Sahoo, & Yadav,. 2017). The limited number of qualitative studies examining strategic management practices in outsourcing companies highlights a research gap that warrants further exploration, particularly in emerging markets where service industries are rapidly expanding (Celestin,. 2018).

This study offers a novel contribution by examining how competitive advantage is developed through strategic management practices within a service firm operating in the outsourcing industry (Charles, & Ochieng,. 2023). By focusing on PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang as a case study, this research provides a contextual and in-depth understanding of how strategic management practices are implemented in everyday organizational activities (Bu, et al., 2020). The qualitative case study approach allows the researcher to explore managerial perspectives, organizational processes, and strategic actions that shape the firm's competitive positioning (Dangelico, et al., 2017). This approach contributes to the strategic management literature by emphasizing the role of contextual and experiential factors in shaping organizational strategies within service industries (Pertheban, et al., 2023).

Based on the issues described above, this study aims to investigate how strategic management practices contribute to building competitive advantage in service firms, particularly within the outsourcing industry (Jansson, et al., 2017). The central research problem addressed in this study is how PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang develops and implements strategic management practices to maintain competitiveness in a highly dynamic service market (Acquaah, & Agyapong,. 2015). It is argued that competitive advantage in service firms emerges from the effective integration of strategic planning, human resource management, service quality improvement, and client relationship management (Terho, et al,. 2015). By examining these processes, this study contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the strategic management literature by providing insights into strategic practices within outsourcing firms. Practically, the findings are expected to provide guidance for managers and policymakers in strengthening strategic capabilities within service organizations.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore how strategic management practices contribute to building competitive advantage in service firms (Roxas, et al., 2017). The qualitative case study method was selected because it allows researchers to obtain a deep and contextual understanding of managerial processes, strategic decisions, and organizational practices that occur in real-life settings (Gupta, & Gupta., 2015).

Strategic management practices often involve complex interactions among leadership, organizational culture, human resource management, and service delivery processes, which cannot be fully captured through quantitative measurement alone (Leonidou, et al., 2017). Therefore, the qualitative case study approach enables the researcher to explore the perspectives and experiences of organizational actors involved in implementing strategic management within the company.

The research was conducted at PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang, an outsourcing company located in Surabaya, Indonesia. The company was chosen as the research site because it operates in the service outsourcing sector, which is characterized by intense competition, dynamic labor management, and the need to maintain high levels of service quality. As a company that provides workforce outsourcing services to various client organizations, PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang must continuously develop strategic practices to maintain competitiveness and client trust. This organizational context provides a relevant setting for examining how strategic management practices are implemented to build competitive advantage in the service industry.

Data collection in this study was conducted through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation analysis. In-depth interviews were carried out with key informants such as company managers, supervisors, and operational staff who are directly involved in strategic decision-making and service management processes. These interviews aimed to obtain detailed insights regarding organizational strategies, managerial practices, and competitive positioning. Observations were conducted to understand the operational environment and daily organizational activities related to service delivery and workforce management. In addition, documentation such as company reports, organizational profiles, and internal policies was analyzed to support and enrich the research findings.

Table 1: Qualitative Data Analysis Process

Analysis Stage	Description of Process	Purpose
Data Condensation	Selecting, focusing, and categorizing important information from interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation	To identify relevant themes related to strategic management practices and competitive advantage
Data Display	Organizing data into thematic categories, matrices, and descriptive narratives	To facilitate interpretation and identify relationships between strategic practices and organizational performance

Analysis Stage	Description of Process	Purpose
Conclusion Drawing	Interpreting patterns, meanings, and relationships emerging from the data	To generate research findings regarding strategic management practices
Data Verification	Confirming conclusions through triangulation and cross-checking data sources	To ensure the credibility and validity of research results

The data analysis process followed the interactive qualitative analysis model, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data condensation refers to selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from interviews and observations into meaningful categories. Data display involves organizing the data into visual or narrative forms to facilitate interpretation and pattern identification. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification are conducted to interpret the data and confirm emerging findings. To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, several validation techniques were applied, including source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking, which help confirm the accuracy and credibility of the collected data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
FINDINGS
Building Competitive Advantage Through Strategic Management Practices at PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang

Operationally, building competitive advantage through strategic management practices at PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang is defined as a series of managerial practices designed to maintain the company's competitive edge amidst increasingly fierce competition in the outsourcing services business. These practices include service strategy planning, human resource management, client relationship maintenance, monitoring the quality of outsourced staff, and regular performance evaluations. In the context of a service company, competitive advantage is not only measured by competitive service prices, but also by the company's ability to provide reliable, responsive services that meet client needs. Therefore, PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang's competitive advantage is built through alignment between management strategy and the demands of the outsourcing services market, particularly in terms of workforce quality, response time, and consistent service delivery to clients.

Interviews with company leaders revealed that PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang prioritizes service quality and client trust as the core of its competitive strategy. Informants explained that the company strives not only to provide outsourced staff according to client needs but also to ensure that the assigned staff possess the discipline, work ethic, and skills that meet the standards of the companies using its services. According to informants, the company routinely evaluates market needs and client demands to ensure its service strategy remains relevant. Researchers interpret this data as indicating that the company's strategic management practices are oriented toward creating service value. Competitive advantage is built through the company's ability to align human resource quality with client expectations, ensuring that business relationships are not merely transactional but based on long-term trust.

Subsequent interviews with operational managers revealed that the company's competitive advantage is also shaped by the organization's responsiveness in addressing client needs and complaints. The informant stated that any client feedback regarding the performance of outsourced staff is promptly addressed through internal coordination, employee coaching, and work system adjustments when necessary. Furthermore, the company maintains intensive communication with clients to anticipate potential problems early. The researcher interpreted these findings as demonstrating adaptive and relational strategic management practices. PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang's competitive advantage stems not solely from internal resources but also from the company's capacity to respond quickly and accurately to changing client needs. This demonstrates that a responsive service strategy is crucial for maintaining client loyalty in the outsourcing services sector.

Field observations indicate that PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang maintains a structured work pattern that supports the company's competitive advantage. This is evident in the clear division of tasks between recruitment, operations, and field supervision, as well as the existence of a regular reporting mechanism regarding the performance of outsourced staff. The researcher also observed that the company's work environment emphasizes discipline, speed of coordination, and direct problem-solving. On the other hand, interactions between the company and clients appear to be maintained through active and professional communication. Researchers interpret these observations as evidence that strategic management practices at PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang extend beyond the planning stage and are implemented within the organization's routines. Thus, the company's competitive advantage is built through the synergy between a clear work structure, service quality, and maintained client relationships.

Based on the overall interview and observation data, it can be reaffirmed that PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang's competitive advantage is built through the implementation of strategic management practices that focus on service quality, human resource management, and strengthening client relationships. The company not only relies on providing outsourced labor as a service product but also makes service reliability, responsiveness, and continuous evaluation its primary strategies for winning the competition. In other words, the company's competitive advantage emerges from its ability to manage internal and external processes in an integrated manner. This data makes it easier for readers to understand that strategic management practices in outsourcing service companies are closely linked to efforts to maintain service standards and build sustainable client trust.

The patterns emerging from the data above indicate that strategic management practices at PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang tend to foster competitive advantage through three main trends. First, the company prioritizes workforce quality as the basis for service differentiation. Second, the company emphasizes speed of response and problem-solving as a strategy to maintain client satisfaction. Third, the company develops long-term cooperative relationships with clients through active communication and continuous evaluation. This pattern demonstrates that competitive advantage in service companies stems not only from internal efficiency but also from the organization's ability to build trust, maintain service consistency, and adapt to market needs.

Table 1: Interview Results

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
The head of the company	"We not only provide outsourcing workers, but also ensure that the workers placed comply with the standards of discipline, work ethics, and client needs."	HR-based service quality
Operations Manager	"We immediately follow up on every input from clients to ensure that service is maintained and relationships with clients remain good."	Responsiveness of service and client relations
Field Supervisor	"We regularly monitor the performance of outsourced personnel in the field to ensure that work quality remains in line with company and client expectations."	Performance monitoring and evaluation

Table Interpretation

Based on the table above, it can be seen that PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang's competitive advantage is shaped by three main indicators: human resource quality, service responsiveness, and performance monitoring. Statements from company management indicate that the company views its workforce not simply as a service commodity but as a strategic asset that determines the company's image and competitiveness. In this context, human resource quality is the primary foundation of competitive advantage because clients assess a company's quality based on the performance of its employees. This means that the company's competitive strategy emphasizes quality differentiation rather than simply price competition.

Meanwhile, statements from operational managers and field supervisors indicate that the company's competitive advantage is also maintained through responsiveness to client needs and ongoing work oversight. These two indicators confirm that the company's strategic management practices are dynamic and oriented toward continuously maintaining service quality. By following up on client complaints and direct monitoring in the field, the company is able to maintain service consistency while strengthening client trust.

This demonstrates that PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang's competitive advantage is formed from a combination of a structured internal strategy and external capabilities in building adaptive business relationships.

Data Pattern Description

The data description reveals a pattern that demonstrates that strategic management practices at PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang are oriented toward quality and relationship-based service. The company builds competitive advantage not only by providing outsourcing services, but also by ensuring that every element of the service adds value to clients. This added value is evident in the emphasis on workforce quality, rapid response to client needs, and a continuous monitoring system.

Furthermore, another pattern is evident in the company's competitive advantage is built through the integration of internal and external strategies. Internal strategies are evident in human resource development, supervision, and work evaluation, while external strategies are evident in active communication and efforts to maintain client satisfaction. This pattern suggests that in outsourcing service companies, competitive advantage stems from the organization's ability to manage service processes comprehensively, consistently, and adaptively to market demands.

DISCUSSION

The discussion on building competitive advantage through strategic management practices at PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang shows that competitive advantage in outsourcing service companies is built through the integration of human resource quality, service responsiveness, and client relationship management. The findings of this study demonstrate that the company prioritizes workforce quality and service as key strategies for maintaining competitiveness. This aligns with strategic management literature, which states that competitive advantage can be achieved through leveraging unique organizational resources that are difficult for competitors to imitate. In the context of service companies, human resources are often a key differentiating factor because the quality of interactions between service providers and customers significantly determines the client's perception of value. Therefore, the results of this study reinforce the view that service differentiation based on human resource quality is a crucial strategy for service companies in building competitive advantage.

Furthermore, the findings also indicate that organizational responsiveness in addressing client needs and complaints is a crucial factor in maintaining long-term business relationships. These findings align with service management theory, which emphasizes that service quality and customer satisfaction are key factors in maintaining customer loyalty. Several previous studies have suggested that service companies that are able to respond to customer needs quickly and effectively will have higher levels of customer trust. In this study, PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang demonstrates similar practices by following up on client feedback through internal coordination and workforce development. This demonstrates the alignment of the company's management practices with the concept of customer-oriented strategy, widely discussed in strategic management literature.

However, this study also differs from some literature that emphasizes the importance of technological innovation as a primary factor in building competitive advantage. At PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang, competitive advantage is built more through service quality and client relationship management than through the use of digital technology. This suggests that in the labor-based outsourcing service sector, competitive strategy does not always depend on technological innovation but can be built through service quality and strengthening business relationships. These findings demonstrate that the industry context significantly influences the strategies companies employ to create competitive advantage.

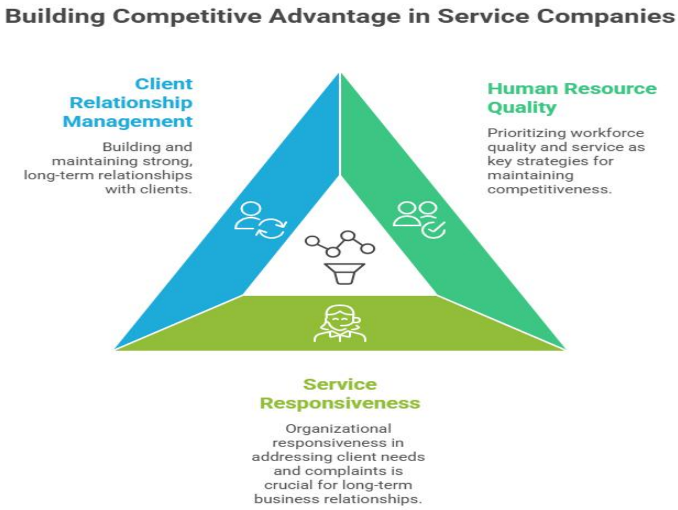

Figure 1 : Building Competitive Advantage in Service Companies

In terms of theoretical implications, this study contributes to the development of strategic management studies in the service sector, particularly in the outsourcing industry. The results confirm that competitive advantage in service companies is determined not only by physical resources or technology, but also by the organization's ability to manage human resources, maintain service quality, and build long-term relationships with clients. These findings expand the strategic management literature by demonstrating that strategic management practices in service organizations are characterized by a greater focus on service and relationships than on production efficiency, as is often found in the manufacturing sector.

Practically, the results of this study offer important implications for outsourcing service companies and other service organizations. Companies need to prioritize human resource management, as workforce quality significantly impacts client reputation and trust. Furthermore, companies need to develop effective communication and service evaluation systems to ensure prompt resolution of client needs and complaints. By integrating service quality, performance monitoring, and strong client relationships, companies can strengthen their competitive position in the increasingly competitive service market. These findings can also serve as a reference for other service companies in designing more effective management strategies to maintain long-term competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how competitive advantage is developed through strategic management practices within a service firm, focusing on PT. Megah Sarana Gumilang, an outsourcing company in Surabaya. The findings indicate that competitive advantage in service organizations is primarily built through the integration of service quality, effective human resource management, and strong client relationship management. The company strengthens its competitive position by ensuring the quality and discipline of outsourced employees, maintaining responsiveness to client needs, and conducting continuous evaluation of workforce performance. These practices demonstrate that competitive advantage in labor-intensive service industries is not solely determined by pricing strategies, but also by the organization's ability to deliver reliable services and sustain long-term client trust. The study highlights that strategic management practices in service firms are closely linked to the management of human capital and the development of strong service-oriented organizational processes.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the strategic management literature by emphasizing the role of service quality and relational capabilities as key drivers of competitive advantage in outsourcing firms. While traditional strategic management theories often emphasize tangible resources or technological innovation, this study shows that in service-oriented industries competitive advantage may emerge from intangible organizational capabilities such as workforce quality, responsiveness, and trust-based relationships with clients. The findings therefore enrich existing discussions on the resource-based view and service management by demonstrating how strategic management practices in labor-based service firms are shaped by the effective coordination of human resources and customer relationships within dynamic market conditions.

Practically, the results of this study provide valuable insights for managers and practitioners in service-based organizations, particularly within the outsourcing sector. Companies should prioritize strategic human resource development, strengthen service monitoring systems, and maintain proactive communication with clients in order to sustain their competitive position. By integrating strategic planning with service quality management and client relationship strategies, service firms can improve organizational performance and maintain long-term partnerships with their clients. These managerial implications suggest that outsourcing companies need to adopt adaptive and service-oriented strategic practices to remain competitive in highly dynamic markets.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research focuses on a single service firm, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries or geographical contexts. In addition, the study mainly explores managerial perspectives within the organization, while perspectives from clients and outsourced employees were not extensively examined. Future research could expand the scope of analysis by including multiple service firms or conducting comparative studies across different service sectors. Further studies may also investigate the role of digital management systems, technological innovation, and strategic partnerships in strengthening competitive advantage within outsourcing and other service-based industries.

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