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**A REVIEW OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**  
**by mgr Patricia Orelly**  
**entitled “*Building competitive advantage in Bangladesh’s FMCG sector – the perspective of customers*”**

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This review includes the following contents:

1. Selection of the research issues and title of the dissertation
2. Objectives of the study and research hypotheses
3. Research methods
4. Layout and content of the dissertation
5. Research findings
6. The formal aspect of the dissertation
7. Final conclusion

**1. Selection of the research issues and title of the dissertation**

The research concerning the process of building competitive advantage regarding a specific market constitutes an interesting, and at the same time scientifically significant matter, however methodologically complex. The latter results to a large degree from the specificity of individual markets (domestic and sectoral) which usually provide different conditions for their functioning. This creates certain problems both at the stage of preparing the research, conducting it and in drawing conclusions.

The doctoral dissertation written by mgr Patricia Orelly can be acknowledged as a work addressing a very pertinent aspect of this problem which is building competitive advantage in the FMCG sector based on the example of Bangladesh. The author placed particular emphasis on presenting this issue from the perspective of consumers, while recognising the widely interpreted impact of national culture as the basis for building this

advantage. One could risk the statement that in this respect the paper fills the existing research gap. Bangladesh, also from the Polish viewpoint, constitutes an attractive market due to its size and growth potential. It should be added that the title of the dissertation was formulated in an unambiguous way – clearly and precisely defining the scope of the research.

## **2. Objectives of the study and research hypotheses**

The author established the primary aim of her dissertation as identifying the conditions which influence the construction of competitive advantage in the FMCG sector in Bangladesh and determining their significance in this process. At the same time, the study placed particular emphasis on the impact of cultural factors, ethnocentrism and significance of a brand. Another important aspect was defining the role of an appropriately prepared strategy in achieving a competitive advantage, which was shown in five detailed objectives described by the author (see pp. 5-6).

Four research hypotheses were formulated in the dissertation, addressing cultural aspects, ethnocentrism, competitive advantage and brand (pp. 6-7), and then verified in the chapters that follow.

The author also posed ten research questions, the first four of which concern ethnocentrism in Bangladesh, local cultural considerations, the strategy of competitive advantage and brand. The other six are linked with instruments of competitiveness and CRM. Thus the dissertation offers methodological abundance, however is this really necessary? This is a matter for discussion since there exist diverse approaches to this issue. In the opinion of this reviewer, it is important that the hypotheses and the research questions are well matched, and the latter provide an elaboration of the hypotheses posed.

## **3. Research methods**

From the methodological viewpoint, the study was based on the 6-step Nieuwenhuizen and Rossouw model adapted by the author, which in itself does not leave any doubt, and diverse research methods were employed: analysis of the subject literature, synthesis, statistical methods and also a case study, whilst the methodology of the primary research was based on direct interview for the sample of n=100 consumers aged 18-55. The survey was carried out in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh in September 2019, using the services of a local company, Kantar. The survey questionnaire contained questions related to competitive advantage, ethnocentrism, cultural values, expectations regarding brands and instruments for building competitive advantage (see pp.156-159); its construction is correct.

#### **4. Layout and content of the dissertation**

The dissertation numbers 167 pages, and comprises six chapters, an introduction, conclusions and recommendations, bibliography, list of tables and figures, and an annex. The organisation of the content can be acknowledged as correct, the order and subject matter of the individual chapters constitute a logical composition, even though the placing of Chapter IV in relation to the whole structure may be disputable.

##### **Chapter I: The concept of competitiveness and competitive advantage**

The dissertation starts with a theoretical chapter dedicated to competitiveness and to competitive advantage. The author focused not only on the matter of definitions, but also described the issue of competitive advantage viewed from the level of the sector and the company itself. In the context of the subsequent chapters such a perspective can be seen as justified. Another valuable approach to the issue of competitiveness was to link it with company resources. The chapter concludes with deliberations about types of competitive advantage resulting from the characteristics of the environment in which a company operates. It should be pointed out that this part of the dissertation is based on very solid theoretical grounding; the author referred to many prominent authorities in this area such as Flanagan, Hill, Jones, Porter and Smith.

##### **Chapter II: Influencing competitive advantage: impacts and instruments**

The second chapter describes the impact of national culture and of specific instruments on competitive advantage. The issue is shown from the consumer perspective, consistently followed by the author. Section 2.1. presents the influence of customer behaviour on building competitive advantage in reference to the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede and Schwartz, while Section 2.3 showed the instruments of competitive advantage in the typically marketing approach, namely 4P. The author skilfully addressed the issue through the prism of cultural values. Section 2.4 constitutes a particularly valuable part of this chapter demonstrating the importance of the concept of CRM for building competitive advantage. This part of the dissertation was also based on a solid theoretical base. It is clear that the author has carried out both an extensive review of the international literature and its critical analysis, in general drawing correct conclusions.

##### **Chapter III: Conditions for conducting business activity in Bangladesh with particular emphasis on the FMCG sector.**

The chapter is dedicated to describing the conditions for conducting business activities in Bangladesh, with particular emphasis on the specificity of the FMCG sector. Whereas the construction of the chapter does not leave room for any significant reservations, yet certain doubts arise in connection with a highly concise approach to some of the issues, mainly regarding Section 3.3, The cultural values of Bangladesh, which provides merely the values of dimensions of culture according to the typology by Hofstede. It would seem that it omitted implications for business activity and reference to the limitations of the methodology used by Hofstede (although these are shown in a further part of the paper). Another problem can be also mentioned, namely that since in the theoretical part the author referred to the typologies by Hofstede and Schwartz (Section 2.1), the same perspective should have been used in Section 3.3., especially since the empirical part also makes reference to both these concepts.

#### **Chapter IV: Methodology of the dissertation**

Chapter IV is dedicated to the presentation of the approach to the research and the author's particular philosophy in this field, as well as devoting a significant amount of space to the process of research. The first section (4.1) presents mainly theoretical deliberations with reference to the international knowledge in this area, while Section 4.2 discusses aspects of the author's own research. This type of composition seems correct, yet another problem arises – should that part have actually appeared earlier in the paper? Above all this is due to the fact that many of the presented issues relate to the entire dissertation and not just to a single chapter of an empirical nature.

#### **Chapter V: Data results and relevant determinants of building competitive advantage in Bangladesh**

The fifth chapter is mostly centred on the presentation of the research results in order to verify the posed hypotheses and seek answers to the research questions. The author correctly started the chapter with information on the characteristics of the survey participants and values significant for consumer attitudes, however Section 5.1 is very compact, and thus it does not provide the full picture of the examined problem. For instance, if the income of the largest group of participants exceeds the level of 30 000 Tk, how does it relate to the average earnings? As far as the sociological and demographic aspects are concerned, the dissertation does not offer a complete view – there is a lack of issues connected with education and religion. If in the author's opinion such matters do not have any influence, an explanation

should be given. Section 5.2 is focused on cultural factors relevant for consumer behaviour in Bangladesh, identified based on the author's research. The factors were selected in line with the concepts of culture elaborated by Hofstede and Schwartz, and it is obvious that their examination is key in understanding consumer behaviour and decisions in Bangladesh. Importantly, the author also drew attention to certain limitations in both these concepts, which confirms her constructively critical approach to the studied matter. The analysis allowed to create a specific base for building competitive advantage and distinguishing preferable features in products offered on the Bangladeshi market.

#### **Chapter VI: The environment of the Bangladeshi FMCG sector for building competitive advantage**

In this chapter the author analysed the impact of conditions influencing the FMCG sector in Bangladesh in the context of building competitive advantage, concentrating on the instruments of building the advantage, understood in the study as the marketing mix and the concept of CRM. Thus, this is a marketing perspective, and therefore the author correctly adopted a broader approach to these issues, linking them with economic categories – such as the market, market communication and cultural considerations. The element of culture was extensively addressed especially in Section 6.2 which refers to CRM. However, at this point a critical comment can be made, namely that if this section actually analyses the role of CRM in building competitive advantage, should that issue have not been highlighted more in the theoretical part? Certainly, the author discusses it in the second chapter (Section 2.4), however in the opinion of this reviewer, the problem should be described more clearly. Naturally, it is understood that this is a matter of perspective, but this approach seems to be missing in the reviewed paper.

#### **5. Discussion, recommendations, and conclusion for building competitive advantage in Bangladesh's FMCG sector**

In this author's opinion, this constitutes the most interesting part of the work, demonstrating its value added. This is the real conclusion to the research process, also confirming the maturity of mgr Orelly's approach and her incisive views on the studied matters. An example is the identification of disputable areas. Is it an open matter for all? It seems that the author should be more restrained in the use of expressions such as "the market of Bangladesh" since the conducted research actually centred on its capital, Dhaka. Being completely aware of the problems linked with carrying out research in a country so distant geographically and

culturally, which the author had to face and which she mostly managed to overcome, it has to be said that Dhaka does not equal Bangladesh. As some fragments of the dissertation show that the author is aware of this difference, this could be merely a matter of semantics.

The recommendations formulated in the dissertation are logical and well-balanced. The conclusions show clearly that the author succeeded in identifying the factors serving to build competitive advantage in the FMCG segment in the studied market, and in showing their importance. This could prove to be of fundamental importance, for example in preparing an effective market entry strategy. However, what seems to be missing in this part is an attempt to present a certain vision of the future – even if very difficult and rather risky in times of the pandemic.

## **6. Research findings**

This reviewer is convinced that the research aims posed for this dissertation have been achieved. The four proposed hypotheses have been verified, and this certainly expands the knowledge about the functioning of the FMCG market in Bangladesh. This means primarily the identification of the most relevant cultural values (harmony, respect for tradition, success), demonstrating the importance of consumer ethnocentrism and of brands associated with quality. It should be pointed out that the conclusions resulting from the research conducted by the author of the dissertation can be used as an example of a specific domestic market and sector. The results may also be applied for practical purposes, above all in the case of businesses interested in entering the FMCG market in Bangladesh.

## **7. The formal aspect of the dissertation**

The formal aspect of the presented dissertation can be acknowledged as correct, even though some critical remarks also arise. The paper was edited with fair attention, which certainly benefits its perception, and the technical side is also well presented – in particular the included illustrations. However, the layout of the text and tables could be better organized, meaning the ‘gaps’ which occur in some places, e.g. pp. 107, 124 and 125. It seems that the use of colour in bar charts could help in their reading. Other small errors can also be indicated – in Figure 24, the summed up values arrive at 99 and not 100. The bibliography and the lists were compiled mostly correctly and do not prompt any major criticism, however the list of publications should also comprise their locations. Some reservations can be expressed in respect of the provided references. The author employed the Harvard method, but when referring to published books she does not include the relevant page number. Even if in many

academic centres this practice is allowed, it does not seem appropriate for studies such as a doctoral dissertation and it would be advisable to inform about the source giving the page number/s.

In writing her dissertation, the author used varied subject literature (196 titles) in English, German and Polish, and it should be noted that among those sources there were many publications dating from recent years.

The linguistic aspect of the dissertation is on the whole satisfactory, and the text is written in a clear and communicative way. Any small errors and minor semantic imperfections do not alter the positive opinion about the entire paper.

## **8. Final conclusion**

A comprehensive assessment of the dissertation is a complex task. On the one hand, it should be appreciated that the author took up in her dissertation rather difficult, yet also cognitively and empirically interesting subject matter. The issue of seeking sources of competitive advantage in the FMCG market in Bangladesh has great research potential, and at the same time offers significant possibilities of application. Despite some critical observations, the composition of the dissertation deserves a positive evaluation. Another advantage is its literature base. It is clear that the author has a good knowledge of the subject literature and can use it competently to conduct her own research and analyses.

On the other hand, it is also necessary to point out some technical and formal imperfections in the work. In some parts the contents are presented in an overly concise way. Referring to concrete information is absolutely not erroneous but sometimes can leave some doubts and a feeling of insufficiency. Some issues should be presented in a more detailed way, and in my opinion, this applies especially to some cultural aspects and building relations.

Nevertheless, in this reviewer's final opinion, the dissertation by mgr Patricia Orelly, entitled "*Building competitive advantage in Bangladesh's FMCG sector – the perspective of customers*" satisfies the substantive and formal requirements set for doctoral dissertations in the Act on Academic Degrees and Title and Degrees and Title in the Arts, and can be used as the basis of further doctoral procedure (discipline of economics and finance). Therefore, I request the acceptance of the doctoral dissertation by mgr Orelly and the admission to further stages of the process.



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