

## DESIGNING THE EXPLANATORY MODEL FOR COMPETITIVENESS OF APPAREL FIRMS IN THE KEY ECONOMIC REGION OF CENTRAL VIETNAM

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### ABSTRACT

*Based on an overview of theoretical background of competitiveness, this paper presents a new definition of firm competitiveness and some well-known explanatory models for competitiveness. On the basis a thorough analysis of specific characteristics of the apparel sector and the spirit of the model Diamond, a model of analyzing the factors affecting the competitiveness of apparel firms have been preliminarily sketched. In this model, groups of factors are identified by modifying the components of model Diamond taking into account characteristic of apparel industry. Then based on the results of an experts' opinions survey on the explanatory factors having obvious impact on apparel firms' competitiveness which was done across the Key Economic Region of Central Vietnam combined with previous studies, the paper goes on to present the deployment of that model in specific factors affecting competitiveness of apparel firms.*

*Keywords: apparel firms; competitiveness; measuring model; explanatory model; the Key Economic Region of Central Viet Nam*

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### Introduction

The Key Economic Region of Central Viet Nam is the name of a dynamic economic region in Central Vietnam, including the provinces and city: Thua Thien - Hue, Da Nang (plays the kernel role), Quang Nam, Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh. This is the 3rd largest economic region in Vietnam with a total area of about 27 879 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 6.6 million people (2011) and with a growing urbans chain stretching over 600 kilometers of coastline. This region has also a lot of deep sheltered gulfs such as Chan May, Chu Lai, Dung Quat and Nhon Hoi, Van Phong...and some airports such as Da Nang International Airport, Hue Airport. This region is crossed along by the national railway, national highway and Da Nang is the last point in Economic Corridor East - West connection Northeast Thailand, Laos and China Central Vietnam. Thus, the Key Economic Region of Central Viet Nam has a strategic location is for the country as well as the Mekong sub-region and Asia Pacific. Compared to two other key economic regions (South and North), this region has a poorer infrastructure and less qualified manpower. However, this region holds in hand greater potential of transshipment seaport and of resorts development. With many favorable economic-social conditions, this economic region is considered the motivation for the development of the Central Viet Nam with many key economic industries, including the apparel industry.

For most of the provinces and city in the Key Economic Region of Central Vietnam, garment industry is considered one of the key economic industries. Thus, in recent years, the number of apparel firms has been increasing. In 2011, the total number of garment firms was 198, of which 108 small and medium-sized firms (which have more than 10 labors to 300 labors) and 40 large-sized garment firms (the rest are super small-sized firms). A majority of these firm are placed in Da Nang and Quang Nam. If classified by categories of ownership, these apparel firms have distributed mainly in 4 groups of categories: private enterprises, joint-stock companies, limited-liability companies and foreign direct investment firms.

In 3 years, from 2009 to 2011, along with an increase in the number of firms, number of employees and capital of apparel firms in the region was also expanded continuously. In 2011, apparel firms in the region employed 51829 employees and exploited 5006 billion<sup>1</sup> VND of capital<sup>2</sup>. The key products of the apparel firms in the region include shirts, jackets, trousers... Their important markets are the U.S., the EU, Korea, Japan, South America, the domestic market.

The development of the local apparel industry in the region always implies the competition between intra-region and extra-region apparel firms. The existence and development of apparel firms unfortunately heavily depend on their competitive strategy. To make the platform for the elaboration of successful competition strategy, the managers really need to learn about the rating of their firm's competitiveness and about factors explaining this situation. Meanwhile, at the macro level, the government should also understand thoroughly explanatory factors to have reasonable support. This raises the need to analyze the factors affecting competitiveness of apparel enterprises. Until this time, there were several models built to analyze the competitiveness of enterprises but unfortunately there is no model designed for explaining competitiveness of apparel firms located in a specific region (like the Key Economic Region of Central Viet Nam) taking into account the particularities of the region. Therefore, the deployment of a suitable model for applying in the explanation of the factors affecting the competitiveness of the apparel firms in

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<sup>1</sup> It's about 244,2 million USD

<sup>2</sup> Data source: General Statistic Office

the Key Economic Region of Central Vietnam is very significant.

### **What is competitiveness?**

According to the synthesis of Ambastha and Momaya (2004), competitiveness is often studied in 3 viewpoints. In the first viewpoint, competitiveness evaluation is based on Performance. The second view is that the companies having high competitiveness certainly hold in the hands of the abundant Asset. The third view contends that it's Processes exploiting resources which are good competitiveness indicators. There is also integrated viewpoints which tends to measure competitiveness on three folds: Asset-Process-Performance. From these points, there are a lot of competitiveness concepts introduced.

*"Firm competitiveness is a capability of a firm to offer customers goods and services sustainably and adapting to social norms so that customers are willing to pay a compensation ensuring profitability more, than to rival firms."* Chikan (2001, p7)

*"Competitiveness can be defined as a firm's ability to stay in business and achieve some desired result in terms of profit, price, rate of return, or quality of its products; and to have the capacity to exploit existing market opportunities and generate new markets."* Asian Development Outlook (2003, p 219)

*"The competitiveness of a firm is the ability to create, maintain, use and innovate competitive advantages of the firm to better meet customer needs (compared to competitors) and achieve the objectives of the company in both domestic and international competitive environment"* Vu Trong Lam, Nguyen Ke Tuan et al (2006 )

With the viewpoint of studying the firm competitiveness based on performance, inheriting the spirit of the previous researches on competitiveness, in this paper, competitiveness is understood as *the ability of companies in dealing with competitors in order to maintain and enhance the value of the company for the stakeholders*. This concept includes the following meanings: 1) competitiveness always implies a comparison; 2) Competitiveness depends on the perception of the value of the company from the perspective of stakeholders in which, investors, customers and employees have the most important voice; 3) Status of competitiveness depends on choice of rivals against which the referential evaluation is made; 4) competitiveness will have to be multi-measured.

### **Formation of models for studying competitiveness of apparel firms**

#### ***The fundamental considerations for designing the explanatory model of apparel firms's competitiveness***

Establishing of a model for analyzing competitiveness of apparel firms should be concurrently based on the fundamental ideas of the model which is built and applied previously and take into account the peculiarities of apparel manufacturing. Specifically:

- + Apparel business involves interests of many groups, but the most important is still the owner, customers and employees. Therefore, the explanatory factors of competitiveness are those that affect the value of firms under these 3 points.
- + Apparel products can serve both domestic market and international markets. Then there are different rivals according different competitive spaces. This means that the model must also take into account the difference in the competitive spaces where there are the different competitors. In addition, in the study of Chevassus-Lozza (2000), Dyer (2001), Cantwell (2009), Rugman, Oh and Lim (2011), Dwyer and Kim<sup>3</sup>, Dhingra et al<sup>4</sup>...the important role of firm location in its competitiveness can be realised. Thus, in case of the garment firm is located in a key economic region, this region's characteristics will affect the competitiveness of the firm. In other words, "region" can be considered as a factor affecting totally competitiveness of apparel firms.
- + Many studies show that the firm competitiveness obviously depends on its position in the value chain of the finished products which they take part in; and capacity of organizing and operating efficiently the value chain within the firm. Thus, the characteristics of the value chain in the heart of the apparel enterprises and value chain position in finished products that companies involved are viewed as a set of factors affect the competitiveness of apparel firms.

#### ***Preliminary ideas of the model***

In this paper, the study of factors affecting the apparel firm's competitiveness is based on Porter's Diamond model (Porter, 1990). Although this model was introduced firstly to analyze national competitiveness, but it can also be used to study the factors affecting the competitiveness of firms in different countries, in different economic regions as it covers both micro factors and macroeconomic factors. However, by taking into account the considerations in Section 3.1, this model should be adjusted as follows:

Firstly, factors conditions and related and support industries will be combined and then split into two groups of factors: factors group of accessibility of principal inputs (capital, labor, sewing equipment, fabric and accessories) and factors group of accessibility of support services (software supply for designing and manufacturing, providing market information, transport operations, storage, import and export, international payments ...)

Secondly, the factors of competitive context and the firm's strategy will be split into two groups of factors: the firm factors and

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<sup>3</sup> Edition time is not specified

<sup>4</sup> Edition time is not specified

the industry's competitive characteristics (Flanagan et al, 2005). This separation is to emphasize the role of firm factors (Gelhar et al, 2006).

Thirdly, the government is exogenous element in the Diamond model. However, for garment industry generally and for apparel firms in a key economic region particularly, the role of the government is very important. So it will be considered as a factor affecting the competitiveness of apparel firms operating in a key economic region (Flanagan et al, 2005). However, opportunities are still considered exogenous factors because they emerge from the macro environment which firms can not control immediately and because macroeconomic factors within the region has been separated into groups of influential factors.

Fourthly, in the whole model, the specific characteristics of the region where companies operate will be shown in the development of the local support industries, the needs of local markets, regional support services, competitive characteristics of garment industry within the region as well as the attitude of the local authorities...

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So the explanatory model of apparel firm's competitiveness can be generalized as follows:

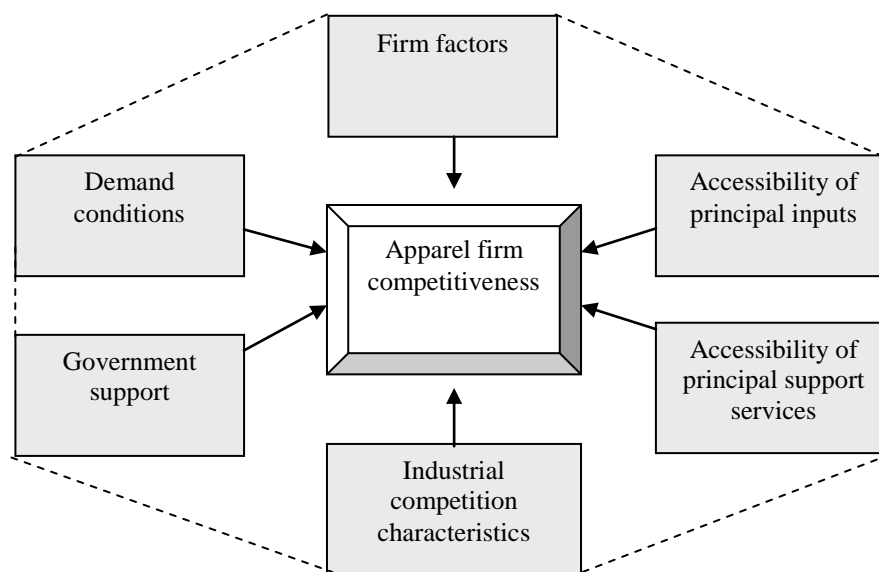


Figure: Factors affecting apparel firm's competitiveness

#### 4. Deployment of the explanatory model applied in studying competitiveness of apparel firms in the Key Economic Region of Central Vietnam

##### 4.1 The purpose of the deployment

The deployment aims to specify the factors in 6 groups of adjusted Diamond model which is said to have a real impact on the competitiveness of apparel firms in research scope as a key economic region

##### 4.2 Research process for deploying the evaluation model and the explanatory model of competitiveness of garment firms

Step 1: Review of researches on competitiveness

The theoretical and practical researches on competitiveness, particularly in the apparel industry has been reviewed to identify the factors affecting the competitiveness of apparel firms.

Step 2: Preliminary survey

**Respondents:** senior executives and middle managers of some apparel firms in the region, a number of government administrators involved in the apparel industry and researchers in the field of garments.

**Sampling method:** For detecting and simultaneously further screening really meaningful explanatory factors of apparel firms' competitiveness (in a key economic region), study in this phase is qualitative study. So the theoretical sampling method can be applied (Nguyen Dinh Tho, 2011) [13]. Also, due to wide research scope and difficulties in accessing respondents, the convenience sampling method was used. In this case, the respondents chosen were those who were easy to contact and agree to

participate in the survey (Nguyen Dinh Tho, 2011). Also because of purpose of this study phase, did the study stop when the overlap of information collected was almost completed. Thus, the number of respondents has stopped at 15.

**Table 1: Profile of survey sample**

Respondents	Quantity	Organisations
Midle and senior managers	10	+ Hoa Tho Texxtile & Garment Joint Stock Corporation + Hoa Tho Fashion Company + Hoa Tho Veston Factory + Duc Ly Private Garment Firm + Phu Hoa An Textile & Garment Company + Truong Giang Garment Joint Stock Company + Quang Ngai Vinatex Limited Company + Binh Dinh Garment Joint Stock Company
Government Administrators in garment industry	3	+ Danang Department of Industry and Trade + Quang Nam Department of Industry and Trade + Department of Economic management, Quy Nhon City, Binh Dinh province
Researchers on garment	2	+ University of Da Nang

**Data collecting method:** the in-depth discussion method was used with a well-prepared discussing outline. There are three channels of discussion was applied: face to face, by e-mail and by telephone. Recording was not used because all respondents were in special position of their organization and the most of answers expressed their points as so as practical understanding. Thus, they might be sensitive to the recording end then might felt uncomfortable.

Step 3: Survey on data sources

Along with the survey presented above, an additional survey was also conducted. Respondents are those who were able to provide data coming from the Da nang Department of Trade and Industry, the Quang Nam Chamber of Industry, Economic Division of Quy Nhon City (Binh Dinh), Da Nang Department of Statistics; and General Statistics Office. The middle and senior manager participating the survey in step 2 have also given some valuable idea on ability to collecting data.

Step 4: Review of the factors that affect competitiveness

Based on results of the preliminary survey and of the survey on data sources, factors affecting competitiveness of apparel firms have been reviewed, selected and modified.

**The factors affecting competitiveness of apparel firms**

In the previous studies on competitiveness in general and of apparel firms in particular, there are multiple perspectives on the factors affecting the competitiveness of apparel firms which was gathered in table 2.

**Table 2: Factors affecting the competitiveness of apparel firms**

Factors Group	Factors	Researchers/Authors	Notes
Firm factors	Firm size	Levitt (1983, cited in Rugman, Oh and Lim, 2011, p.6); Nathan Associates Inc. (2005)	Size could be evaluated in term of number of labors, sum of capital, revenue
	Firm location	Nohria & Ghoshal (1998); Chevassus-Lozza (2000), Dyer (2001), Rugman , Oh and Lim (2011); Rugman and Verbeke (2003), Cantwell (2009); Dwyer et al; Dhingra et al <sup>5</sup> ; Nachum & Zaheer (2005) and Porter (2000, cited in Cantwell,2009,p.2)	
	Category of ownership	Amann & Cantwell (2012)	
	Product development	Prahalab & Hamel (1990); Chandler. 1992; Lall, 2001 and Foss, 1996 (these 3 authors are cited in Mohamed,2005, p. 2); Buckley and Casson (1976, cited in Henisz, 2003, p.173);	
	Availability of resources	Gelei (2004) Chikan (2006) Gonzalez and Austin (2007)	Resources are including equipment, machines, labors (quantity and qualification)

<sup>5</sup> Publication time is not specified

	Finacial ability	Agarwal & Ramaswamy, 1992 and Grosse, 1992 (cited in Rugman, Oh and Lim,2011,p.6)	Total capital, capital scalability
	Apparel manufacturing pattern	Sturgeon (2001); Palpacuer, Gibbon and Thomsen (2005); Gereffi and Frederick (2010); Amann & Cantwell (2012)	Cut-Make-Trim, Original Equipment Manufacturing, Original Design Manufacturing, Original Brand Manufacturing
	Managerial variables	Bartlett và Ghoshal, 1989 và Kogut, 1985 (cited in Rugman, Oh and Lim,2011, p.6); Flanagan et al (2005); Nathan Associates Inc. (2005); Gonzalez and Austin (2007); Haider (2007); Porter (2008); Mataraarachchi & Henenkenda (2012); Gehlhar et al*;	Leadership, business strategies, cooperation management systems
	Technology	Laudesmann – Pfaffermayr, 1997 (cited in Wolfmayr,2008, p. 3); Best, 2001 (cited in Mohamed,2005, p.2 ), Gehlhar et al; Kumar & Chadee (2002); Flanagan et al (2005)	
	Solutions involving labors	Kumar & Chadee (2002); Nathan Associates Inc. (2005); Flanagan et al (2005); Gonzalez and Austin (2007); Marimuthu et al (2009)	Training, salary, bonus, work environment ...
	Organizational structure	Kumar & Chadee (2002)	The relationship between the department and individuals, organizational culture.
Accessibility of principal inputs	1. Capital	Kumar & Chadee (2002) ); Flanagan et al (2005); Porter (1990); Watchravesringkan, Karpova, Hodges & Copeland (2010)	
	2. Human resources (quantity and qualification)	Flanagan et al (2005); Gonzalez and Austin (2007); Mataraarachchi (2012); Watchravesringkan (2010); Porter (1990)	
	3.Equipment, materials	Flanagan et al (2005); Porter (1990); Watchravesringkan (2010); Mataraarachchi (2012)	
Accessibility of principal support services	Size, quality and cost of support services delivery	Reitch (1991, cited in Wolfmayr, 2008, p.1) Flanagan et al (2005); Arnold-Javorck-Mattoo (2006,); Wolfmayr (2008) Watchravesringkan (2010); Porter (1990)	
Industrial competition characteristics	The number of apparel firms in the region	Flanagan et al (2005)	
	The degree of products similarity (homogeneity)	Saviotti and Krafft (2004); Flanagan et al (2005)	Homogeneity is judged according to functions or to specifications of products
	Pricing behaviors of apparel firms in the region	Baumol, Panzar and Willig (1982); Flanagan et al (2005)	
Government support	Government policies	Kumar (2002); Verma (2002); Flanagan et al (2005); Chikan (2006); Porter (1990); Mataraarachchi (2012)	
Demand conditions	Size and growth rate of the target markets	Gonzalez and Austin (2007); Porter (2008) ; Mataraarachchi (2012)	
	Changes in behavior (of buyers)	Flanagan et al (2005); Porter (1990)	

Through surveys, comments and suggestions given by the surveyed experts on the factors affecting the competitiveness of apparel firms in the Key Economic Region of Central Viet Nam have been recorded and synthesized as follows:

\* Firm factors:

The industrially peculiar factor which has significant impact on apparel firms' competitiveness is apparel manufacturing patterns (corresponding to the level of the enterprises involved in the apparel value chain). In addition, the direct impacts also come from factors such as planning, personnel qualifications; mechanization level; conformance to international standards (especially significant for export-oriented enterprises in the U.S., EU, Japan...)

According to experts having been questioned, the firm scale is one of the original factors because it itself shows the availability

or level of resource abundance. It is also one of the factors that may affect other factors such as method of apparel manufacturing, technological innovation ability as well as conformance to international standards ... Same is the case of ownership category factor. In the context of Vietnam in general and the Key Economic Region of Central in particular, ownership category firstly represent the way of capital formation: from how many investor and from what kind of investors. So this factor also affect the amount of capital and its scalability. In addition, the firm category such as foreign investment companies, in most cases, closely related to apparel manufacturing method for they have embodied the geographical expansion of global apparel value chain.

Firm location is initially a firm factor. However, local markets, infrastructure, local labor markets, sources of raw materials in place; policies of local governments ...which is usually tied to a specific location are all reflected in 5 other factor groups the model. In other words, firm location factor (in the case of this research, that is the region factor) is also seen as the root factor. But unlike the two original factors as firm size and firm category, the region factor implies environmental factors.

\* Accessibility of principal inputs:

Experts' additional opinions just stop at concretizing the factors which contain peculiarity of the apparel industry: the labor market is considered a distinctive factor; the words phrase "support industries" should be used instead of "materials market". The labor market in the region will include factors such as scale of human resource, human resource qualification, discipline awareness of labor and labor costs. Supporting industries factors will include interested factors such as the supplier number of fabric, garment accessories and equipment; quality and price. Capital accessibility factors should be considered on a number of factors, such as banks and other financial institutions in the region, the credit policies of this institution, interest rates...

\* Accessibility of support services

Based on opinions of experts, the professional services (designing, fabrics and clothes printing..) are identified as the important factors. In addition, the logistics service is also thought to be very significant for the competitiveness of apparel firms in the Region when most of them have activities related to import and export (materials and/or products). Besides, other services such as goods inspection, customs...are also taken into account.

\* Industry's competitive characteristics:

In the survey results, the view of experts consulted agreed that apparel firms in the Key Economic Region of Central benefit a more convenient business condition than those in another Key Economic Regions due to the lower density of apparel firms. In other words, the number of apparel firms may be considered as one of the factors affecting the competitiveness of apparel firms in the Key Economic Region of Central. In addition, the level of similarity of the products and the pricing behavior of firms in the region are also agreed that affect the competitiveness of apparel firms.

\* Government supports:

If the competitiveness of apparel firms in a region is evaluated compared with apparel firms in other regions, the authority policies is certainly a factor making the differences. However, it will be not enough if only the role of the local government is taken into account. In the garment sector, beside Vietnam Textile Association, there are actually associations of local industries having got remarkable contributions to the development of the garment industry in the region, such as Textile and Garment Association of Central, Textile-Garment-Embroidery-Knitting Association of Ho Chi Minh city. Therefore, according experts' opinions, the support of the associations have to be recognized as a factor affecting the apparel firms' competitiveness.

\* Demand conditions:

Interview results don't suggest any changes for this factors group except the emphasis on the local market, especially for apparel firms directed to satisfy this kind of market.

Thus, the model applied in analyzing factors affecting the competitiveness of garment enterprises the Key Economic Regions of Central is generalized as follows:



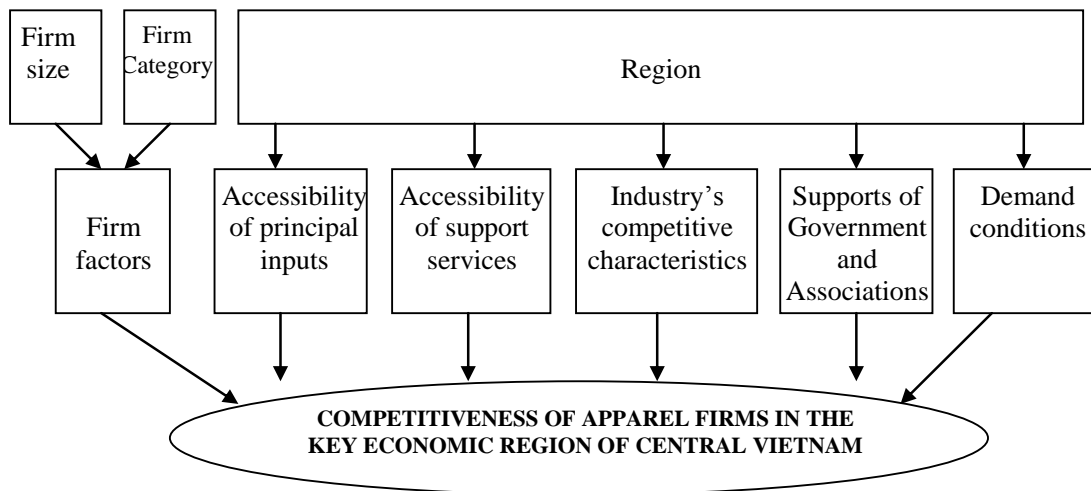


Figure 2: Model applied in analyzing factors affecting the competitiveness of the apparel firms in the Key Economic Regions of Central

How the influence of these factors on the apparel firms' competitiveness, considering the scope of the research is a key economic regions, can be generalized description in table 3.

Table 3: Manner of affecting on apparel firms' competitiveness of explanatory factors

Factor group	Factors	Manner of affecting
Firm factors	Apparel manufacturing pattern	+ Impact on the level of participation in creating added value + Impact on the ability to win buyers' choice + Impact on power in distributing added value in the global apparel value chain or in a narrower range → Selecting a suitable apparel manufacturing pattern will increase competitiveness, results in higher competitive outcome for investors
	Planning, elaborating strategies	Well-elaborated strategies, plans will supply enterprises with good orientations in competition, so result in stronger competitiveness.
	Human resources qualification	+ Impact on product quality, the ability to win the demanding orders, the efficiency of internal processes ... → high-qualified personnel often lead to high competitiveness
	Degree of mechanization	Well-equipped manufacturing will result in increasing productivity, in ensuring conformity in quality ... → high level of mechanization often lead to high competitiveness
	Application of certified management systems	+ That's a sign of quality assurance as committed to protecting the environment, ensuring social accountability ... → The availability of management systems conforming international standards will ensure the easier access to difficult markets such as the USA., EU, Japan ...
Accessibility of principal inputs	1. Capital	The number and scale of financial institutions affect the firm's ability for both width and depth investment. That thus affect competitiveness. Cost of capital affect the final product cost.
	2. Availability of human resources	The scale of human resources, their qualification and discipline affect positively the competitiveness while labor costs have negative influence
	3. Equipment, materials	The number of suppliers, the quality of materials and equipment have positive influence on competitiveness in the meantime, the price of these factors has negative influence because of its negative impact on product production cost
Accessibility of principal support services	Size, quality and cost of support services delivery	These factors affect competitiveness in the similar manner of case of materials and equipment
Industrial competition characteristics	The number of apparel firms in the region	Here, for convenience of study, the competitors may be specified as the apparel firms. This factor seems to be part of market structure and thus affect the intensity of competition. The higher the intensity of competition is, the lower the ability to win market share and to gain profit is.
	The degree of	In general, the higher the degree of product similarity is, the higher the risk of

	products similarity (homogeneity)	greater competition could be (Saviotti and Krafft, 2004). The degree of product similarity could be reviewed in aspect of product functions or product specifications
	Pricing behaviors of apparel firms in the region	Price behavior is a manifestation of competitive intensity and therefore affect competitiveness.
The support of government	Government policies	Government policies can affect both directly and indirectly and in multiple dimensions. When government policies give priorities for one group of apparel firms, they may also weaken the competitiveness of other groups
Demand conditions	Size and growth rate of the target markets	This factor will increase the competitiveness of apparel firms which are located near the market.
	Change in behavior (of buyers)	Changes in product selection criteria will increase the competitiveness of some apparel firms but meanwhile decrease the others' competitiveness

## Conclusion

Thus, from ideas of the model Diamond, combined with results of interviews with the experts who have enormous knowledge and experiences in the apparel industry, the model of analyzing the factors affecting the competitiveness of apparel firms have been modified to be applied in studying the competitiveness of apparel firms in the Key Economic Region of Central. Such adjustment and screening make the model leaner and more applicable from the perspective of those who have practical experience. Based on this authentic model, explaining factors affecting the competitiveness of apparel firms in Key Economic Region of Central will be able deployed in the studies in the future.

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