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Economic Intelligence and Competitive Advantage: A Case Study of Some Algerian Enterprises

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Economic Intelligence, Competitive Advantage, Strategic Vigilance, Algerian Enterprises, Knowledge Management, Economic Security, Strategic Decision-Making.

Abstract

This study explores the role of economic intelligence in achieving competitive advantage within Algerian enterprises, through a case study of selected national institutions. The research was conducted in response to the rapid global transformations that have compelled economic organizations to adopt new strategies based on information and knowledge rather than traditional material resources. Using a descriptive-analytical approach for the theoretical framework and a case study method for the practical aspect, the paper examines how economic intelligence contributes to building sustainable competitive advantages. The findings reveal that, despite facing technological and organizational challenges, Algerian enterprises are capable of leveraging economic intelligence mechanisms to collect, analyze, protect, and strategically utilize information in order to enhance strategic decision-making and market positioning. The study highlights the necessity of establishing strategic vigilance units and developing human resource competencies in this field, as these initiatives play a crucial role in improving institutional performance and strengthening the competitive standing of Algerian enterprises in a dynamic business environment.

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Introduction:

In recent years, there have been rapid and profound global changes that have had a significant impact on the future direction of the economy. The global economy has transformed into a small, competitive marketplace driven by technological and informational revolutions. This has led to an increase in competition among economic institutions. The rapid spread of information and communication technologies in a world characterized by intense competition has affected economic institutions in general, leading to significant developments in their economic and technological environments. Political, geographical, cultural and economic barriers between countries have diminished and markets across various nations have converged to form a unified global market. Consequently, economic institutions now face greater challenges in light of these developments. This situation is beginning to influence the management strategies of institutions that cannot cope with the competition. They find themselves compelled to keep pace with these new challenges and seek ways to ensure their survival and continuity in the markets. One notable outcome is the emergence of a new generation of non-political alliances consisting of economic conglomerates and mergers between institutions and countries. Information has become a strategic tool for aggregating and developing capital returns, shifting the focus away from material resources and towards manufacturing.

These necessities have led to the development of economic intelligence strategies, which have become essential for all geographical units, whether they are institutions, conglomerates or countries. These strategies fundamentally rely on obtaining accurate, complete, credible and high-quality information that is utilized well and in a timely manner to inform strategic decision-making, mitigate and prevent crises, and gain competitive advantages and strengthen market shares. This requires a qualitative leap from a quantity-driven economy to a quality-driven economy, particularly one that relies on knowledge. This has become imperative for improving the performance and effectiveness of institutions.

Economic intelligence is associated with the cognitive abilities required of managers and strategic thinkers, enabling them to think holistically about the future of the institution, confront uncertainty, and deal with the scarcity or limitation of information. This involves studying the demands of the surrounding environment and seeking the institution's strategic positioning by surpassing competitors.

The problem:

In light of these significant transformations, a fundamental issue has emerged concerning the ability of Algerian institutions to adopt economic intelligence as an effective means of improving their competitiveness. Algerian institutions face numerous internal and external challenges, including weak technological capabilities and an inability to process and utilise information effectively. Accordingly, the central issue of the research is:

How can economic intelligence be used to develop a strategy that achieves competitive advantage in the face of market dynamics and their challenges?

Research hypotheses:

To address this issue, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

1. Economic intelligence provides the right mechanisms to achieve competitive advantage.
2. Algerian institutions lack a clearly defined economic intelligence strategy.
3. Institutions can use strategic information to distinguish themselves from competitors.
4. Algerian institutions do not pay sufficient attention to protection (defensive support) and influence (offensive dimension).
5. Algerian institutions are capable of adapting their organisational methods to adopt economic intelligence as a strategic option.

Research motivations:

The reasons for choosing this topic are as follows:

1. The economic and social transformations imposed by economic globalisation necessitate institutions defining their methods and mechanisms to keep pace with current economic changes.
2. The challenging situation faced by Algerian institutions due to an absence of effective strategies.
3. The importance of economic intelligence in managing the competitive position of business organisations.

Importance of the study:

This research sheds light on economic intelligence as a means of enhancing the competitiveness of institutions, ensuring their continuity and increasing their market share. This necessitates institutions integrating this topic into their interests and collaborating with universities.

This will open a pathway for Algeria to become a proactive force characterised by effective analysis and foresight.

Objectives of the study:

1. Exploring how to use economic intelligence tools to gain a competitive advantage.
2. Establish a link or complementary relationship between economic intelligence and competitive advantage.
3. Highlighting the role of economic intelligence in identifying strategic information that constitutes a competitive advantage for institutions.

4. Investigate the strategies employed by Algerian institutions to achieve competitive advantage.

Methodology of the study:

We conducted a scientific and methodological analysis of how economic intelligence can be utilised to build a competitive advantage strategy amidst market challenges, and tested the validity of the proposed hypotheses. We followed a descriptive-analytical approach in most parts of the theoretical section, along with a case study of an Algerian institution.

For the theoretical aspect, we collected books in Arabic and French, as well as theses, journals, symposiums, conferences and internet resources.

For the practical aspect, we conducted a case study of an Algerian institution.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

1. Concept of Economic Intelligence:

First: Economic intelligence in language:

God favoured Adam over the angels by giving him intellect and honouring him by making him a vicegerent on Earth. The term 'intelligence' is mentioned in the Holy Quran, as in the verse: 'And I am sending to them with a gift, and I will see what the envoys bring back' (Quran, Surah An-Naml, Ayah 35). This refers to Bilqis's use of intelligence when she sent a gift to Prophet Suleiman (peace be upon him).

The purpose of the gift was to convince Solomon (peace be upon him) about her people and avoid conflict. In language, 'intelligence' signifies completeness, as in the phrase 'intelligence in the years', which implies total understanding. It also refers to the ability to comprehend quickly and accurately.

Ibn al-Qayyim defined intelligence as 'quick-wittedness and rapid understanding'. Ibn Sina described it as 'the power of intuition'. Intelligence encompasses the cognitive abilities an individual uses to confront new situations. This is reflected in behaviour that enables problem solving and adaptation to the environment, as well as the formation of mental concepts and learning.

Secondly, conceptually:

Given its importance, economic intelligence has attracted a great deal of attention, as evidenced by the many different definitions of it.

Definition by Harold Wilensky:

In his book *L'intelligence organisationnelle*, Harold first defined economic intelligence as follows: 'The activity of producing knowledge that serves the economic and strategic objectives of the organisation, collected and stored within a legal framework from known or open sources.'

Definition by Marter Henri:

In 1994, the working group at the General Directorate of Planning in France provided the first comprehensive definition of economic intelligence in Marter's report, defining it as 'a set of coordinated activities for researching, processing and disseminating useful information to economic agents and stakeholders, to help them formulate strategies, achieve the institution's objectives and improve its position in its competitive environment. These activities are conducted lawfully, ensuring optimal conditions of quality, time, and costs for the institution's assets.' (H. Marter, 1994, p. 11).

Definition by Revelle, C. (1998):

'Economic intelligence is the process of collecting, processing and disseminating information aimed at reducing uncertainty when making strategic decisions' (D. Amos, p. 02). (D. Amos, p. 2)

Christian Harbulot's definition:

He defined economic intelligence as 'the research and interpretation of available information aimed at determining the intentions of economic agents and understanding their capabilities'. It encompasses all monitoring processes in the competitive environment, distinguishing between traditional information based on the nature of its application. As it relates to open information, compliance with credibility and the identity of the active parties involved is required. All administrative staff participate in building an information culture and its characteristics, not just experts, because every national economy produces its own unique economic model (A. Filali, 2013, p. 27). (A. Filali, 2013, p. 27).

Alain Juillet's perspective:

The French official responsible for economic intelligence in 2005 stated that it is a governing behaviour that aims to control and protect strategic information in order to achieve competitive advantage and ensure the economic security of institutions, while also enhancing policy influence. (Jean Pierre, 2006, p. 5)

Michael Porter's definition:

A Harvard University professor who contributed to the development of the concept of economic intelligence stated that it relies on providing the right information to the right person at the right time. This enables them to make appropriate decisions and take optimal action, resulting in improvements to the institution's environment.

Philippe Baumard's definition:

He defined economic intelligence as ‘not just the art of monitoring, but the defensive and offensive application of information aimed at linking various domains and fields to serve the organisation’s tactical and strategic goals, acting as a bridge between its actions and knowledge’.

Definition by P. Bisson and J. C. Possin:

—Economic intelligence is the intensive management of strategic information in terms of its production, circulation, exploitation and protection. It is also the art of identifying opportunities and threats while ensuring information security and being prepared for the unexpected.¶

Elements of Economic Intelligence:

The economic system consists of three interconnected and integrated elements: strategic vigilance, security and influence.

1. Strategic Vigilance:

Strategic vigilance plays a comprehensive role in the intelligence system and can be summarised as follows:

- Anticipation: Forecasting competitors’ activities or changes in the environment.
- Discovery: identifying competitors and market opportunities.
- Monitoring: Observing product developments in the market, technological advancements or production methods.

Learning: understanding the characteristics of new markets and the successes and failures of competitors.

2. Protection:

The defensive aspect of economic intelligence involves protecting information. This is a priority because success lies not only in obtaining information, but also in protecting it in order to preserve the institution’s informational legacy and achieve economic security.

3. Influence:

This involves using information to enable the institution to improve its environment, leverage its resources, and achieve its strategic goals while countering adverse trends. Influencing strategies include communication campaigns aimed at consumers, utilising think tanks to influence opinion leaders and lobbying.

In addition to these elements, there are other components:

Competitiveness relies on research and development processes, enabling the institution to seize global market opportunities by identifying strategic interests and gathering private and public expertise and information.

- Communication and security: This involves preparing for and anticipating the vigilance of others, as well as equipping employees with knowledge, clarifying the content of internal dialogues, creating responses, and ensuring confidentiality in employee contracts.

The elements of economic intelligence for the state include:

- Ensuring strategic vigilance to facilitate decision-making processes for public economic agents.
- Supporting the competitiveness of institutions and their capacity to transfer technologies from research institutions, primarily for their own benefit.
- Guaranteeing the economic security of research institutions.

Considering the institution as a microcosm and an integral part of the state, it is evident that the elements of economic intelligence for the institution are similar to those for the state.

The importance of economic intelligence:

Due to numerous changes and the rapid exchange of information, the institution now operates in a dynamic and complex business environment, with intensified competition translating into an economic war. This underscores the urgent need to adopt economic intelligence, which is important for:

- providing protection against external threats;
- enabling the institution to seize opportunities from its competitors;
- helping the institution to adapt to new market rules.
- Helping the institution to formulate its future strategy and achieve its objectives by applying economic intelligence.
- Serving as a tool for development, innovation and differentiation by relying on and leading in the acquisition of information, as well as predicting market needs and reactions, such as the launch of new products, changes in legislation and laws, and the discovery of recent developments and technologies.
- Assisting the institution in achieving a competitive advantage and positioning itself in new markets.
- Enhancing overall satisfaction by improving techniques and development, thereby alleviating work pressure.
- Increasing organisational effectiveness by enhancing collective work capacity and improving communication to strengthen the relationship between management and employees.

Previous studies:

Local studies:

(Hajjaj, 2007) This study examined ways in which economic institutions could gain a competitive advantage, and the role of technological innovation in enhancing it. It concluded that competitive advantage is achieved by optimally exploiting tangible resources and competencies, enabling institutions to design and implement competitive strategies.

(Hamidouch, A., Doctoral Thesis, 2014) This research addressed the concept of economic intelligence in terms of understanding, establishing, embedding, and using it. It raised the issue of the conceptual boundaries of economic intelligence at state and organisational levels, taking an analytical approach to collecting and describing facts related to intelligence.

(Boussalem, A., & Assas, I., 2014) Titled *‘The Relationship of Strategic Vigilance as One of the Dimensions of Strategic Intelligence in Achieving Sustainable Competitive Advantage: A Field Study on Najma Telecommunications Company’*, this paper was presented at the Fourth National Conference on Information Systems, Strategic Vigilance and Economic Intelligence, held at the University of Oum El Bouaghi on 17-18 March 2014. The study examined strategic vigilance (technological, competitive and commercial) as an important dimension of strategic intelligence, investigating its relationship with achieving sustainable competitive advantage through a field study. Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, the study used a questionnaire to survey 66 employees from 22 Najma Telecommunications offices across the country. The findings were as follows:

- No statistically significant relationship was found between strategic vigilance and achieving competitive advantage for Najma Telecommunications.
- A statistically significant relationship was found between technological vigilance and achieving competitive advantage for Najma Telecommunications.
- No statistically significant relationship was found between the dimensions of commercial vigilance and technological competition, and achieving competitive advantage for Najma Telecommunications.

Finally, the study recommended that the company form a dedicated strategic intelligence unit to provide the necessary information to seize environmental opportunities and avoid risks, thereby achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

(Tabouch, K., & Zaatout, R. (2015). Master’s thesis.) This study aimed to highlight how economic intelligence can be applied to create a competitive advantage for institutions.

(Mghamouli, N., 2016, Doctoral Thesis): This study addressed the role of economic intelligence in enhancing the international competitiveness of Algerian economic institutions. A case study of Fertial in Annaba. It aimed to diagnose Algeria’s competitive situation and emphasise the need for institutions to focus on economic intelligence systems and integrate them to improve performance and strengthen their local and international competitive positions. The results showed a strong positive correlation at the 5% significance level between the economic system variables (strategic vigilance, protection of knowledge heritage, influence and pressure) and the competitiveness of the studied institution. This indicates that improving the application of the dimensions and principles of economic intelligence has a positive effect on the competitiveness of the institution.

(Dai, W., Doctoral Thesis, 2016): This study examined the feasibility of using economic intelligence policies to improve regional competitiveness. Aiming to shed light on the concept of economic intelligence, which has become essential due to rapid changes in the competitive environment, the study sought to provide an academic foundation for researching sustainable regional development. The study concluded that public and regional intervention to enhance regional competitiveness is a fundamental working method based on the components of economic intelligence. Furthermore, the national monitoring and foresight system lacks appreciation for strategic information at local and regional levels. The researcher employed a descriptive-analytical approach to present the theoretical aspects of the study variables, using SPSS 20 and an improved version of Excel for the practical side. A case study methodology and inductive approach were used to interpret the results.

(Kensa, M., Article in the Journal of Law and Human Sciences, Issue 20): This study aimed to highlight the role of human resources in developing and sustaining competitive advantage by identifying the importance of ethics and knowledge in this regard. It concluded that human capital is the most effective institutional resource and that knowledge is one of the most valuable contemporary institutional assets, while ethical values enhance competitive advantage by fostering relationships among individuals and, consequently, institutions.

(Bourich, 2019) This study addressed economic intelligence as a management approach to support strategic management in identifying threats and opportunities. The study examined the level of interest among managers of Algerian economic institutions, particularly Mobilis, in applying economic intelligence to activate the primary functions of strategic management in response to changes and transformations in their environment.

(Mohammedi S. and Ben Sifyan Z., 2020) This study examined economic intelligence practices in high-tech institutions by conducting a comparative study of several Algerian institutions. Based on the main hypothesis that

economic intelligence is practised to varying degrees in high-tech institutions, it raised the issue of how economic intelligence is practised in such institutions. The study relied on a descriptive-analytical methodology.

(Zarqout, 2020) discussed economic intelligence as a means of achieving competitive advantage and posed the question of how adopting economic intelligence models leads to achieving competitive advantage. This study took a descriptive-analytical approach.

(Rziq K. and Aqoun A.) This study examined the role of economic intelligence in achieving competitive advantage in economic organisations and addressed the question of the effectiveness of economic systems in qualifying economic organisations. The study concluded that:

Understanding the needs of information seekers is fundamental to economic intelligence.

Feedback is essential for any economic system to correct errors and deviations.

Some strategic and confidential information must be retained and protected.

Arab Studies:

(Shafiq, 2006/2007) This study aimed to address the issue of Maghreb institutions' applications in the field of economic intelligence. The study focused on a sample of nine Maghreb institutions that possess vigilance or economic intelligence units. The study concluded that each institution has its own characteristics (strengths and weaknesses) when it comes to applying the economic intelligence system. Most of the institutions that apply economic intelligence are sector leaders.

(Dahawi, 2008) examined the operational mechanism of economic intelligence, proposing it as a strategic leadership system for institutions and integrating it with administrative practices to serve the institution's strategy. The study examined seven major Tunisian institutions, measuring the strength of the relationship between the economic intelligence system and the improvement of the institutions' competitiveness through several axes: cultural, strategic, informational, individual, organisational and technological.

Foreign Studies:

(Teresa Garda, Emanuele Santos, Filipe Pinto, Maria Augusto and Carlos Silva) An article published in the Journal of Commerce, Economics and Finance in 2013 aimed to highlight the importance of business intelligence systems in helping small and medium-sized enterprises to gain a competitive advantage. The study concluded that, as the volume and quantity of information and data inside and outside institutions increases, business intelligence systems have become an essential approach for all institutions.

Statistical Analysis of Tables:

1. Reliability Statistics Table – First Questionnaire:

The results of the reliability analysis showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.967, reflecting a very high level of internal consistency among the 27 items in the first questionnaire. This result far exceeds the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 and indicates that the research tool is accurate and reliable for measuring economic intelligence. The high alpha coefficient also indicates that the questions are interrelated and all contribute to measuring the same conceptual dimension, instilling confidence in the later derived results.

Therefore, it can be concluded that this tool accurately reflects the reality of economic intelligence practices within the institutions under study, and that the targeted institution is sufficiently aware of the importance of information relating to customers, competitors and the external environment.

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	30	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	30	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics Table – Second Questionnaire:

For the second questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.954 for the 20 items. This indicates a high level of internal consistency and reliability. This demonstrates that the items measuring competitive advantage are interconnected and coherent, meaning the results genuinely reflect the institution's ability to build a sustainable competitive advantage.

The strong correlation between the items suggests that competitive advantage stems from the integration of various factors, such as service quality, cost reduction, product innovation, talent acquisition and geographical

location advantages, rather than a single element. Consequently, this research tool can be relied upon to evaluate the institution's success in achieving a strong competitive position.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.967	.985	27

Inter-item correlation matrix:

The inter-item correlation matrix revealed strong correlations between most variables, with the majority of correlation coefficients being positive and close to one. This suggests that the items collectively measure the same dimension, whether related to economic intelligence or competitive advantage. The absence of large negative values suggests that the items do not contradict each other, but rather support one another.

For instance, items related to gathering marketing and technological information are closely linked with items concerning utilising this information to develop competitive strategies. Additionally, items measuring focus on protecting strategic information are correlated with items evaluating capacity to cope with crises. This reflects institutions' awareness that economic intelligence encompasses not only the gathering of information, but also its protection and optimal utilisation.

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	30	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	30	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.954	.979	20

Summary Item Statistics

Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
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Item Means	3.760	3.533	3.800	.267	1.075	.010	20
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Conclusion:

Based on the results of the statistical analysis, it can be concluded that the research tools used are highly credible and that, despite the challenges they face, Algerian institutions are capable of leveraging economic intelligence to build a genuine competitive advantage. Institutions that invest in gathering, analysing, protecting and strategically utilising information are better equipped to confront competition and achieve sustainability in a dynamic business environment.

Clearly, developing clear policies in the field of economic intelligence is imperative for ensuring the survival of institutions and enhancing their market share. This includes setting up specialised strategic vigilance units, training staff, investing in information protection systems and joining professional cooperation networks. Taken together, these steps will make Algerian institutions more adaptable to market changes and help them to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

Methodology

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical and case study methodology, combining theoretical examination and empirical observation. The descriptive component aims to conceptualize the relationship between economic intelligence and competitive advantage by analysing existing literature, institutional frameworks, and strategic management theories.

For the empirical component, a multiple case study approach was applied to a selected sample of Algerian enterprises operating in various sectors, including manufacturing, services, and technology. Data collection was conducted through structured interviews, documentary analysis, and questionnaires directed at managerial staff responsible for decision-making and information management.

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative techniques to triangulate findings. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse survey results, while thematic content analysis was applied to interpret interviews and institutional reports. The methodological design enabled a comprehensive understanding of how economic intelligence processes—information gathering, analysis, dissemination, and protection—contribute to the formation of sustainable competitive advantage within the Algerian context.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered strictly to research ethics and the standards established by Djilali Liabes University's Research Ethics Committee. All participants were informed about the objectives, methods, and purpose of the research prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent.

Confidentiality and anonymity were fully respected; no personal or institutional identifiers were disclosed. Data were used exclusively for academic purposes and stored securely. The research avoided any form of bias, coercion, or conflict of interest, and all findings were reported with accuracy and transparency in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki on Ethical Research Practices.

Author Contributions

Youcef Ifikhar — Conceptualization of the research framework, literature review, and development of the theoretical model of economic intelligence.

Redif Mostapha — Data collection, methodological design, statistical analysis, and validation of empirical findings.

Nedjari Fatima Zohra — Case study coordination, interpretation of results, and drafting of the discussion and conclusion sections.

All authors contributed equally to the final revision, approved the manuscript for publication, and are jointly accountable for the integrity of the work.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently and reflects only the academic perspectives of the authors.

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