

IT OUTSOURCING AND FACTORS OF INCREASING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF ENTERPRISES

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Purpose: The aim of the article was to examine the factors of increasing the competitiveness of enterprises by separating services in the field of information technology (IT) and their importance for enterprises.

Design/methodology/approach: This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from a Likert-scale questionnaire distributed to a wide range of businesses. The research aimed to explore how IT outsourcing impacts corporate competitiveness across various dimensions.

Findings: The study reveals that IT outsourcing significantly contributes to enhancing business competitiveness by offering cost savings, improved efficiency, access to advanced technologies, and allowing firms to focus on core competencies.

Research limitations/implications: The study recognizes its limitations, including potential bias from self-reported data and limited generalizability due to focusing on a specific market segment. Future research will aim for wider industry representation and investigate the long-term effects of IT outsourcing.

Practical implications: For practitioners, the study underscores the strategic value of IT outsourcing in achieving cost efficiency and leveraging technological advancements. It suggests a structured assessment of outsourcing opportunities, considering both operational and strategic impacts.

Social implications: By delineating how IT outsourcing can drive business efficiency and innovation, the study implies broader societal benefits, such as job creation in the IT service sector and enhanced consumer experiences through higher quality products and services.

Originality/value: This research advances both theoretical and practical knowledge of IT outsourcing's impact on business competitiveness, blending quantitative and qualitative data for a detailed analysis of its diverse benefits.

Keywords: IT outsourcing, digitization, enterprise, competitiveness, management.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

In the face of continuous digital transformation, enterprises worldwide are challenged to adapt to rapidly changing market and technological conditions. This constant evolution forces organizations to seek new pathways to enhance their competitiveness and operational efficiency (Turban et al., 2018). In this context, IT outsourcing, understood as the strategic external delegation of IT functions to specialized service providers, emerges as a key element enabling companies to achieve these goals. It allows businesses to focus on developing core competencies and primary activities while also providing access to the latest technologies and world-class expertise without the need for substantial internal investment (Yin et al., 2020).

The growing significance of IT outsourcing in business strategies also stems from the increasing need for operational flexibility and scalability, enabling companies to quickly adjust to changing market demands and capitalize on new business opportunities (Kabus, Cichoń, Lenort, Kabus, 2023). Additionally, IT outsourcing opens doors to the global market of talents and innovations, which is particularly crucial in the context of rapid technological progress and global competition (Zhen et al., 2021).

Understanding the impact of IT outsourcing on the competitiveness of enterprises is thus vital not only for theorists studying the dynamics of contemporary organizations but also for business leaders seeking effective strategies to maintain and strengthen their market position. The discussion on this topic allows for a deeper exploration of both the benefits and challenges associated with external delegation of IT functions, as well as the identification of best practices and strategies for managing relationships with service providers.

Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine this multifaceted topic, presenting how IT outsourcing affects various aspects of a company's operations, including innovation, operational efficiency, and the ability to respond quickly to market changes. Through a combination of thorough theoretical analysis and empirical research findings, this article aims to build a comprehensive picture of the role of IT outsourcing in shaping competitive advantage, offering valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners aiming to understand and leverage the potential of this strategy in a global context.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Essence of Outsourcing

Outsourcing, as a strategy for using external resources, is widely analyzed in the scientific literature. It is defined as the process by which companies transfer some of their functions or processes to third-party service providers. This process is often motivated by a desire to increase efficiency, focus on core competencies, and reduce costs (Brynjolfsson, McAfee, 2017).

Modern approaches to outsourcing often focus on long-term contracts that delegate responsibility for the management and development of specific business processes or infrastructure to external vendors (Kane et al., 2015; Kern et al., 2013). In this perspective, outsourcing is understood not only as a way to reduce costs, but also as a strategic tool that allows companies to access advanced technologies and expertise (Krull, Mackinnon, 2016; Lacity, Willcocks, 2009).

Other researchers emphasize the importance of outsourcing as a tool for acquiring skills and competencies that are necessary to improve the organization's operations (Kłos, 2009). They emphasize that by outsourcing, companies can focus their resources on the most strategic tasks while benefiting from the expertise of external suppliers (Pandita, Singhal, 2017).

In conclusion, outsourcing is recognized as a key element of business strategy that enables companies to adapt to a rapidly changing business environment and take advantage of the expertise and technologies available on the market (Turban et al., 2018).

2.2. IT outsourcing and its importance in the process of market digitization

IT outsourcing, i.e. the process of outsourcing IT services to external providers, plays a key role in the process of digitization of the market. Companies are increasingly using this strategy to meet rapidly evolving technologies and dynamic changes in the business environment (Yin et al., 2020).

IT outsourcing enables organizations to access advanced technologies and expertise, which is especially relevant in the age of digitalization, where information and communication technologies (ICT) are becoming the foundation of market competitiveness (Galvin, 2019; (Kabus, Dziadkiewicz, Miciuła, Mastalerz, 2022).

IT outsourcing allows companies to adapt faster to changing market and technological conditions. IT service providers offer access to the latest technologies and innovations, which allows companies to effectively implement digital solutions such as cloud computing, big data, artificial intelligence, or the Internet of Things (IoT) (Kocot, Kwasek, 2022). This allows companies not only to increase their operational efficiency, but also to create new business models and revenue streams (Kern et al., 2015).

IT outsourcing allows companies to flexibly scale IT resources depending on current needs, without the need to invest in expensive infrastructure and hire IT specialists. Service providers can quickly adjust support levels and resources in response to changes in the market or in company strategy, which is crucial in a rapidly changing business environment (Lacity, Willcocks, 2013). IT outsourcing can contribute to reducing the operating costs of an organization. Companies do not have to invest in developing their own IT infrastructure or incur costs related to the recruitment and training of IT employees. IT service providers offer effective solutions that allow companies to save time and money (Quelin, Duhamel, 2003).

IT outsourcing allows companies to benefit from the knowledge and experience of IT specialists. Service providers often have teams of experts in various fields of computer science, which allows them to solve even the most complex technical problems (Porter, Heppelmann, 2014).

To sum up, IT outsourcing is an important tool supporting the process of market digitization. It allows companies to accelerate digital transformation, increase operational agility, reduce costs, and access expertise and technology. In the era of dynamic technological change, it is a strategy that can bring many benefits and enable companies to remain competitive in the market (Qureshi, 2016).

2.3. Factors of increasing competitiveness through IT outsourcing

IT outsourcing can significantly contribute to the competitiveness of enterprises by providing access to advanced technologies and deep specialization, which are crucial in a dynamically changing digital environment (Raišienė et al., 2019).

The benefits of IT outsourcing are an important topic for today's enterprises as they look for ways to improve their efficiency and competitiveness in a dynamic business environment (Cullen et al., 2005). IT outsourcing can be considered in the context of various aspects of business operations, such as cost savings, increased operational efficiency, focus on core competencies, use of the latest technologies available from IT service providers, improved quality of services/products, faster adaptation to changing customer requirements, better protection against cyberattacks, and access to the latest technological innovations.

Making a decision about IT outsourcing requires taking into account many factors, such as business strategy, industry specifics, current needs of the organization, and the risks associated with delegating certain functions and data to external providers. Enterprises must also consider the potential benefits and challenges of IT outsourcing in order to make optimal decisions for their operations and business goals (Constantinides, 2014).

By using third-party IT vendors, companies can focus on their core competencies, thereby increasing their organizational agility (Felipe et al., 2020) and ability to respond quickly to market changes. Outsourcing also enables better risk management and data security, which is essential in the face of growing cyber threats (Danneels, Kleinschmidt, 2016). Cost flexibility, achieved by the ability to scale IT services according to current needs, allows for more efficient

allocation of financial resources (Dhillon, Backhouse, 2001). Cooperation with external IT experts enables companies to adapt to new technological and market requirements, which is crucial for maintaining and increasing competitiveness in the market (Chakrabarty, 2006).

IT outsourcing also follows an organizational agility approach that allows companies to adapt to change (Gupta et al., 2006). Organizational agility is an important factor in the effective use of ICT (Ravichandran, 2016), which is confirmed by research on the impact of IT capabilities on corporate performance (Leberecht, 2016).

In addition, IT outsourcing supports an agile approach that promotes an iterative and adaptive approach to project management (Lacity, Willcocks, 2010). Agile Project Management is a key tool in today's business environment, ensuring the delivery of valuable products and services (Uhl-Bien, Arena, 2017). The integration of third-party IT vendors can enable companies to better leverage agile methodologies in their project processes.

With the growing importance of e-commerce (Zhen et al., 2021), aligning competitive strategy with the role of information technology in the industry is becoming crucial to achieving competitive advantage (Cavusgil et al., 2014). IT outsourcing can enable companies to better align their IT strategy with their business strategy, which is crucial for success in the digital age.

It is also worth noting that cooperation with external IT providers can contribute to improving the adaptability of organizations (El-Wakeel, 2019), which is important in an increasingly complex and uncertain business environment. By providing new tools, knowledge, and experience, third-party vendors can support organizations in adapting to changing market and technology conditions (Zhen et al., 2021).

To sum up, IT outsourcing can be a strategic tool supporting the development and competitiveness of enterprises by providing access to modern technologies, increasing organizational flexibility and enabling effective use of financial resources.

3. Analysis of own research

3.1. Research Methodology

Between May and September 2023, a scientific study was conducted using an online survey. We managed to collect 723 completed questionnaires, which was possible thanks to the use of the method of computer-assisted online interviews (CAWI). With this method, it was possible to reach a large number of respondents quickly and effectively. Study participants completed questionnaires via an online platform. The CAWI method made it possible to contact people from different locations, ensuring high technical standards during the study and minimizing errors resulting from manual data entry.

The aim of the study was to investigate the factors of increased competitiveness through the separation of information technology (IT) services and their importance for enterprises. The aim of the study was to identify what benefits enterprises can gain through the external provision of IT services and what factors may influence the decision to use this form of services. The research questions focused on the assessment of the importance of individual factors for the competitiveness of enterprises and on the identification of preferences in the use of external IT services. The research hypothesis assumed that the separation of IT services could contribute to the improvement of the efficiency of the company's operations and increase its competitiveness through cost savings, access to the latest technologies, better quality of services or faster adaptation to changing market conditions.

In the course of the research, sociodemographic data of the respondents were collected. Of the 723 respondents, 50.5% were women and 49.5% were men. In terms of age, 20% were under 25 years old, 30.4% were between 26 and 35 years old, 24.9% were between 36 and 45 years old, and 24.6% were over 45 years old. In terms of positions held, 6.9% are top management, 21.1% are middle management, 29% are junior management, and 42.9% are employees. The length of service in the study group was as follows: 27.6% had up to 5 years, 24.9% 6-10 years, 20.7% 11-15 years, 16.6% 16-20 years, and 10.1% over 20 years. In terms of company size, 27.6% were micro-enterprises, 24.9% were small enterprises, 24.9% medium-sized enterprises and 22.5% large enterprises. The period of operation of the companies was as follows: 13.8% operated for more than one year, 27.6% for 1 to 3 years, 30.8% for 4 to 7 years, and 27.6% for more than 8 years. In terms of industry, 19.9% of those surveyed were active in the automotive and retail industries, as well as in education, healthcare, and other industries, each with a share of 20%. In terms of geographical coverage, 27.6% operated locally, 24.9% regionally, 23.5% nationally, and 23.9% internationally. The financial situation of the companies was as follows: 13.7% assessed it as very good, 30.9% as good, 27.4% as bad, 13.7% as very bad, and 14.2% it was difficult to give an unambiguous opinion on this issue.

3.2. Presentation of Research Findings

The research sought to identify various factors for increasing competitiveness by separating information technology (IT) services in the context of enterprises. Table 1 presents the results of survey assessments of these factors in the form of a Likert cafeteria, where respondents had the opportunity to choose one of five points of the scale: "Definitely NO", "Rather NO", "I don't have an opinion", "Rather YES", "Definitely YES".

On the basis of tabular data, it can be seen that the majority of respondents positively assessed the potential benefits of separating IT services. It is worth noting that the highest number of responses in the "Definitely YES" category were given by factors related to cost savings, increased efficiency and the ability to focus on key competencies. On the other hand, the lowest values in this category were achieved by factors related to protection against cyberattack and access to the latest technological innovations. It is also important that there is

a group of respondents who, in many cases, did not express a clear opinion ("I have no opinion").

In the context of business decision-making, the results of this survey can provide information about the priorities and expectations of enterprises in relation to the external provision of IT services and help to identify areas to focus on in order to increase competitiveness.

Table 1.

Factors for increasing competitiveness through the separation of IT services (Likert scale)

	Definitely not	Rather not	I don't have an opinion	Rather yes	Definitely yes
Cost Savings (1)	35	87	159	246	196
Increase efficiency (2)	40	92	155	232	204
Opportunity to focus on core competencies (3)	38	96	158	239	192
Leveraging the latest technologies available from IT service providers (4)	45	103	156	230	189
Offering better quality of service products (5)	41	94	162	228	198
Faster adaptation to changing conditions and customer requirements (6)	39	91	166	227	200
Better protection against cyberattack (7)	43	98	161	224	197
Access to the latest technological innovations (8)	38	90	165	230	200

Source: own.

Table 2 presents a matrix of correlations between the various factors of increased competitiveness through the separation of IT services, as defined in Table 1. In the context of the first factor, i.e. cost savings, a high correlation with the other aspects examined in the study can be observed. The values of correlation coefficients for this variable ranged from about 0.995 to 0.999. Such strong links suggest that there is a clear relationship between cost savings and other elements studied, such as increased efficiency, focus on core competencies, use of the latest IT technologies, improved quality of services or products, faster adaptation to customer needs, better protection against cyberattacks, and access to the latest technological innovations. These results suggest that cost savings are closely linked to other drivers of increased competitiveness through the separation of IT services, which may be important for strategic decisions regarding the outsourcing of IT services in enterprises.

Table 2.

Correlation between factors of increased competitiveness through the separation of IT services

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	1							
2	0,996	1						
3	0,999	0,995	1					
4	0,997	0,995	0,999	1				
5	0,996	0,998	0,996	0,996	1			
6	0,994	0,996	0,994	0,993	0,999	1		
7	0,995	0,998	0,996	0,996	0,999	0,999	1	
8	0,995	0,997	0,995	0,994	0,999	0,999	0,999	1

Source: own.

On the basis of the data contained in Table 1 and Table 2, several important conclusions can be drawn. First of all, the factors of increasing competitiveness through the separation of IT services are strongly correlated with each other. This is due to high correlation coefficients, which indicate the existence of strong relationships between various aspects, such as cost savings, increased efficiency or access to the latest IT technologies.

Secondly, in the context of the first factor, which is cost savings, it can be seen that there is a positive relationship between this factor and the other aspects of competitiveness examined. This means that cost savings are a key factor in improving the efficiency of the company's operations, enabling it to focus on key competencies, providing access to the latest technologies and conducive to offering better quality services or products.

It's also worth noting that some factors, such as faster adaptation to changing market conditions or better protection against cyberattacks, show slightly less correlation with cost savings. However, despite this, they are still important for increasing competitiveness through the separation of IT services and need to be taken into account when making strategic decisions regarding IT outsourcing in companies.

4. Conclusions

IT outsourcing is a strategic tool that contributes to increasing the competitiveness of enterprises. It provides access to modern technologies, increases organizational flexibility and enables more efficient use of financial resources. In the era of dynamic technological and market changes, IT outsourcing enables companies to adapt faster to new requirements, which is crucial for maintaining and increasing competitiveness on the market.

The analysis of the literature and the presented studies entitles us to formulate several conclusions. First, a significant majority of respondents see IT outsourcing as beneficial for cost savings and operational efficiencies, suggesting that enterprises can gain significant financial and operational benefits by choosing to spin off IT services. Secondly, the ability to focus on core competences, access to the latest technologies and offering better quality services and products are considered to be important factors for increasing competitiveness. This indicates that companies are aware that IT outsourcing can contribute not only to cost reduction, but also to improving the quality of the offer and adapting to market requirements. In addition, strong correlations between factors have been demonstrated, suggesting that success in one area (e.g. achieving cost savings) can have a positive impact on other aspects of competitiveness, such as increased efficiency or better protection against cyberattacks. This highlights the complexity and interconnectedness between the different aspects of IT service management and their impact on a company's competitiveness.

The presented conclusions entitle us to formulate several recommendations for enterprises. Companies should actively consider IT outsourcing as a way to optimize costs and increase operational efficiency. It is also important to focus on core competencies, while using external suppliers to access modern technologies and innovations. In addition, enterprises should ensure that they are constantly updated on new cybersecurity solutions to better protect their data. Working with suppliers who offer access to the latest technological innovations can also help to increase your company's competitiveness in the market.

The study encountered some limitations that may affect the generalization of the results. One limitation may be the method of data collection, which was based on respondents' self-assessments, which can lead to subjective assessments. In addition, the study focused on a specific group of companies, which may limit the possibility of extrapolating the results to other sectors or markets. Future lines of research may include expanding the sample to more industries and regions to increase representativeness and understanding of the global impact of IT outsourcing on the competitiveness of companies. It is also worth studying the long-term effects of IT outsourcing on the financial performance of enterprises, which can provide deeper insight into the strategic benefits of such decisions. The added value of the article results from a comprehensive approach to the analysis of the impact of IT outsourcing on the competitiveness of enterprises, combining quantitative data with qualitative conclusions.

Comparing the findings from presented studies with other scientific papers, one can observe some consistencies and differences in terms of the impact of IT outsourcing and logistics outsourcing on the competitiveness of companies. According to the study by Munim et al. (2023), logistics outsourcing is positively associated with cost-based competitiveness and financial outcomes of companies. In outsourcing relationships that are focused on cost reduction or strategic partnership, companies strive to develop and ensure the alignment of activities within and between organizations. Another study that addresses operational resource issues in outsourcing relationships is a comparative analysis between India and the DACH region (Germany, Austria, Switzerland), showing differences in expectations towards logistics service providers in these regions. In India, there is a greater gap between manufacturing companies and logistics service providers compared to the DACH region, indicating differences in perceptions and expectations between these markets (Acquah et al., 2023).

Furthermore, a study on the impact of supply chain management on the competitiveness of the automotive industry highlights the importance of strategic decisions regarding organizational boundaries, which have consequences for the company's outcomes. The decision to outsource or vertically integrate (internal production) is not only an economic decision based on costs but also a strategic one for the company. Outsourcing can be a way to reduce costs and improve outcomes by entrusting activities to specialists, however, it should always be considered from a strategic perspective in order not to lose the company's competencies and to leverage the capabilities of specialized suppliers (Baah et al., 2022).

These conclusions show that the success of outsourcing depends on many factors, including a strategic approach to managing relationships with suppliers and aligning them with key business objectives. This highlights the complexity of the outsourcing decision and the need to consider various aspects of supply chain management and technology in the decision-making process.

Future research directions in the impact of IT outsourcing on the competitiveness of companies could focus on several key areas to deepen understanding and leverage the potential of this strategy. First, it might be essential to examine the impact of organizational culture and readiness for change on the success of IT outsourcing, considering how these aspects affect cooperation with providers and adaptation to new technologies. Second, a comparative analysis of different models and practices of outsourcing across various sectors and regions of the world could provide valuable insights into best practices and potential pitfalls. The third direction is to study the long-term effects of IT outsourcing, including its impact on innovation, the ability to quickly implement changes in products and services, and ultimately on the financial outcomes of companies. Additionally, deepening knowledge on risk and security management in the context of IT outsourcing, especially in the face of increasing cyber threats and data protection requirements, might be significant.

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