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Economic intelligence as a mechanism to achieve competitive advantage in economic business
An empirical study of the NAFTAL commercial agency mascara

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Abstract ;(

In recent decades, economic institutions have paid extensive attention to the term economic intelligence in an effort to ensure their continuity and maintain their existence, in light of the competition witnessed in the market. To keep pace with this competition, economic institutions had to activate economic intelligence, which may allow them to create added value, enhance competitive advantage, and develop and improve their strategy by applying elements of economic intelligence. This is what our scientific study reached. Accordingly, the study aimed to identify the role of economic intelligence in achieving competitive advantage, through a study sample consisting of 31 employees at the Naftal Commercial Agency in Mascara. The most important results were the existence of a correlation at a statistical significance level of less than (0.05) between economic intelligence and achieving competitive advantage

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1. *Introduction*

The first subtitle opens with an introduction that presents the specific problem under study and describes the research strategy. The first subtitle opens with an introduction that presents the specific problem under study and describes the research strategy

The world is witnessing rapid economic changes that are difficult to keep up with, leading to an ever-increasing demand for information. This has accelerated the development of new products, methods, and technologies, intensifying competition in the markets. Accordingly, recent studies have shown that the past decade has witnessed a massive flow of information, equivalent to that experienced by humanity in previous centuries. The knowledge economy has posed unprecedented challenges to economic institutions, particularly with the adoption of information and communications technology, which has contributed to development and innovation. The future of institutions no longer depends on their access to information, but rather on how they exploit it. This is the cornerstone of the term "economic intelligence," which has helped economic institutions achieve their goals, enhance their competitiveness, and maintain their survival and continuity.

Economic institutions in Algeria face numerous challenges, prompting them to seek competitive advantages to address them. They exploit any information that enables them to access valuable resources to achieve this distinction by providing modern and innovative products that optimally meet consumer needs. This takes into account the operating environment of economic institutions to create the competitive advantage they seek, with the goal of increasing their market share and strengthening their competitive position, In addition to achieving this competitive advantage, economic institutions continually strive to achieve sustainability and development by exploring new and innovative ways to compete in their markets. This enables them to keep pace with changes and fluctuations in the Algerian and global markets amidst intense competition.

Thus, the economic institution increases opportunities and reduces threats associated with a competitive market. Accordingly, the research problem is formulated as follows:

How economic intelligence can contribute to achieving competitive advantage on Algerian economic business.

study hypothesis :

There is a significant correlation at a significance level less than (0.05) between economic intelligence and competitive advantage from employees view point of Naftal commercial agency Mascara.

study Importance :

Demonstrating the ability of economic intelligence to support the competitive advantage of economic institutions.

- Identifying the most important obstacles preventing economic intelligence from achieving a competitive advantage at the level of the institution under study, Naftal Trading Agency, Mascara.
- Enriching the research by understanding economic intelligence and clarifying its most influential aspects, to achieve a competitive advantage in the economic institution under study.
- Identifying the most important points to consider in the study to establish a strong link between the elements of economic intelligence to enhance the competitiveness of economic institutions.

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study Objectives :

- Identify the extent of application of economic intelligence and its components (within the Mascara naftal Trading Agency).
- Study competitive advantage and how to achieve it within the agency.
- Measure the extent to which economic intelligence is linked to achieving competitive advantage within the mascara naftal Trading Agency.

Previous studies:

- *(mohammedsalamaabourached , 2021):* (محمد سلامة أبو رشد، 2021)

This study aims to measure the impact of economic intelligence on achieving competitive advantage within the Union of Health Work Committees (Palestine), and to determine the extent of the relationship between the dimensions of economic intelligence and achieving competitive advantage from the perspective of employees within the organization. The descriptive analytical approach was used in the study, and data was collected through a questionnaire distributed within the Union of Health Work Committees, targeting its employees in Palestine. The study population consisted of 68 employees at administrative levels, with 96% of the questionnaires returned. The study found a positive relationship between economic intelligence and achieving competitive advantage, and an impact of economic intelligence on achieving competitive advantage, according to employees in management, through the influence of the dimensions of strategic vigilance and the policy of pressure and influence.

- *(bouhacene et bouacha, 2019) :* (بوحسان و بوعشة، 2019)

This study aims to understand how economic intelligence contributes to enhancing the competitive advantage of economic institutions, while ensuring their survival, continuity, and profitability. The researcher adopted a descriptive and analytical approach in the French experience (presenting the Total Group's experience). The study concluded that, although it is difficult to analyze and measure the direct contribution of economic intelligence to enhancing the competitive advantage of institutions, this can only be achieved by providing available strategic information to continuously enhance and maintain competitive advantage, and by innovating to achieve competitiveness at the local and global levels.

- (adaobi, 2018)

The study aimed to determine the impact of competitive intelligence on knowledge technology within an industrial organization, and how innovation enhances competitive advantage in economic institutions (Nigeria). The researcher adopted the descriptive approach in the theoretical aspect, and the analytical approach in the applied aspect. The study population consisted of 1,258 individuals, and 303 samples were identified using a statistical significance level formula with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. Questionnaires and interviews were used as study tools. Of the 303 questionnaires distributed, 283 were retrieved. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson's correlation coefficient and simple linear regression. The results showed that economic intelligence significantly impacts technological knowledge in Nigerian manufacturing firms, creating a competitive advantage.

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2. *Conceptual approach*

2.1. Definition of economic intelligence:

Economic intelligence is a broad term with no fixed definition. Its concept has evolved over the years, and several terms fall under it, such as business intelligence and competitive intelligence.

Definition by Luhn: It is a means of communication that benefits organizations. In other words, it is a strategic intelligence system. It can be defined as the ability to understand interconnected relationships in the internal and external environment to guide decisions according to the desired goal. (هروم و بوخمخم، 2019، صفحة 196)

Wilsinski defined: it in his book Organizational Intelligence in 1967 as an activity that allows for the generation of knowledge, which helps achieve the economic and strategic goals of the organization, and also works to store and produce it in a systematic manner. (بودارمة، 2018، صفحة 428)

Economic intelligence is defined as allowing access to available information and data, exploiting them at the lowest cost, and analyzing them for timely decision-making. Therefore, it is considered the basis for creating and enhancing competitive advantage. (خالد أحمد، 2019، صفحة 130)

2.2. *Characteristics of economic intelligence:*

This term is distinguished from other terms, and among the most important characteristics of economic intelligence, we mention the following: (محمد الزبيدي، 2017، الصفحات 36-37)

- Coordinating economic intelligence across various knowledge sources.
- Building strong, interconnected relationships between various departments (central, local, university, and economic institutions) to access and exchange information.
- Maintaining the confidentiality of information and data when published, legally searching for them, and preventing espionage.
- Relying on pressure and influence within the company's environment (external and internal).
- Employing tactical and strategic performance to access critical information to achieve a competitive advantage when making decisions.
- Characterized by effective and strong management that coordinates the efforts of all relevant economic stakeholders.

2.3. *Elements of economic intelligence:*

2.3.1. *Strategic Vigilance:* This vigilance enables an economic institution to understand its competitive environment within the same activity by monitoring and updating information about potential competitors and their activities. This provides a typical picture of its competitors. Based on this, it plans and implements strategies to seize opportunities and avoid threats in the competitive context. (بوحسان و بوعشة، 2019، صفحة 168)

2.3.2. *Protection and security of information:* Physical protection of information within an organization, maintaining its security, and securing information and its assets, in particular, includes reviewing threats and vulnerabilities and educating employees about preventive measures consistent with the organization's strategy. This includes risks to information systems and their security. (رقامي، 2015، الصفحات 185-186)

3.3.3 *Impact:* This policy focuses on the use of information in the best possible way, which enables the business to work on its environment to make it more streamlined to achieve strategic

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goals, and the impact has several means, the most important of which is the impact through communication and information technology and this for the purpose of influencing the consumer, and influencing through thinking the so-called influence on opinion leaders, and there is an impact through pressure. (خوالد و بوزرب، 2017، صفحة 41)

3. *Empirical study : The role of economic intelligence in creating competitive advantage within the economic business- a case study - Commercial Agency Naftal Camp:*

3.1. *Summary presentation of Naftal:*

Naftal is the National Company for Marketing and Distribution of Petroleum Products, a joint-stock company with a capital of 15,650,000,000.00 DZD. The Naftal commercial branch in the Mascara province exists to market and facilitate the distribution process within the province. The distribution unit was established in 1985 with the aim of simplifying, expanding, and making petroleum products accessible to customers, meeting their various needs, and breaking their isolat

3.2. *Population and sample of the study:*

The study population consisted of all employees of the commercial branch management, the distribution center, the authorized sales points, and the stations affiliated with Naftal, totaling 76 employees. Among them, 41 were part of the Naftal Mascara commercial branch management, 15 were part of the distribution center affiliated with the branch, and the rest were distributed across the sales points and affiliated stations. The sample size studied was 31 employees from this population, divided into 22 males and 9 females. A total of 38 questionnaires were distributed in the last quarter of 2023, and 31 were returned and used for the study.

3.3. *Study variables and methodology:*

The independent study variable was represented in economic intelligence, and the dependent variable was represented in the competitive advantage, so that it is necessary to identify the extent to which the independent variable contributes to the direction of the dependent variable.

As for the methodology of the applied study, the method of statistical analysis of data was adopted using the statistical package (SPSS v.23), with the aim of testing hypotheses.

3.4. *The study tool and scale:* The main study tool was the questionnaire in order to collect the necessary data, and it covers all the variables of the study, and the Likert five-point scale was adopted to measure the opinions of the target sample in order to facilitate its understanding and balance its scores, and the responses of the sample were translated within it as follows:

Table 1. Likert five-point scale

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Direction
Score	1	2	3	4	5
Relative Importance of the Mean Score	1-1.8	1.8-2.6	2.6-3.4	2.4- 4.2	4.2-5

Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS output.

The questionnaire included 28 items distributed on two axes, and the following table illustrates this:

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Table 2. Questionnaire Items

Axes	Dimensions	Variables	Number of Items
First Axis	Strategic Vigilance	Independent	07 items
	information Security		07 items
	influence		06 items
First Axis Overall: Economic Intelligence			20 items
Second Axis	Competitive Advantage	Dependent	08 items
Questionnaire Overall			28 items

Source: Prepared by researchers based on the questionnaire.

3.5. *study tool Stability:* Stability means the stability of the scale and not contradicting with itself, that is, the scale gives the same results with a probability equal to the value of the coefficient if it is reapplied to the same sample. The instrument is considered constant when it achieves the acceptable stability coefficient of minimum (0.70).

Table 3. alpha Cronbach coefficient

Variables	alpha Cronbach
Strategic Vigilance	0.820
information Security	0.737
influence	0.712
First Axis Overall: Economic Intelligence	0.884
Second Axis: Competitive Advantage	0.794
Questionnaire Overall	0.899

Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS output.

Accordingly to table 03, the value of the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the first axis "economic intelligence" (0.884), which is a strong stability coefficient for the minimum, and the second axis "competitive advantage" was (0.794), and these results indicate a strong stability coefficient for the study tool.

Therefore, the total stability coefficient of the resolution was (0.899), which indicates a very strong stability between the axes of the resolution since the minimum stability coefficient ratio is (0.70).

3.6. *Statistical description of the study population:*

The statistical description of the demographic data of the study population members is shown in the following table:

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Table 4. demographic data

Variable		Number	%	Variable		Number	%
Gender	Male	22	71%	Age (years)	Under 30	4	12.4 %
	Female	9	29%		30 – 40	13	41.9 %
Educational Level	Baccalaureate	1	3.2%		40 – 50	9	29%
	Bachelor's	14	45.2%		Over 50	5	16.1 %
	Master's	1	3.2%	Employment Duration (years)	Under 5	5	16.1 %
	Postgraduate	7	22.6%		5 – 10	5	16.1 %
	Senior Technician	4	12.9%		10 – 20	11	35.5 %
	Other	4	12.9%		Over 20	10	32.3 %
Job Position	Head of Department	4	12.9%				
	Branch Manager	2	6.5%				
	Station Manager	4	12.9%				
	Employee	21	67.7%				

Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS output

The demographic data of the respondents reveals a predominantly male workforce (71%) with a majority aged between 30-40 years (41.9%) and a significant portion holding Bachelor's degrees (45.2%). Most employees have over a decade of work experience, with 35.5% having 10-20 years and 32.3% having over 20 years. The majority hold non-managerial positions (67.7%), indicating a broad representation across different organizational levels. This diverse sample provides valuable insights into the workforce's characteristics, crucial for understanding the study's findings.

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3.7. *Results of statistical analysis of the dimensions and axes of the study:*

Table 4. Dimensions and axes of the study

Descriptive Measures of Study Variables	Dimensions and Axes of the Study				
Measure	Mean	Relative Weight	Standard Deviation	Rank	Agreement Level
First Dimension: Strategic Vigilance	3.8617	77.23%	0.5779	2	Agree
Second Dimension: Information Security	4.9447	98.89%	0.5053	1	Strongly Agree
Third Dimension: Influence	3.7258	74.51%	0.6313	3	Agree
First Axis: Economic Intelligence	4.1774	83.54%	0.5682	---	Agree
Second Axis: Competitive Advantage	4.3266	86.53%	0.4421	-----	Strongly Agree

Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS output

The analysis reveals that the dimension of Information Security has the highest level of agreement, with a mean of 4.9447 and a relative weight of 98.89%, indicating a strong consensus among respondents. Strategic Vigilance and Influence dimensions also show substantial agreement, with means of 3.8617 and 3.7258, respectively. The overall mean for Economic Intelligence is 4.1774, reflecting a high level of agreement, while Competitive Advantage scores even higher, with a mean of 4.3266, indicating strong agreement and highlighting its importance to the respondents.

3.8. *Testing the hypotheses of the study:*

Hypotheses can be verified using the Pearson correlation coefficient test to measure the relationship between the independent variable "economic intelligence" with its dimensions (strategic vigilance, protection and security of information, influence) and the dependent variable "competitive advantage", so that the null hypothesis is tested, which assumes that there is no statistically significant relationship between economic intelligence and achieving competitive advantage from the point of view of the employees of the commercial agency Naftal Mascara, against the alternative hypothesis that assumes a statistically significant relationship between economic intelligence and competitive advantage, and based on the result of The test we can reject or adopt the hypothesis for its validity through the level of significance, and on this the alternative hypothesis is accepted if the level of significance is less than (0.05) and the test is significant, statistically significant. We accept the null hypothesis if the test value is greater than (0.05), which proves that there is no relationship between the two variables, and Table (5) shows the results of the test of the main hypothesis.

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Table 5. Results of the EI/Competitive Advantage Correlation Test using Pearson coefficient

Study Axes		Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Independent Variable	First Dimension: Strategic Vigilance	0.278	0.130
	Second Dimension: Information Security	0.472**	0.007
	Third Dimension: Influence	0.609**	0.000
Overall Score of Independent Variable "Economic Intelligence"		0.519**	0.003

** Statistically significant at 0.01.

Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS output

Through Table 05, which shows the results of the relationship between economic intelligence and achieving competitive advantage from the point of view of the employees of the commercial agency Naftal Mascara, and therefore we conclude that there is a positive correlation between economic intelligence and achieving competitive advantage from the point of view of the employees of the commercial agency Naftal Mascara, where the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient was (0.519) with a level of significance (0.003), which is less (0.01) and (0.05), and this indicates a strong correlation between economic intelligence and achieving the competitive advantage of the business under study.

This result confirms the acceptance of the main hypothesis: "there is a statistically significant correlation at a significance level less than (0.05) between economic intelligence and achieving competitive advantage from the point of view of the employees of the commercial agency Naftal Mascara".

3.9. Analysis of the results of the test of the relationship between the dimensions of economic intelligence and achieving competitive advantage using Pearson's correlation coefficient:

- There is no correlation between the first dimension "strategic vigilance" and the achievement of competitive advantage from the point of view of the employees of the commercial agency Naftal Camp, where the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient (0.278) with a level of significance (0.130) which is greater than (0.05) and this indicates the lack of correlation between strategic vigilance and the achievement of competitive advantage that allows raising its competitiveness in the desired manner This may be due to the lack of periodic close monitoring of the information obtained from the external environment and the absence of a cell for strategic vigilance at the level of Commercial Agency Naftal Camp.

- There is a positive correlation between the second dimension "protection and security of information" and the achievement of competitive advantage from the point of view of the employees of the commercial agency Naftal Mascara, where the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient (0.472) with a level of significance (0.007) which is less (0.01) and this indicates a

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strong correlation between economic intelligence and achieving the competitive advantage of the business under study, and is due to the presenceof the necessary protection through technical security by controlling access to the network and means of safer protection of information such asCopying and backup, antivirus system, use of network programs, may also be attributed to the organization's legal protection, which allows it to develop its products as well as its competitors.

- There is a positive correlation between the third dimension "influence" and achieving competitive advantage from the point of view of the employees of the commercial agency Naftal Mascara, where the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient (0.609) with a level of significance (0.000) which is less (0.01) and this indicates a strong correlation between economic intelligence and achieving the competitive advantage of the business under study, and this is due to the business's possession of a digital communications strategy to influence its competitors (blogs, forums and social networks), and to Means to maintain its digital reputation in the event of attack, enabling the organization to attract new customers and create competitiveness.
- From it, it was found that there is a clear correlation between the dimensions of "protection and security of information" and "influence" in competitive advantage, due to the policies adopted by the business to reach competitive advantage.

4. *CONCLUSION*

The matter of achieving the business of competitive advantage is necessary to ensure survival, continuity and maximize its prosperity, but achieving this advantage in light of the rapid changes that the world is witnessing is dependent on economic intelligence since of its ability to enhance and raise competitive advantage. the results of our applied study to know the role of economic intelligence in achieving competitive advantage through the statistical study of a group of employees of the commercial agency Naftal Mascara can be as follows:

- The existence of a positive correlation between economic intelligence and achieving competitive advantage from the point of view of the business's employees, where the relative weight of the economic intelligence variable was 83.54%, and the relative weight of the competitive advantage variable was 86.53%, and this shows the extent to which economic intelligence contributes to achieving competitive advantage away from other variables.
- Economic intelligence plays an effective role in creating competitive advantage within the economic business and this is by interpreting the outputs of our research study on the applied side.
- The existence of a strong impact of economic intelligence in achieving competitive advantage, and this was manifested in the dimensions of "protection and security of information" and "influence", but after strategic vigilance, it was not effective as required in achieving competitive advantage, due to the lack of close periodic monitoring of information obtained from the external environment and the failure to establish a strategic vigilance cell at the level of the commercial agency Naftal camp.
- Despite the lack of full knowledge of the concept of economic intelligence in the business, the business under study is aware that it practices a large part of its techniques, but without more control over the stages and tools of each dimension, and the practice of economic intelligence remains without total focus on it.
- The business enjoys effective protection of its strategic information as well as at the technical level.
- The impact of the business on the competition market by one of the most important means of economic intelligence, through information technology, communication and innovation by introducing new products and services in the market and on its competitors as well

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- Economic intelligence is a combination of information-based strategies that drive the R&D cell for innovation, which gives preference to achieving its competitive advantage over the rest of the business in the same field.

Recommendations:

- Opening a strategic vigilance cell within all branches of Naftal Corporation that allows raising the capacity of research and development and following up the capabilities of the competitor within the vicinity of the commercial agency.
- In order to consolidate the applications of economic intelligence, it is necessary to move towards the knowledge economy and investment in information, as the world is witnessing rapid developments based on knowledge.
- Working to embody the dimension of strategic vigilance in all its features at the level of the agency has no great profitability, so that it is considered the most important part of economic intelligence and its application in a necessary manner that enables increased competitiveness.

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