

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY TO EXAMINE GUANXI-BASED STRATEGY AS A SOURCE OF SUSTAINED COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE FOR CONDUCTING BUSINESS IN CHINA

1st ZHAO KUN, 2nd Abhijit Ghosh

ABSTRACT

This experimental study examined a Guanxi-based strategy as a framework for enduring partnerships aimed at aiding Chinese enterprises in sustaining their competitive advantage. In the Chinese market, possessing Guanxi is the most important thing to do to be successful. Guanxi, which comes from ancient Chinese culture, is based on honesty, giving back, and being loyal over a long period of time. It helps firms get a leg up on the competition, secure important resources, and stay calm under pressure, all of which are based on Chinese culture. The study findings indicate that Guanxi can provide a sustainable competitive advantage via the cultivation of enduring and successful partnerships. Companies utilise this method for several reasons, including as the long-term stability, loyalty, and advantages it gives both parties. One of these reasons is because it gives these benefits. Guanxi creates a culture of collaboration that helps businesses save expenses, lower the chance of acting opportunistically, and make their operations more effective. Chinese companies would work together to better deal with changes in the market and rules, and they can do so without putting their most important activities at risk. The findings indicated that long-term relationships built on principles of Guanxi strategy provide a range of benefits, like making businesses more resilient and ensuring their ongoing success. In China's current social and economic climate, it's very crucial to build confidence and credibility while still keeping operations going all the time. The study findings also indicate that for Chinese enterprises to sustain their competitive advantage in China's dynamic economy, they must implement strategies that prioritise Guanxi and the establishment of enduring linkages. The results of the research conducted enable the formulation of this conclusion.

Keywords: Guanxi-based strategy, competitive advantage, sustainable collaboration, business operations, China

1. INTRODUCTION

At the same time as China's economy has grown, the country's internal markets have also changed. Because of this process, the basic principles behind international commerce have been looked at again and given new meanings. This shift in business strategy is mostly due to the Guanxi system, which is a long-standing network of personal and institutional ties that is very important to Chinese culture. Guanxi is a network of both personal and institutional relationships. One way to define Guanxi is as a network of both individuals and organisations. On the other hand, Guanxi puts more value on trust and reciprocity than on basic commerce. Guanxi, which puts a lot of value on devotion, is different from Western networking methods. This is not how networking is done in the West. Chinese enterprises may avoid problems, get resources, and build confidence by using Guanxi (Barbaralet, 2021).

In light of the current state of the economy, it is becoming harder to stay ahead of the competition. Companies need to be able to adapt to the fast pace of technological change, the changing tastes of their consumers, and the growing number of rules that the government enforces (Day, 2025). In this particular context, Guanxi-driven strategies establish a distinct and enduring competitive trajectory. This is because Guanxi brings together individuals from diverse walks of life. Companies can't have the stability and strength that they stand for if they don't have connection to social networks (Li, 2023). This is the case because networks like this can't be made. This research aims to assess the extent to which strategic Guanxi orientations provide a sustainable competitive advantage within the Chinese setting, rather than concentrating on cultural orientations. This study does not aim to concentrate on cultural orientations. The goal of this study is to highlight the strategic aspects of Guanxi by connecting cultural heritage to contemporary business operations. The establishment of a partnership will facilitate such connection. The article's main point is to talk about how social networks continue to affect how well firms run, how easy it is to get resources, and how long organisations like this will last. Further, the primary objective of the research is to demonstrate that Guanxi transcends mere cultural phenomenon; it is a strategy that can be used to attain enduring success in the Chinese market.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

China's economic modernisation has been marked by both record opportunities and endemic challenges. With speeding-up market liberalisation, more global integration, and a competitive domestic environment, firms are always in the position that they need to create sustainable advantages. Traditional Western strategy frameworks, traditionally highlighted as being focused on efficiency, innovation, and cost leadership, have been widely used in China. However, they fail to fully capture the influence of socio-cultural pressures that remain deeply ingrained in Chinese society. Guanxi, the multifaceted network of professional and social relationships, has thus emerged as a major force driving business activities (Su et al., 2023).

Guanxi was historically employed as a means to manage scarce formal institutions to provide people and organisations access to resources, protection, and opportunities. Despite the emergence of new legal and regulatory systems in contemporary China, Guanxi is still at the heart. For firms, it is not about developing individual relationships but using trust relations in an orderly manner in order to garner credibility and attain long-term collaborations. Guanxi brings stability into operations, reduces transaction costs, and provides firms privileged access to essential information and resources (Ding & Jie, 2021). Here, sustained competitive advantage increasingly relies on the ability of a company to strategically integrate Guanxi into its business. Through this, organisations not only endure in China's very competitive markets but also thrive by constructing resilience and adaptive capacity (You & Williams, 2023). This study capitalises on the wisdom that Guanxi is not only a Chinese cultural phenomenon but

also a strategic resource enabling companies to become attuned to China's socio-economic environment and position themselves for sustainable success.

China's economic growth has been marked by unprecedented opportunities and enduring challenges throughout history. Both of these things have helped China's economy grow. The world economy is growing quickly, which is shown by more globalisation and more competition on a local level. This growth is happening extremely swiftly. To stay ahead of the competition, businesses are always under pressure to develop innovative ways to improve their competitive edge. China has relied heavily on Western strategic frameworks for much of its history. These frameworks have stressed being the cheapest, coming up with new ideas, and being efficient. However, the impact of enduring social and cultural norms in China has not been sufficiently examined to a significant extent. Guanxi, defined as an extensive network of social and professional connections, has emerged as a significant element in the business domain. Guanxi may be categorised as an extensive network of such relationships (Su et al., 2023).

Traditionally, the goal of Guanxi strategy was to help businesses get resources, keep group members safe, and open up new opportunities for both people and businesses. Organisations utilised Guanxi to get past official rules that were too rigid. Even if China has built new legal and regulatory institutions, the idea of Guanxi is still very important to the Chinese people today. For companies, building human connections is more crucial than building trust in a systematic way when it comes to building credibility and long-term partnerships as it helps in developing connections are far more likely to pay off than trust. Guanxi is a way of communicating that helps make operations more efficient, lowers transaction costs, and gives people access to the resources and information that they need to get things done (Ding & Jie, 2021). In today's business world, it is important for a firm to be able to strategically integrate Guanxi into its operations in order to stay ahead of the competition. Businesses may learn to be more resilient and adaptable, which will help them do better in China's very competitive marketplaces (You & Williams, 2023). Effective assessment of Guanxi transcends mere cultural phenomenon in China as it serves as a strategic asset that enables enterprises to identify and adeptly navigate China's distinctive social and economic landscape.

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

A Guanxi-based strategy is a methodical and evidence-based approach to gaining a competitive edge in China. The objective of this study is to evaluate the efficacy of the plan to determine its success. Even while there has been a lot of study on Guanxi in cultural and social contexts, not much has been done to look into its possible use in strategic business situations. This research aims to fill the knowledge vacuum by focussing on the function of Guanxi as a means of sustained advantage, adaptability, and resilience in a complex and dynamic environment. A primary objective of this research is to comprehend the many ways in which Guanxi might enhance the efficacy, credibility, and accessibility of capital inside a business. All of these parts are necessary for maintaining high levels of competition for a lengthy period of time. The objective of this study is to examine the similarities and contrasts between the two types of Guanxi: Guanxi as a formalised economic practice and Guanxi as a historical social norm. This research aims to compare the two varieties of Guanxi. The objective of this attempt is to reconceptualise the latter as a source of sustainable profit that is both attainable and viable. Guanxi is a comprehensive concept that goes beyond culture and includes strategic management of businesses to gain competitive advantage for organisations.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers in China who focus on management and business have spent a lot of time and effort studying Guanxi, which is the core idea that underlies all social and economic relationships. Guanxi is a word that describes the connection between leaders and their followers. Research indicates that Guanxi prioritises enduring partnerships founded on mutual trust and support. People think these ties are more important. Western networking models, on the other hand, are more interested in the benefits that may be achieved via transactional linkages in the not-too-distant future. This is not the same as how people in the West think. To build and keep Guanxi, one must always show loyalty and favour. This leads to the creation of relationships that are meant to last for a long time. Guanxi is created and kept by building long-lasting relationships (Bedford, 2022).

Guanxi, a distinct kind of link capital, enables firms to get resources, knowledge, and legitimacy. Guanxi is the ability to make relationships. Guanxi is a kind of relationship capital. Studies show that Guanxi networks and informal institutions may help cut the costs of governance and trade by making things less unclear. This is done by helping to lower the level of ambiguity that exists. China's institutional and regulatory frameworks make it possible for enterprises to get around bureaucratic roadblocks, negotiate better deals, and find possibilities that they wouldn't have been able to find otherwise. These ties make it easy for corporations to do business in China. In other words, these relationships let firms take advantage of opportunities that they wouldn't be able to get to in any other way (Chit & Vasudevan, 2024). In addition, Guanxi has been associated with enhanced operational resilience and responsiveness, which are both essential for maintaining competitive advantage. Stable relationships with stakeholders such as government, suppliers, and buyers, built on trust, enable companies to obtain stable resource flows and mitigate risks from market uncertainty. Guanxi strategy focus on long-term commitment builds sustainable cooperation, prompting firms to make investments in long-term alliances rather than short-term benefits (Lu et al., 2025).

Simultaneously, criticism in the literature identifies potential risks. Guanxi may lead to over-reliance on social relationships, limit organisational openness, and have entry impediments for companies without existing networks. However, if they are built strategically, Guanxi can be an active capability, helping companies cope with evolving market conditions while maintaining competitive edge (Sen et al., 2023). Recent scholarship has called for repositioning of Guanxi from a unique cultural construct to a competitive strategy that maximizes business competitiveness in China. This repositioning finds coherence with resource-based and relational views of the firm, which argue that enduring competitive advantage results not only from internal resources but also from the ability to create, cultivate, and leverage external relationships. From this perspective, Guanxi is introduced as a viable and sustainable source of competitive edge for business in China (Syarifudin & Kholis, 2024).

5. RESEARCH QUESTION

- What is the effect of sustainable collaboration on competitive advantage for business operations?

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The quantitative data analysis was performed with SPSS version 25. The odds ratio and 95% confidence interval were used to determine the degree and direction of the statistical association. The researchers established a p-value criterion of less than 0.05 for statistical significance. A descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the most significant features from the data. Quantitative methods are often used to assess data gathered via polls, questionnaires, and surveys, together with data enhanced by statistical analysis tools.

6.2 Sampling

Participants were required to complete questionnaires to participate in the research. Researchers sent 700 questionnaires after verifying that 560 individuals had used the Rao-soft application. Following the collection of 634 replies, the sample size was reduced to 600 by excluding 34 incomplete submissions.

6.3 Data and Measurement:

The study mostly used questionnaire surveys to get the data. In Part A, it requested fundamental demographic facts, whereas in Part B, it enquired about the attributes of online and offline channels using a 5-point Likert scale. The secondary data was obtained from several sources, mostly internet databases.

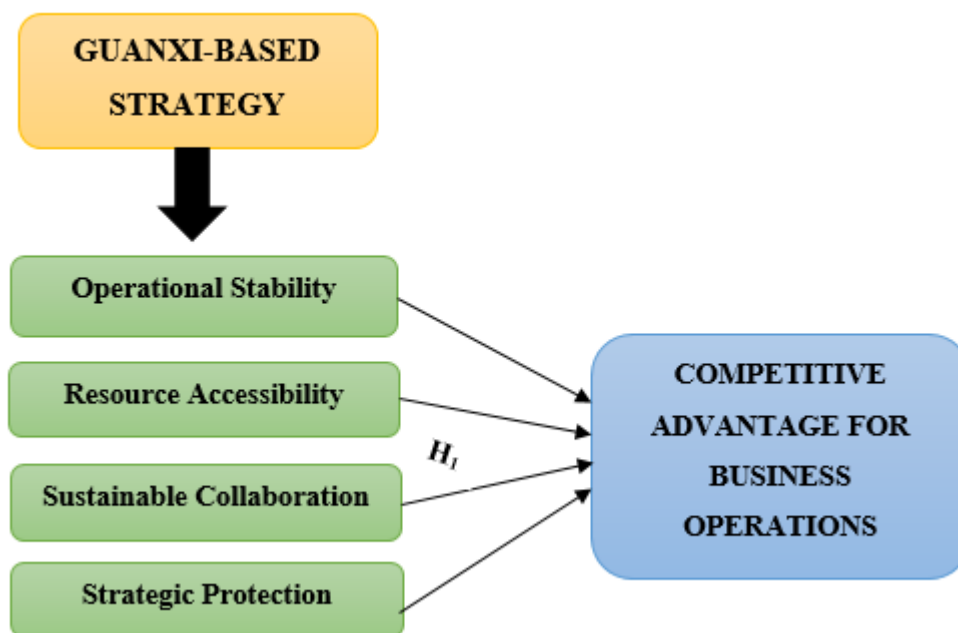
6.4 Statistical Software:

The researcher has used SPSS 25 and MS-Excel to do the statistical analysis.

6.5 Statistical Tools:

In order to have a basic understanding of the data, the researcher used descriptive analysis. Using ANOVA, the researcher must examine the data.

7. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



8. RESULT

• Factor Analysis

For a set of measurement items, Factor Analysis (FA) is often used to confirm the underlying component structure. Scores of observable variables could be potentially impacted by factors that are not immediately obvious. The FA approach is one model-driven technique. This study aims to establish a connection between observable occurrences, their causes, and measurement mistakes.

One way to determine whether data is suitable for factor analysis is to use the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) technique. The researcher determined if the sample size was enough to capture the essence of the model and all of its variables. A number of statistical measures evaluate the potential degree of shared variation among many variables. Factor analysis often benefits from data at a lower hierarchical level.

The numbers 0 through 1 are the ones that KMO produces. If the KMO score is between 0.8 and 1, then the sampling is adequate.

Inadequate sampling necessitates corrective measures if the KMO is less than 0.6. Choose best discretion; most authors choose 0.5 for this, so 0.5 to 0.6 is a good range to work within.

As the KMO number gets closer to 0, a large portion of the correlations are partial correlations. Notably, component analysis is greatly hindered by substantial correlations.

Here are the approval requirements that Kaiser has set:

Unsatisfactory results between 0.050 and 0.059.

The range below the norm is 0.69 to 0.60.

The range of a mediocre grade is often between 0.70 and 0.79.

Quality points are indicated by a number between 0.80 and 0.89.

From 0.90 to 1.00, there is a noticeable variation.

Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.892
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3252.968
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

Results from the execution of the sample corroborate the validity of the statements. Using Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, the researchers determined how significant the correlation matrices were. When the KMO value hits 0.892, it means that the sample is sufficient. After doing Bartlett's sphericity test, the p-value comes out as 0.00. According to Bartlett's sphericity test, there is a statistically significant deviation of the correlation matrix from an identity matrix.

❖ **INDEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Guanxi-based Strategy

Guanxi strategy is the conscious application of relationship networks, trust, and reciprocity as a mechanism for business in China. Guanxi is not just about personal relationships; it is a culturally grounded system that informs social and professional relationships. For companies, using Guanxi strategically allows access to institutional assistance, information, and market opportunities inaccessible otherwise. Compared to transactional networking in the short term, Guanxi emphasizes loyalty, mutual respect, and ongoing reciprocity, which creates sustainable relationships with stakeholders (Lee, 2022). In business operations, Guanxi strategy helps firms navigate institutional barriers, bargain favourable terms, and develop trust in competitive markets. Through including Guanxi in decision-making, firms can ensure stability, reduce risks, and achieve long-term cooperation from stakeholders and state institutions. It also exists as an intangible, difficult-to-imitate capability that differentiates successful firms from others. Guanxi strategy thus transcends culture practice and emerges as a core source of long-term, sustainable competitive advantage, allowing firms to thrive within the dynamic and often volatile Chinese market (Li & Abdullah, 2024).

❖ FACTOR

Sustainable Collaboration

Sustainable collaboration is the type of collaborative partnership that emphasizes persistence, trust, and two-way benefits at the cost of short-term, immediate gains. In Guanxi-based strategies, sustainable cooperation is central to building long-term relationships that are resilient to market uncertainties and institutional hazards. Sustainable cooperation differs from opportunistic alliances in that it ensures that both parties invest in mutual growth that enhances trust and commitment in the long term (Zhao & Cai, 2022). For Chinese firms, it means building into supplier, distributor, regulatory, and customer relations resilience to competitive pressures. Such partnerships provide firms with stable access to inputs, more effective negotiation, and greater operating safety. Sustainable cooperation also reduces transaction costs by mitigating risks of conflict, misunderstanding, or opportunism, which can jeopardize long-term stability. Above all, when combined with Guanxi, sustainable cooperation is a strategic enabler of resilience. Businesses not only maintain operational effectiveness but also cope more effectively with changing policy, regulatory needs, or consumer trends. Such ongoing collaboration automatically translates into organisational reputation and credibility that are critical drivers of competitive edge in China (Huang, 2025).

❖ DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Competitive Advantage for Business Operations

Competitive edge in the practice of business means the ability of a company to provide better performance and achieve long-run success relative to other competitors. To achieve this type of edge in China, the company must utilize greater than efficiency or creativity; it depends significantly on cultural and relational strategy coordination. Guanxi-guided practices support business practice through granting single access to networks, assets, and opportunities that competitors without the same connections are unable to replicate. Through relational strategies, businesses build credibility, build trustworthiness, and reduce costs of transactions, leading to smoother operations and stability. Such intangible benefits translate to improved market positioning, where businesses can secure contracts, assets, and strategic partnerships that provide long-term growth prospects. Competitive advantage similarly relies on sustainability, and Guanxi-based strategies, when coupled with sustainable collaboration, lead to long-term capabilities of resilience and adaptability (Wang et al., 2025). Through the embedding of these relational strengths into functions, firms develop unique capabilities that are difficult to replicate by rivals. This fortifies their short-run market performance as well as long-run survival in an increasingly dynamic and competitive globe. In essence, competitive advantage from Guanxi ensures that businesses enjoy resilience in addition to growth and are thus placed as leaders in the Chinese market (Zhong & Werner, 2025).

- **Relationship between sustainable collaboration and competitive advantage for business operations**

Sustainable collaboration is crucial to the achievement of business competitive advantage while operating in China. Sustainable collaboration, shaped by Guanxi-informed strategy, fosters partnerships grounded on trust, reciprocity, and long-term affiliation. These long-term relationships allow companies to attain guaranteed access to resources, reduce operational risk, and build solid reputations within the marketplace. By ensuring long-term collaboration, companies can ensure supply chain continuity, strengthen cooperation with government agencies, and attain commitment from business partners as well as customers. This ensures that operations remain effective and reduces transaction costs, both of which are pivotal in building

a competitive edge. Moreover, the long-term nature of cooperation discourages opportunistic behaviour and provides stability and justice in business processes (Li et al., 2024).

Importantly, sustainable cooperation guarantees strong adaptability. In periods of market fluctuation, regulatory changes, or crises, co-operators within a solid collaborative network provide ongoing support, allowing firms to recover more vigorously than their rivals. This resilience forms the base of competitive advantage as it ensures businesses can sustain performance in the long term rather than experiencing short-lived spikes. In China's competitive economy, sustainable cooperation guided by Guanxi thus emerges as an exclusive strategic asset enabling companies to outdo others and achieve long-term business success (Farkas, 2023).

The researcher posited, based on the prior debate that a link exists between sustainable collaboration and competitive advantage in business operations.

“H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between sustainable collaboration and competitive advantage in business operations.”

“H₁: There is a significant relationship between sustainable collaboration and competitive advantage in business operations.”

Table 2: H₁ ANOVA Test

ANOVA					
Sum					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	41846.382	236	5096.796	947.007	.000
Within Groups	597.761	363	5.382		
Total	42444.143	599			

This probe has revealed significant results. The significance criterion is satisfied with an F-value of 947.007, since the p-value is .000, which is below the .05 alpha threshold. The researcher may accept ***“H₁: There is a significant relationship between sustainable collaboration and competitive advantage in business operations”*** after the rejection of the null hypothesis.

9. DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that Chinese business may develop a lasting competitive advantage through application of strategies based on Guanxi, directed at the creation of lasting relationships. What distinguishes long-term partnership from short-run partnerships is that the former is founded upon trust, reciprocity, and mutual growth of both parties through reciprocal development. All these collaborations are extremely crucial to China in general because the institutional frameworks of the country can render things challenging and ambiguous. The assistance that is derived through collaboration through Guanxi assists companies to address these issues. Guanxi is considered to ensure that their functions are stable that they obtain resources in a credible manner, and that key stakeholders have confidence in them.

Sustainable partnership can assist in reducing the cost of transactions and make operations more efficient. An important realization has been achieved, marking an important

understanding on development of sustainable collaboration skills among businesses for gaining competitive advantage in general. When uncertainties exist, companies that collaborate have a competitive advantage over their competitors. This is owing to the fact that related businesses stand a chance to be loyal, equitable, and supportive for the company during such moments and collaborate that creates a competitive edge over other companies. Companies might shift their attention from survival mode in the short run to growth and strategic innovation in the long term to avail themselves of the shield that their relationships offer. Firms can change their focus, which allows for that shift in focus to occur that also assist in the achievement of competitive edge in the long run. In addition, long-term alliances also possess the advantage of being adaptable, which allows firms to alter the way they operate in response to alterations in the market or legislation. Companies that have extensive networked partners can continue their success even when others, who compete with them, are struggling to achieve the same. This is because such firms are able to recover quickly from setbacks compared to their key competitors. If applied appropriately in team-based projects, Guanxi, which is a cultural resource in conventional settings, can become an effective skill that offers individuals resilience, creditability, and competitiveness. Guanxi is a cultural gem that has been passed down through Chinese culture.

10. CONCLUSION

In summary, Chinese businesses can attain a sustainable competitive advantage through the use of Guanxi-based approaches through the development of long-lasting relationships. From this research, it is possible to conclude that sustainable cooperation enables individuals to establish long-lasting relationships founded on trust, commitment, and dedication. This contradicts transactional methods, which emphasise face-to-face contacts at all times. Companies must create alliances that grant them access to resources, operational stability, and institutional legitimacy if they are to succeed over time. This is especially so in markets with a high degree of competition. The findings of the study also indicate that companies can become more agile and robust in adapting to changing trade conditions if they collaborate in an environmentally friendly manner. This objective is achieved by reducing the level of uncertainty that individuals are exposed to and reducing the impacts of opportunism in business. Through the application of Guanxi in collaborative processes, businesses can acquire a strategic resource that is unique and cannot be replicated by any other enterprise. Another advantage of applying this approach is that it ensures everything goes on as planned. The formation of Guanxi-based long-term relationships is promoted to foster long-term benefits. This is achieved by combining long-term cultural values and what the corporate world requires in the modern era. Bringing the two together might be the solution for this conundrum. This will ensure Chinese businesses are able to weather the fluctuations of the market, establish trust, and continue growing over a very long term. Due to this, Guanxi is a vital strategic tool that one must employ in order to be long-term competitive.

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