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RESOURCES AND CAPABILITIES OF MALAYSIAN RETAILERS': A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW TOWARD COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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Abstract

In a highly dynamic environment, a competitive advantage is a weapon tool for every organisation. Retail players heavily invest in logistics as the retail industry has evolved tremendously. Few systematic reviews have been conducted purposely to look at the importance of resources and capabilities in achieving competitive advantage through logistics activities. The articles analyse the existing studies in logistics, which mainly highlight the roles of the resources and capabilities in their daily operations. PRISMA Statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guides the articles. A systematic Scopus and Taylor & Francis database review recognised 13 related studies. A few recommendations are highlighted related to this review, which is to have a specific and standard systematic review method for guide research synthesis in the context of resources and capabilities in the logistics activities amongst the retailers and to practice complementary searching techniques like citation tracking, reference searching, snowballing and contacting experts.

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Keywords: Competitive advantage, capabilities, logistics, retailers, resources, systematic review

1. Introduction

The retailers act as the intermediaries between the manufacturers and the end-users; hence, they are in the final stages of the transactions (McArthur et al., 2016). Generally, the retail sector consists of four retail models: mono-branded retail outlets, multi-branded retail outlets, convergence retail outlets, and online retailers (Krishnamurthy & Venkitachalam, 2023). Malaysia's retail industry has transformed since the mid-1990s; the transformation is in line with the rapid growth of the Malaysian economy and consumer behaviour shifting. A previous study indicated that the positive development of the retail industry in Malaysia has sped up internationalisation processes where retail players penetrate the Malaysian market such as Macro, Tesco, Carrefour, Giant, IKEA and so on (Dales et al., 2019; Kaliappan et al., 2009). Furthermore, according to Morganosky in 1997, the attractiveness of modern retailing concepts also becomes one of the factors in the retail industry transformation in Malaysia; this industry is continuously moving forward due to highly dynamic scenarios (Hassan & Rahman, 2012).

Statista Research Department (2021) stated that the retail market in ASEAN is lucrative for the retail players as it was forecasted to increase dramatically by 2025. In Malaysia, the retail industry is highly competitive, as has been proven in The Global Competitiveness Report 2019-2020, which shows that Malaysia ranked 25th out of 140 economies. In highly intensified competition, retail players must strategise their resources efficiently to sustain themselves in the industry (Bambang Baroto et al., 2012). Hence, the retail sector in Malaysia is significantly influenced by globalisation, leading to rapid transformation. Retailers must invest aggressively in resources and capabilities, partly in logistics activities. Sandberg and Abrahamsson (2022) claimed that logistics activities are competitive tools for retailers. Empirical research by Mellat-Parast and Spillan (2014) illustrates that logistics and supply chain activities become vital in positioning the industry's retail players. For instance, due to the efficiency of the supply chain systems, Wal-Mart, Tesco and Starbucks have been listed among the top 25 retailers in the industry (Hofman et al., 2011). Previous studies showed that resources significantly affect the competitive position of retailers in the sector (Brush & Chaganti, 1999; Grimmer et al., 2017). In the organisation, the diversity of the tangible resources becomes antecedents to the capability of the retailers, while the intangible resources become a point of difference to the organisation (Fernández et al., 2000; Schriber & Löwstedt, 2015). Furthermore, integrating and utilising the resources is crucial to gaining a competitive advantage (Evans et al., 2004). Past empirical studies showed that capabilities that consist of VRIN, Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitution, dramatically improve competitive advantage (Puspita et al., 2020).

2. Problem Statement

A formulated question is examined using systematic and explicit methods to recognise, select and critically appraise appropriate studies included in the review. The included studies may or may not use statistical methods to analyse and summarise the results (Oblak et al., 2021). Through a systematic review, authors' claims of rigour in their research can be justified, allowing for identifying gaps and acquiring directions for future research. Despite abundant studies on the capabilities and resources, efforts to systematically review these studies, mainly focusing on Malaysian retailers, still need to be made. This

article attempts to fill the gap in understanding the role of resources and capabilities in becoming competitive in the Malaysian retail industry.

3. Research Questions

In the initial stage, it is necessary to draft clear and concise research questions that drive the entire systematic review methodology process. This article highlights the role of resources and capabilities in achieving a competitive advantage in Malaysia's retail landscape. Hence, the main focus of this study is the retailers, as logistics activities are the backbone of the retail industry in catering to market demand (Sandberg & Abrahamsson, 2022). Scopus and Taylor & Francis have been selected for this study. These databases enable one to search through different areas like titles, authors, keywords, and abstracts and choose research domains, years of publication, etc. The search will focus on the title, abstract, and keywords. In obtaining adequate results concerning the objective of this paper, the terms "resources" OR "sources" AND "capabilities" AND "competitive advantage" OR "competitiveness" AND "retail" OR "retailer" AND "logistics" OR "supply chain" are considered in performing the search based on the mentioned fields.

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to identify the existing literature on the importance of resources and capabilities in managing retailers' logistics activities. This part explains the aims of conducting a systematic review. The second part details the methodology, the PRISMA Statement (Preferred Reporting Items Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) approach. The third part systematically reviews and synthesises the scientific literature to identify, select, and appraise relevant studies on the role of resources and capability in determining the retailers' competitive advantage in Malaysia. The last part highlights the future direction of this study.

5. Research Methods

This paper addresses the research question through a Systematic Literature Review, which is more pertinent than a traditional narrative literature review. The PRISMA Statement guided the review (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). Sierra-Correa and Cantera Kintz (2015) claimed PRISMA offered a few advantages: defining straightforward research questions that permit systematic research, identifying inclusion and exclusion criteria, and seeking to examine large scientific literature databases in a specified time. For this study, the PRISMA Statement allows for rigorous search or terms related to the area of research.

5.1. Resources

The review relied on two major journal databases, Scopus and Taylor & Francis. Scopus is the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature, which consists of scientific journals, books, and conference proceedings. It delivers a comprehensive overview of the world's science,

technology, medicine, social sciences, arts, and humanities research output. Taylor & Francis is the second database used in this systematic review. It is one of the most extensive abstract and citation databases of peer-reviewed literature, with more than 2700 journals.

5.2. Systematic Review Process

Four stages were involved in the systematic review process. The review process was performed in November 2022. Identification of keywords in the first stage is necessary for searching by relying on the previous studies and thesaurus; keywords similar and related to resources, capabilities, competitive advantage, logistics, and retail were used (Table 1)

Table 1. Keywords and searching information

Database	Search string
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("resources" OR "sources") AND ("capabilities") AND ("competitive advantage" OR "competitiveness") AND ("retail" OR "retailer") AND ("logistics" OR "supply chain")
Taylor & Francis	allintitle: ("resources" OR "sources") AND ("capabilities") AND ("competitive advantage" OR "competitiveness") AND ("retail" OR "retailer") AND ("logistics" OR "supply chain")

In the screening stage, several eligibility and exclusion criteria are determined. Firstly, only article journals with empirical data are selected regarding literature type. The review articles, book series, book, chapter in the book, and conference proceedings are all excluded. Secondly, the search excluded non-English publications and only selected papers published in English to avoid confusion and difficulty in translating. Thirdly, regarding the timeline, six years from 2017 to 2022 is chosen, an adequate period to identify current research related to the study area. As the review focused on the resources and capabilities in logistics activities of the retail industry, the articles indexed in the Business, Management, and Accounting fields, meaning all the articles in the non-related areas, such as those published in the hard science index, will be excluded. Finally, in line with the objective of this review, the retail industry will be focused on in this study—the inclusion and exclusion criteria are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Eligibility	Exclusion
Literature type	Journal (research articles)	Journals (systematic review), book series, book, chapter in the book, conference proceeding
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	Between 2017-2022	<2017
Indexes	Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)	Science Citation Indexed Expanded

The data abstraction and analysis process assessed and analysed the remaining articles. The processes focused on specific studies that responded to the formulated questions. Appropriate themes and sub-themes were identified by reading through the abstracts first, then the full articles (in-depth). Qualitative analysis was performed using content analysis to identify themes related to the content of the study. Figure 1 shows the flow of the Systematic Literature Review process.
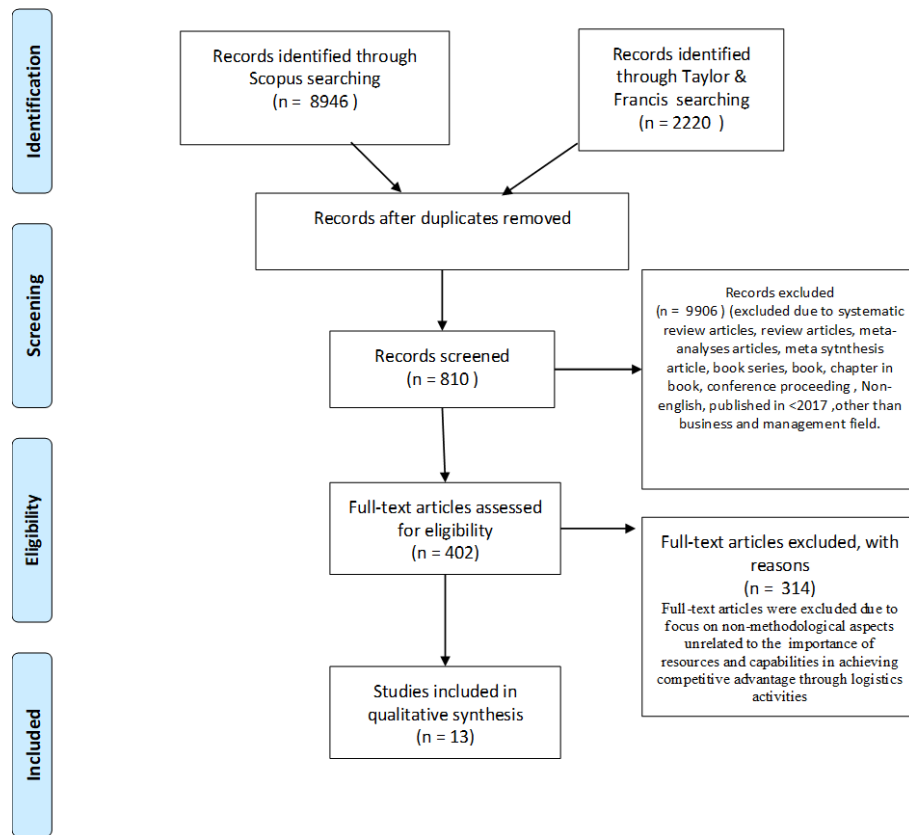
Figure 1. The flow of the SLR process

6. Findings

The result reviewed themes divided into capabilities, knowledge sharing, relational resources, cooperation, technology, resources, and trust. Table 3 shows the thematic analysis. All figures and tables should be referred to in the text and numbered in the order in which they are mentioned.

Table 3. Thematic Analysis

Studies	Findings
Jen et al. (2020).	Knowledge sharing
Manikas et al. (2023)	Capabilities
Song et al. (2022).	Capabilities
Ding and Jie (2021).	Relational resources
Accorsi et al. (2018)	Cooperative
Haag et al. (2019).	Capabilities
Lee et al. (2018).	Technology
Monferrer et al. (2021)	Capabilities
Elia et al. (2021).	Resources
Cherbib et al. (2021)	Collaborative
Prataviera et al. (2023)	Trust
Nandi et al. (2020)	Capabilities
Lin et al. (2021).	Resources

A total of five studies focused on Asia (Ding & Jie, 2021; Jen et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2021; Song et al., 2022), six studies focused on the Europe region (Accorsi et al., 2018; Cherbib et al., 2021; Elia et al., 2021; Haag et al., 2019; Monferrer et al., 2021; Prataviera et al., 2023), while resting of the studies focused in United Arab Emirates and a using Nexis Uni database (Manikas et al., 2023; Nandi et al., 2020). Furthermore, six of these studies employed quantitative method (Ding & Jie, 2021; Elia et al., 2021; Jen et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2021; Manikas et al., 2023; Monferrer et al., 2021), remaining seven studies used qualitative method (Accorsi et al., 2018; Cherbib et al., 2021; Haag et al., 2019; Nandi et al., 2020; Prataviera et al., 2023) and mixed-mode method (Song et al., 2022) respectively. Regarding years of publishing, two articles were published in 2018; only one was published in 2019; three papers were published in 2020, then moderately increased in 2021, where five articles were published and in 2022, only two articles related to this study area were published. A review source from two databases has resulted in 13 resources and capabilities in the retail landscape. Within the scope of the review, eight themes emerged in this study: knowledge sharing, resources, capabilities, relational resources, collaboration, cooperation, trust, and technology. All these themes are interrelated to this article as they are the elements of resources and capabilities. The findings show 13 articles, which entail contributions regarding the importance of resources and capabilities as tools for surviving in a highly dynamic industry. The results are further described in Table 4.

Table 4. The identification of the importance of resources and capabilities

Author(s) year	Discussion
Jen et al. (2020).	Intangible resources in the form of knowledge sharing across the parties in the logistics process enhancing the competitiveness
Manikas et al. (2023)	The organisation's capabilities need to be re-aligned to suit the current demand of the dynamic industry.
Song et al. (2022)	Capabilities are essential for retailers when facing technology in logistics activities.
Ding and Jie (2021)	The logistics process's efficiency is enhanced by intangible resources, relational resources, especially trust, and information sharing.
Accorsi et al. (2018)	Efficient information sharing amongst the logistics activities members increases the retailers' competitiveness.
Haag et al. (2019)	The internal resources led to the retailers' capabilities to compete internationally, creating a competitive advantage.
Lee et al. (2018)	Knowledge sharing regarding technology transfer between the parties in the logistics activities is the resource that will create competitiveness for the retailers.
Monferrer et al. (2021)	Higher performance will be gained once the organisation can exploit knowledge through innovation capabilities.
Elia et al. (2021)	Digital resources, technologies, and capabilities improve the competitiveness of the organisation.
Cherbib et al. (2021)	The collaboration between the partners enhances the learning capabilities of the organisation.
Prataviera et al. (2023)	The logistics activities' efficiency can be improved through good relationships, mutual trust and communication among the logistics partners.
Nandi et al. (2020)	Implementing blockchain technology can enhance operational-level capabilities efficiency in terms of time and cost.
Lin et al. (2021)	Efficient management of internal and external resources leads to better performance of the organisation.

Retailers must manage their resources efficiently and empower technology to become more competitive (Bilgihan & Wang, 2016). Hence, flexibility is essential in responsiveness toward any resource changes, while collaboration is needed to support the retailers adapting to the transformation capability, especially during digitalisation (Song et al., 2022). Trust is crucial in managing the resources along the logistics process as it will contribute to the retailers' performance (Prataviera et al., 2023). In addition, it will significantly encourage knowledge sharing across the parties (Jen et al., 2020). The resources in terms of relational resources like trust and information sharing significantly contribute to the efficiency of the logistics activities (Ding & Jie, 2021). Adopting efficient relationships with the parties involved in logistics activities is beneficial to retailers, especially in terms of cost efficiency (Accorsi et al., 2018). A past empirical study showed that multinational companies gain more comprehensive benefits in terms of resources than local companies because they collaborate with more partners, giving them an added advantage in terms of resources (Cherbib et al., 2021). However, it depends on the quality of the resources instead of the quantity. In short, retailers need to acquire resources and capabilities to achieve a competitive advantage (Elia et al., 2021). To adapt to the highly competitive industry, retailers must effectively allocate internal and external resources to improve logistics activities, bringing the retailer's competitiveness (Lin et al., 2021).

Apart from the resources, the retailers must also realign their logistics capabilities to suit the industry's current demand (Manikas et al., 2023). The resources and capabilities must be blended to achieve a competitive advantage (Haag et al., 2019). The core competencies of the retailers can be developed through collaboration as the retailers in developing countries are increasingly seeking cooperation to acquire R&D resources to create and maintain their competitive advantage (Lee et al., 2018). The previous study showed that exploratory capabilities could contribute to better performance through innovation capability (Monferrer et al., 2021). As per past studies, blockchain technology can improve operational ability, which provides much value to retailers in terms of cost and time saving, flexibility, and process improvement (Nandi et al., 2020).

7. Conclusion

Much remains to be discovered on the role of resources and capabilities in logistics activities that contribute to the retailers' competitive advantage. Accordingly, attention needs to be given to the several areas of study. In this review, six articles are quantitative studies; only one study used a mixed method approach, while the remaining six were entirely qualitative. In sum, it is recommended for future studies to conduct more qualitative study designs. A qualitative study design provides in-depth analysis and detailed explanations of the role of resources and capabilities in retail logistics activities. Qualitative review results in better transparency and an increased ability to critically assess rigorous review methods, reflecting new and diverse systematic approaches to research synthesis (Berrang-Ford et al., 2015).

In filling the gap, there is room for developing a standard guideline to support searching efforts on evidence based on the importance of resources and capabilities in logistics activity that determine the retailer's competitive advantage. As for these studies, it is recommended to have the following points:

i. Research question that leads the review's objective

ii. Methodology;

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    a. The review can be based on a conceptual approach as a guidance

    b. Resources – justification, and description of the databases used for the article searching

    c. Inclusion and exclusion criteria- explaining the selection criteria used to find suitable articles in the systematic review process

    d. Systematic Review Process

        i. Identification – description of the keywords used to retrieve articles from the database

        ii. Screening – explaining the exclusive of some articles that have not met the criteria set in the exclusion level

        iii. Eligibility – selected articles will be reviewed thoroughly, and any articles that do not meet the criteria will be removed

iv. Analysis and presentation of the result

    a. Analysis method.'

        i. Most studies depend on electronic keyword searching, as this is the best method for searching for a systematic review. Nonetheless, several complementary methods can be considered in search efforts (Tsafnat et al., 2014; Wohlin, 2014). One of the methods that can be regarded is citation tracking. It refers to identifying related articles based on the studied papers. This technique allows the researcher to flow research leads forward and backward in time. In addition, the search result can also be enriched as it might detect additional publications that cannot be identified via standard database searches due to the vocabulary constraints of a search strategy or bibliographic record.

7.1. Future Direction

This SLR seeks to answer the research question by adopting an SLR using PRISMA. This study contributes in a few ways. First, it has highlighted the functions of the resources and capabilities of the retailers. The authors have identified capabilities, knowledge sharing, relational resources, cooperation, technology, resources, and trust as the themes of this review. The review is from 2017 to 2022, with a focus on research. The findings reveal that resources and capabilities are required in an efficient logistics process, which can create value for Malaysian retailers. Second, the study identifies efficient management; resources and capabilities between all the parties in the logistics process are necessary as they will bring the retailers' competitiveness. Lastly, the retailers must primarily focus on the managerial and organisational aspects to leverage the resources and capabilities in their logistics activities. Identifying the importance of resources and capabilities would assist retailers in competitive advantage. Hence, this study can be followed by empirical studies to yield new and valuable insights. Moreover, this study will show quick reference for the retail players to remove any potential constraints in efficiently managing the resources and capabilities.

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