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Adapting Porter's Five Forces for International Competitiveness: Strategies for International Business

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Abstract: This paper explores the complexities of the global business environment and its effect on international competitive advantage in a world that is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). It highlights the critical role of competition in shaping the most effective international business strategies and how to sustain competitive advantage in the global marketplace. The study explores the importance of analyzing foreign market environments, particularly from an industry perspective, by using Michael Porter's Five Forces framework for international settings. Porter's Five Forces framework has been widely used to analyze industry competition; however, studies related to the impact of competitive pressures on firms' ability to maintain international competitive advantage remain under-explored. This research underscores the necessity of understanding the relationship between competitive forces and international competitiveness to enable firms to effectively strategize and sustain performance in global markets.

Keywords: *International Competitive Advantage, Rivalry among Competing Firms, Bargaining Power of Suppliers, Bargaining Power of Buyers, Threat of Substitute Products, Threat of New Entrants*

1. Introduction and Background

The business environment in the global economy is vulnerable, uncertain, competitive, and extremely ambiguous (VUCA) in nature (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Businesses nowadays operate in a complex global environment, characterized by rapid product life cycles, disruption in technological development, changes in consumer lifestyles, and pressure from competition in the global market (Schilke et al., 2018; Teece, 2014). In this VUCA environment, competition at the global level is the key enabler and determinant of activities in international business. The greatest challenge for international companies is to strategize for the attainment and sustaining of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Competitive advantage is the ability of an international firm to attain greater performance than its competitors in multi-market competition.

To develop strategic business activities, businesses need to analyze the environments of foreign countries in an effort to align their activities with external market conditions (Ghemawat, 2001). The primary strategic analytical tool to assess these environments is Michael Porter's Five Forces framework (Porter, 2008). This framework maps an industry-based view through five distinct forces: competitive rivalry among existing competitors, threat of new entrants, threat of substitute products, bargaining power of buyers, and bargaining power of suppliers (Porter, 1979: 2008). In an international setting, these five forces are not stagnant. The forces that greatly affect the dynamic nature are shaped by geographical distance, regulatory policies, differences in culture, and complexity and variation in competitors' personalities (Peng et al., 2008; Ghemawat, 2001). Thus, international competitiveness is directly determined by the firm's ability to respond strategically to these five forces in the international market (Peng et al., 2008; Porter, 1986).

While Porter's Five Forces framework has been widely used to analyze industry competition, little attention has been given to the effect of competitive pressure on the ability of international firms to develop and sustain international competitive advantage. Failure to respond effectively to strategic competitive forces can decrease market share, decrease profitability, and finally weaken the firm's sustainability in the international market. Hence, the relationship between competitive forces and international competitive advantage in internationally operated firms needs to be examined. Understanding the relationship between industry competition and international competitiveness is important to help firms compete effectively in the global markets.

2. Literature Review

International Competitive Advantage: As firms increasingly compete in complex, interconnected, and rapidly changing global markets, the quest for international competitive advantage remains a central theme in international business research. International competitive advantage explains the capacity of a firm to achieve superior performance over its international rivals by developing and utilizing valuable resources, unique capabilities, and strategic positions, which lead to the creation of more customer value and sustainable economic returns (Peng et al., 2008; Teece et al., 1997; Barney, 1991; Porter, 1985). International competitiveness is referred to as the systemic capability of a firm to deliver superior performance and maintain market share in the evolving global competition (Kumar & Chadee, 2024). In international business, international competitive advantage is defined as a business's ability to attain above-average return relative to competitors on a global scale (Barney, 1991; Porter, 1998). International competitiveness is fundamentally dynamic and driven by its capacity to localize strategic rivalry, foster a productive ecosystem and drive innovation (Abdelkawy, 2026; Vu & Pham, 2016). Therefore, firms expanding abroad must create and sustain a competitive position in increasingly competitive global industries (Tasheva & Nielsen, 2022; Verbeke & Kano, 2021).

Sustainable competitive advantage is the basis for executing successful value creation activities in the foreign market, as it principally directs the effective measures for foreign market complexities and cross-border expansion (Alharbi, 2026; Porter, 1985). International business activities are inherently characterized by the liability of foreignness, including host country regulations, intense local and global competitors, and different governance and customer expectations (Liu, 2025). Within a highly competitive international environment, a well-established competitive advantage allows a firm to exploit its unique organizational resources and capabilities to create superior value that is hard for foreign competitors to imitate (West et al., 2026; Chen et al., 2022). Hence, distinctive competitive advantage is important to empower international business firms to mitigate risk in the foreign market and to successfully achieve above-average returns (McKee, 2026; West et al., 2026).

Achieving international competitive advantage is complicated as international businesses face unique institutional, market, cultural, and competitive conditions in various countries (Yang, 2026). International businesses encounter stiff and aggressive competition in the foreign market due to evolving consumers' tastes and preferences, the threat of new entrants, and substitute products (Kusumah, 2026; Müller, 2026). Additionally, hyper-globalization, rapid technological development, and the structural complexity of cross-border competition have led to an escalation in the importance of international competitive advantage (Moraga, 2026; Toksoy, 2026). Apparently, firms that develop dynamic competitive advantages are more capable of penetrating the international market and enjoy a sustainable market position, coping efficiently with unexpected threats, and eventually achieving superior performance (Alharbi, 2026). The determinant of long-term survival depends on the capability of understanding the competitive forces in the foreign market (Gafni, 2026; Porter, 1985).

Research indicates that firms' ability to withstand aggressive competitive intensity is a valuable asset that strategically enhances brand equity and investors' confidence level (Dukhaykh & Alangri, 2026). The necessity of multinational firms to consistently appraise competitive settings is crucial since the decision related to entry strategy and sustainable performance depends on the firm's capability to understand competitors' strategic moves (Yao et al., 2024). Hence, understanding and responding to competitive forces has become a key indicator in international accomplishment. The recent finding suggests that global competition has become more intense and dynamic. Businesses need to understand their direct rivals and other global industry forces that determine profitability and the recognition of new opportunities in foreign markets (Verbeke & Kano, 2015).

Despite the recent development in research related to competitive advantage, understanding how to sustain competitive advantage at the global level remains a significant research focus. Although existing studies have observed multiple dimensions of competitive advantage, the five forces perspective remains particularly vital because it explains the extent to which external industry conditions influence a strategic choice and a firm's performance outcome. Therefore, examining international competitive advantage through Porter's Five Forces

Framework provides valuable insights into how firms analyse competitive environments, develop appropriate strategies, and sustain superior positions in global markets.

Porter's Five Forces Framework: The foundation that governs Porter's Five Forces Framework is the industrial organization (IO) approach (Bruijil, 2018; Porter, 1981). This theory served as an underpinning theory for the establishment of a competitive strategy that guides firms on how to evaluate competitive forces. Porter (1981) argued that a firm's achievement is greatly affected by the industrial setting in which the company operates. From the Five Forces Framework, businesses must understand the competition level, the bargaining power of the buyer and supplier, threats of substitutes, and threats of new entrants before developing effective strategies in any market. This approach focuses on an outside-in perspective that focuses on responding to five competitive forces, including responding to the rivals' moves, customers, suppliers, substitute items, and possible new entrants for value creation in international business activities (Asseraf et al., 2019). From this context, it explains why some business players are more gainful than others and how the business players can position themselves strategically to attain an international competitive advantage.

The expansion of business activities globally has resulted in intensified competition faced by international firms. In the current era of globalization, firms often experience a difficult situation in sustaining their competitive advantage in the global context. Technological developments, changes in market preferences, ease of access to information, and various disruptive innovations are challenges that must be faced by every business player (Ningsih et al., 2025). Competitive advantage demonstrates a firm's capability in mitigating the rivalry forces, bargaining power of suppliers and buyers, threat of foreign entry, and substitute products (Brujil, 2026). Hence, the focus on Porter's Five Forces Framework is due to its significance as one of the most influential explanations of how firms develop international competitive advantage through industry analysis and shape the attractiveness of the industry.

Studies show that the Five Forces Framework remains important in contemporary international business research. The competitive forces are explained as determinants that significantly influence competitive advantage and organizational performance (Baird et al., 2024). From this finding, it can be concluded that businesses that systematically analyze industry pressures are in a better state to design a strategy that improves business performance. Dynamic interaction between international business players remains a critical issue in international business since businesses are continuously responding to competitors' moves and changes in the industry structure (Yao et al., 2024).

Rivalry among competitors: The level of competitive contestation within an industry is referred to as rivalry among current competitors. It is typified by tactical strategies like aggressive marketing campaigns, price reductions, ongoing product innovation, and improvements in customer service with the goal of gaining market share (Porter, 1980, 1985). As international firms navigate hypercompetitive global landscapes, divergent regulatory regimes, and varying national competitive dynamics across diverse geographic markets, competitive rivalry extends well beyond domestic boundaries from an international business perspective (Mosina, 2026; Verbeke & Hutzschenreuter, 2021).

The fear of substitution intensifies competitive struggle in these contested cross-border situations, directly determining an international firm's capacity to extract economic value and preserve an international competitive edge. Based on the economics of the Industrial Organization (IO) theory, the existence of substitute products imposes a rigid artificial ceiling on the prices that an industry can command, intensifying market competition and reducing profit margins unless businesses develop strong counter-differentiation strategies (Mosina, 2026; Porter, 1980). Because host markets sometimes provide low-cost regional substitutes that avoid standardised global product offerings, alternative local technologies, or changing consumer behaviours, international firms are more vulnerable to substitution concerns (Chen et al., 2026; Verbeke & Hutzschenreuter, 2021).

To mitigate competitive rivalry fueled by cross-border substitution, contemporary strategy literature emphasizes the deployment of dynamic internationalization capabilities, cross-border strategic alliances, and relational governance mechanisms (Peng, 2025; Valbuena-Hernandez & Ortiz-de-Mandojana, 2026). Rather than engaging in defensive price wars that degrade international margins, international firms respond through

digital business model adaptation and co-developed, context-specific solutions with local network partners (Chen et al., 2026; Peng, 2025). By transforming standard global offerings into high-value, locally tailored solutions embedded with high institutional switching costs, firms neutralize substitute threats, insulate themselves from destructive price rivalry, and secure a sustainable international market position (Chen et al., 2026; Valbuena-Hernandez & Ortiz-de-Mandojana, 2026).

Intense local competition considerably reduces a firm's export performance and foreign revenue growth, according to an empirical study assessing cross-border marketplaces (Iriyama et al., 2016). Businesses must devote significant resources to price reduction, frequent marketing campaigns, and ongoing product customisation in highly competitive situations in order to protect their local and regional market shares (Mosina, 2026; Porter, 1980). According to Chen et al. (2026) and Ozturk Kose (2023), this fierce competition for market share severely depletes operating cash flows, limits the deployment of R&D capital for cross-border expansion, and erodes the price-cost margins necessary to create sustainable worldwide distribution networks. Moreover, escalating foreign competitive rivalry in host markets actively compresses profit margins and increases customer churn, particularly when entering price-sensitive international sectors (Nuruzzaman et al., 2019). Intense competitive rivalry directly erodes the profitability, financial flexibility, and price competitiveness of the firm in the global marketplace. Since rivalry among competitors can directly dictate the international performance and strategic positioning of a firm, it is proposed that intense competitive rivalry among competitors has a significant impact on the international competitive advantage of the company

Proposition 1: Rivalry among existing competitors is a significant competitive force in determining international competitive advantage.

Bargaining power of suppliers: The bargaining power of suppliers explains the extent to which suppliers of raw materials, components, or services hold power over the industry or companies (Porter, 1979, 2008). In situations where the bargaining power of the supplier is high, the supplier can raise the price of supplies, determine the quality and availability of supplies, and directly reduce the profit margin of the buying company (Porter, 2008). On the other hand, when the bargaining power of the supplier is low, the buyer enjoys greater flexibility to switch to another supplier, negotiate favourable terms, and enjoy greater profit. Understanding this competitive force is critical for any business to attain targeted profitability and determine long-term competitive strategy (Porter, 2008).

For international business players, cross-border transactions involve complex value chain activities where logistics costs and economic interdependencies significantly affect the bargaining power of foreign suppliers (Stiller, 2023; Takele & Tveter, 2025). The complexity of the VUCA world navigates international business players through rapid inflation, geopolitical issues, and unexpected geopolitical disruptions, requiring firms to proactively predict and strategically mitigate unexpected risks (Gao et al., 2025; Kimario & Mwagike, 2024). Inadequate assessment and mitigation of the bargaining power of suppliers on a global scale may give rise to abrupt structural vulnerabilities, volatile operational costs, and a diminished global competitive advantage, thereby constituting a crucial and prospective consideration in the formulation of international corporate strategy.

According to Industrial Organization (IO) economics, suppliers can obtain a disproportionate share of value by raising prices due to high supplier bargaining power, which can be caused by supplier concentration, high switching costs, or proprietary inputs (Porter, 1980). International businesses' capacity to implement a global cost leadership strategy is severely limited when they deal with dominant domestic or foreign suppliers (Porter, 1985). On the other hand, international businesses can counteract supplier leverage, reduce input costs, and improve price competitiveness in price-sensitive international markets by utilizing global sourcing techniques to aggregate purchasing power across emerging and developed countries (Coetzee et al., 2020).

Supplier relationships influence value creation and differentiation capabilities in addition to cost effectiveness. Research shows that strong suppliers often control proprietary technology and rare, non-replaceable resources (Barney, 1991). International firms can gain distinctive product features and a clear, non-price competitive advantage in international markets by securing exclusive access to high-quality inputs or co-developing vital technologies with important international suppliers (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Pittz et al., 2024).

Lastly, organizational international competitive advantage is significantly impacted by supplier bargaining power. Over-reliance on strong international suppliers increases the cost of risk mitigation, negotiation, and monitoring (Reckendrees et al., 2023). International firms develop dynamic skills including multi-region supplier diversification, standardized component design, and selective vertical integration to lessen these structural vulnerabilities. By eliminating supplier lock-in, businesses can strengthen their long-term position in international markets by gaining the operational flexibility needed to quickly reorganize supply networks in reaction to shocks to the global market (Pittz et al., 2024; Sun, 2026).

A study that evaluated large-scale manufacturing companies shows that high bargaining power of suppliers significantly lowers the trade volume (Watanabe & Yanagawa, 2013). In this situation, purchasing firms are forced to operate with less favorable commercial credit schemes and are forced to increase their cash-holding requirements (Zhang, 2021). This tactic draws a lot of money, reduces financial options, and lowers their cost advantage in the global markets. The cross-border transaction has actively inflated the bargaining power of suppliers, in particular the transport and input suppliers (Takele & Tveter, 2025). The high bargaining power of suppliers directly grinds down the competitiveness of the firm in the global marketplace. Since the bargaining power of suppliers can influence the competitive advantage of the purchasing company, it is proposed that higher supplier bargaining power has a significant impact on the international competitive advantage of the company.

Proposition 2: Bargaining power of suppliers is a significant competitive force in determining international competitive advantage.

Bargaining power of buyers: The bargaining power of buyers explains the leverage that the buyers possess to influence the negotiation terms in the commercial transaction within a particular industry (Porter, 1985). When the buyers are highly concentrated and purchase in bulk volume, they can aggressively bargain the prices, demand superior product quality, and consequently compress the profit margin of the competing firms (Porter, 2008). The bargaining power of buyers increases in an industry with standard products because customers can easily switch between options and compare competitors.

In the context of international business, the bargaining power of buyers is significant as a determinant of profitability, trade patterns, and value creation across the global market (Bair & Mahutga, 2023). Buyers who are buying in large quantities use their size to force sellers to give them a price discount of up to 7%, and because of their high bargaining power, buyers have the power to walk away and find other options (Ignatenko, 2025). Grundy (2006) proved that the bargaining power of the buyer depends on larger orders and low switching costs. It is also found that larger international buyers use their data systems to create a strong network, and it is used to quickly replace those who don't integrate well (Jacobides et al., 2018; Kenney & Zysman, 2020). Mladenovic et al. (2024) state that any companies that are unable to meet automated buyer systems become easily replaceable, as global buyers constantly use digital platforms to compare and switch suppliers across countries. Apparently, the multinational buyers leverage their digital sourcing platforms to control the negotiation terms with foreign suppliers to protect their competitive advantage in the international marketplace.

Buyer negotiating power has a direct impact on a company's ability to extract value and create a long-term global competitive advantage. High buyer power, which is based on Industrial Organization (IO) economics and is typified by concentrated buyer groups, low switching costs, and high price sensitivity, continuously drives down prices and profit margins (Porter, 1980, 1985). In order to maintain baseline profitability during international expansion, international firms must attain global scale economies and cross-border operational efficiency in the face of strong global purchasers (Yip, 1992).

Concurrently, research on global marketing emphasises that buyer power stimulates innovation and customer-focused differentiation (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). Strong foreign consumers sometimes require localised adaptations, stringent compliance, and customised product criteria. Although fulfilling these expectations raises immediate coordination costs, it pushes businesses to develop dynamic localisation and quality control capabilities, giving them non-price competitive advantages over less flexible foreign competitors (Douglas & Craig, 2011; Kaleka & Morgan, 2019).

Finally, international firms can reduce the risks of buyers' opportunism and switching behaviour through cooperative strategic alliances (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Inderst & Wey, 2003). International businesses successfully increase consumer switching costs by co-developing proprietary inputs, integrating global supply networks, and using dynamic internationalisation capabilities (Peng, 2025; Snyder, 1996). This ensures strong operational alignment and maintains a competitive position internationally by converting potential buyer power into lock-in mechanisms (Mbabu & Ombok, 2024; Valbuena-Hernandez & Ortiz-de-Mandojana, 2026).

When buyers have high power due to low switching costs, high price sensitivity, or strict quality standards, it serves as an external force that encourages international business players to continuously improve their core capabilities, leading to greater efficiency and distinctive value in international markets. High bargaining power of buyers is a competitive force that drives international business players to continuously innovate and upgrade their competencies to enhance their long-term performance. Henceforth, the bargaining power of the buyer is significant in explaining international competitive advantage.
Proposition 3: Bargaining power of buyers is a significant competitive force that determines international competitive advantage.

Threat of new entrants: In Michael Porter's framework, the threat of new entrants is defined as the risk that new firms pose to existing businesses by competing for market share (Porter, 1979). New entrants are perceived as a threat because their entry can reduce the profitability of incumbent firms (Ningsih et al., 2025). Any lucrative business attracts new firms, which lower the price of offerings, raise the cost of innovation to keep customers, and reduce profit margins (Porter, 2008). The threat depends on the entry barriers such as economies of scale, high capital needs, switching costs, government rules and regulations, and the countermeasures from the existing firms (Porter, 1979, 2008). Industries with high entry barriers face less competition and enjoy greater stability and sustainability in performance (Porter, 2008).

International firms often pose a greater threat of new entrants than local businesses because they have a different cost structure. International firms are global in scale, large in capital, advanced and unique in technology, and strong international brands (Yip, 1989; Caves, 2007). In international business, the threat of new entrants is critical because it can change industry structure and motivate global innovation, disrupt stable domestic industries, and motivate companies to improve performance. Global competition in this decade is shaped by digital platforms and innovates the entry strategy for international firms, enabling rapid market entry (Yang et al., 2025). Any international firm that enters a new market they bring their productive capacity and competitive advantage, which leads to profit reduction for local firms (Porter, 1986). It also pushes incumbents to optimize operations and create innovation in operations, logistics, and distribution to gain better market access (Hamdi et al., 2026).

The ability of an established company to safeguard profit margins and preserve a long-lasting global competitive edge is strongly impacted by the threat of new competitors. According to Michael Porter's Industrial Organization (IO) theory, unless strong entry barriers are in place, new market entrants increase capacity, escalate price rivalry, and reduce industry profitability (Porter, 1980; Mosina, 2026). When expanding internationally, international firms use structural entry barriers, such as global economies of scale, high capital requirements, and exclusive distribution channels, to protect their market share from both foreign and domestic competitors trying to enter new markets (Porter, 1985; Mosina, 2026).

However, recent research highlights how conventional structural obstacles are becoming more susceptible to innovations in business models and digital transformation. Through network effects and flexible go-to-market tactics, emerging global digital platform economies enable non-traditional entrants to avoid traditional physical capital needs and quickly scale across borders (Verbeke & Hutzschenreuter, 2021; Chen et al., 2026). As a result, established international firms are no longer able to rely exclusively on static scale economies, but they must build dynamic internationalization skills to consistently strengthen entry barriers.

International firms mitigate the threat of new entrants by constructing deep context-specific advantages, such as localized institutional knowledge, co-developed R&D ecosystems, and high switching costs created through customer integration (Barney, 1991; Peng, 2025; Valbuena-Hernandez & Ortiz-de-Mandojana, 2026). By converting physical and institutional entry barriers into agile, non-imitable strategic assets, MNEs suppress the

threat of entrant disruption, ensuring sustainable performance and long-term channel dominance across foreign markets (Hung & Wang, 2024; Chen et al., 2026).

This competitive threat drives firms to improve business efficiency, innovate, and some may consider international expansion to survive (Yip, 1989). This threat may also raise tariff barriers to protect local industries, and some other governments may reduce the barriers to attract foreign companies (Caves, 2007). Understanding this competitive threat is essential for assessing market stability and guiding strategic changes to achieve international competitive advantage. The threat of new entrants is significantly linked to sustainable global competitive advantage since it creates aggressive competition that drives incumbent firms to improve operational efficiency and speed up innovation to strengthen resilience in the international market. Therefore, the threat of new entrants is significant in explaining international competitive advantage.
Proposition 4: Threat of new entrants is a significant competitive force that determines international competitive advantage.

Threat of Substitution: The competitive threat refers to the risk a company faces when different products or alternative products can meet the customer's needs (Porter, 1979). Substitution provides an alternative solution that may stop customers from using the company's offerings altogether (Porter, 2008). This threat restricts the amount of profit generation when customers shift their preferences to the alternative solutions, particularly if the alternative solution is more attractive, has low switching costs, and is more reliable (Porter, 2008). A common strategy in dealing with the threat of substitution includes innovation in product, service, or technology (Ningsih et al., 2025). In the digital economy, the threat of substitution is more intense because rapid changes in technology s and global digital platforms can rapidly make existing products outdated (Yang et al., 2025; Silva-Rêgo & Kogut, 2026).

In international markets, the threat of substitution is characterized by market forces and accelerated by government institutions, including rules and policies (Porter, 2008). The host government frequently uses coercive power to make alternative options offered by the domestic players cheaper and more appealing to the market (Vargas-Hernández et al., 2023). For instance, an international company that invested in carbon-intensive infrastructure may face a quick, legally driven threat of substitution when the host government enforces strict environmental standards, thereby pushing consumers in favour of green technologies that are supported and subsidized by the government (Fischer, 2003; Vargas-Hernández et al., 2023). In the international market, when the threat of substitution is constantly exposed to alternative offerings, firms are logically driven to innovate rapidly to maintain their relevance (Silva-Rêgo & Kogut, 2026).

The ability of international firms to retain long-term price premiums in foreign markets and capture economic value is directly determined by the danger of substitution. According to Michael Porter's Industrial Organization (IO) framework, the existence of substitute products artificially limits the prices that an industry can charge, reducing profit margins and limiting competitive performance unless businesses develop effective counter-differentiation strategies (Porter, 1980, 1985; Mosina, 2026). Because host markets often offer alternative local solutions, unique consumer habit shifts, or regional technological paradigms that can circumvent standard product offerings, international firms are more vulnerable to substitution threats in the context of international strategy (Verbeke & Hutzschenreuter, 2021). As a result, when low-cost or technologically superior alternatives reach outside markets, businesses that only rely on traditional product advantages frequently suffer from quick cross-border margin deterioration.

Scholars emphasize the deployment of relational ecosystems and dynamic innovation skills to overcome the threat of substitution and create a sustained international competitive advantage (Peng, 2025; Valbuena-Hernandez & Ortiz-de-Mandojana, 2026). Leading multinational corporations respond with strategic adaptation, digital business model transformation, and cross-border strategic alliances rather than defensive pricing battles that jeopardize profitability (Chen et al., 2026; Peng, 2025). Businesses turn weak global products into tightly integrated value offerings by using proprietary technology, collaborating with local network partners to generate context-specific solutions, and imposing high institutional switching costs (Valbuena-Hernandez & Ortiz-de-Mandojana, 2026). International firms can maintain long-term market share across several global markets, secure channel dominance, and protect international pricing premiums by neutralizing the danger of replacement products (Chen et al., 2026; Mosina, 2026).

The threat compels international firms to develop a unique value proposition and pursue distinct differentiation strategies to raise profit margins (Islam, 2025; Porter, 2008). Firms that put effort into upgrading value creation yield a competitive advantage over foreign rivals who face less substitution pressure (Silva-Rêgo & Kogut, 2026; Yang et al., 2025). The threat of substitute products is significantly related to international competitive advantage, such as when firms plan to optimize efficiency, actively involve themselves in innovation, and proactively plan for strategic moves when entering foreign markets. When international firms systematically upgrade their competencies to counter the threat of substitute products, they can drive the company towards a sustainable international competitive advantage. Thus, the threat of substitute products is significant in explaining international competitive advantage.

Proposition 5: Threat of substitution is a significant competitive force that determines international competitive advantage.

3. Methodology

The study proposes to explore the relationship between the five competitive forces and international competitive advantage. To create a cohesive conceptual model that connects the Five Competitive Forces to international competitiveness, this study uses an integrative literature synthesis design (Torraco, 2016). An analytical deductive strategy was used to assess current theoretical frameworks and empirical studies since conceptual research aims to improve theory by interconnecting previously isolated domains rather than producing primary evidence (Jaakkola, 2020). To ensure high data quality and construct validity, a purposive sampling technique is proposed to be used in selecting suitable respondents based on two stringent inclusion criteria: (1) the firm actively participates in export activities, cross-border strategic alliances, or foreign market operations; and (2) the respondent has at least three years of experience making strategic decisions within the organization.

The target respondents should consist of senior strategic decision-makers in multinational enterprises (MNEs) and exporting manufacturing companies that operate in international marketplaces to experimentally assess the links within this theoretical framework. Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), Chief Strategy Officers (CSOs), Global Procurement Directors, and International Business Managers are the only target respondents using a key informant technique. These respondents are chosen because they have the thorough strategic oversight needed to accurately assess internal firm capabilities, cross-border market performance metrics, and external industry structural forces.

The measurement items for the five forces framework and international competitive advantage will be obtained from reliable sources. First, the bargaining power of suppliers is operationalized by the degree of supplier concentration, the existence of high switching costs when switching vendors, the supplier's control over essential proprietary inputs, and the supplier's ability to set pricing and terms of payment, all of which are used to operationalize (Wagner & Johnson, 2004; Porter, 1980). Second, to gauge the bargaining power of buyers, buyer concentration, buyer price sensitivity, low buyer switching costs, and the degree to which customers demand special requirements or price concessions are all used to operationalize the variable (Spina et al., 2013; Porter, 1980, 1985). Next, according to Karakaya and Stahl (1989) and Mosina (2026), the threat of new entrants is evaluated by calculating the financial needs for market entry, access to worldwide distribution channels, brand loyalty of current customers, and government regulatory hurdles. Then, the availability of alternative regional products and technologies, the relative price-performance ratio of substitutes, customer willingness to switch, and the low switching costs associated with adopting substitute offerings are all used to operationalise the threat of substitution (Chen et al., 2026; Mosina, 2026). According to Jaworski and Kohli (1993) and Iriyama et al. (2016), measurement of competitive rivalry includes price competition intensity, the frequency of marketing and promotional conflicts, the rate at which overseas competitors introduce new products, and aggressive tactics to gain local market share. Finally, international competitive advantage is measured by assessing relative foreign market share growth, protection of price premiums, superior product quality relative to global competitors, and overall cross-border profitability (Zou et al., 1998; Kaleka & Morgan, 2019).

4. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

The proposed study underscores the critical need for international firms to continuously evaluate and adapt their strategies in response to dynamic competitive forces in the global market. By applying and contextualizing Porter's Five Forces framework to international settings, firms can better understand the complex interplay of geographical, cultural, regulatory, and competitive factors that influence industry rivalry. This study is expected to strategically guide international firms to remain competitive for business sustainability. Therefore, managers and decision-makers must prioritize strategic agility and environmental analysis to effectively navigate the VUCA global business landscape, enhancing their ability to achieve and sustain competitive advantage across diverse international markets. The proposed study will guide policymakers and international firms in terms of explanations related to factors that affect international competitive advantage. The information would benefit both parties in designing the strategic move for the attainment of competitive advantage.

Limitations

This study is mainly conceptual in nature, establishing the conceptual framework and derived premises through theoretical deduction and integrated literature synthesis. The model lacks empirical confirmation using primary quantitative data, despite the fact that it consistently connects Porter's structural factors with international competitive advantage through relational and dynamic mechanisms. As a result, the suggested direct, mediating, and moderating pathways have not been confirmed in particular operational contexts. Future academics are strongly invited to test the suggested framework through empirical study in order to address these boundary conditions. In particular, cross-sectional or longitudinal survey data from senior executives (such as CEOs, CSOs, and Global Procurement Directors) in international firms could be gathered for quantitative studies using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) or Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM). To evaluate the model's generalisability, more empirical studies should examine any context-specific differences across various industry sectors or geographical areas.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to create a conceptual framework for empirical research explaining the relationship between Porter's Five Forces Framework and International Competitive Advantage. The global business environment requires firms to develop strategies for the attainment of competitive advantage. Porter's Five Forces framework remains a vital tool for analyzing industry competition, but its application must consider the unique complexities of international markets, including geographical, cultural, and regulatory differences. For international companies, this finding would benefit them in designing the most effective strategy for sustaining competitiveness in the international marketplace. This study highlights the importance of understanding and responding strategically to competitive pressures to maintain market position and profitability. Ultimately, firms that effectively align their strategies with external competitive forces will be better positioned to succeed and thrive in the highly competitive global economy.

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