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MAPPING OF STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY AND SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE RESEARCH THEME: THREE-DECADE REVIEW

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Ni Putu Santi Suryantini[1]
Doctoral Program of Management Science, Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
Email: santisuryantini@student.ub.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4759-7671

Moeljadi[2]
Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
Email: moeljadi@ub.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1438-0169

Siti Aisjah[3]
Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
Email: aisjah@ub.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2450-2051

Kusuma Ratnawati[4]
Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
Email: kusuma@ub.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8308-2034

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Ni Putu Santi Suryantini
Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
santisuryantini@student.ub.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Sustainable competitive advantage emerges as a model of organizational outcomes which is considered an organization's ability to maintain its sustainability. To achieve this goal, organizations need to optimize all available resources. To achieve this, organizations need to build strategic flexibility, change business models and drive business performance to provide value to customers. This systematic literature review seeks to map the main topics that are related to strategic flexibility and sustainable competitive advantage, and map publication patterns and efforts to conduct research in the future. Key lines of research potential have been identified, and suggestions for future research to facilitate sustainable competitive advantage are provided. This study contributes to deepening the literature by identifying priority areas regarding strategic flexibility and sustainable competitive advantage to encourage future research that contributes to business sustainability.

KEYWORDS:

Sstrategic flexibility, sustainable competitive advantage, bibliometric analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental dynamics encourage organizations to identify their own resources for long-term resilience (Iborra et al., 2020). This has an impact on the ability of organizations to carry out open innovation (Alassaf et al., 2020; Hameed et al., 2021; Popa et al., 2017), business transformation (Mota Veiga et al., 2021; Parida et al., 2019), leadership capability (Hartnell et al., 2020; Kim & Beehr, 2018), and dynamic capabilities (Harsch & Festing, 2020; Weaven et al., 2021). Market turbulence and changes in customer orientation have even changed the perspective of organizations to become more comprehensive. Thus, creating uniqueness, having value, rareness, inimitable and unsubstitable are the best practices for building sustainable competitiveness (Arsawan, Koval, et al., 2022; Krishnan, 2021; X. Zhang et al., 2023). Literature indicates that organizations must map both tangible resources (Britto et al., 2014) as well as intangible assets (S. Z. Khan et al., 2019; Ying et al., 2019). This encourages organizations to build dynamic capability (Ferreira et al., 2020; Kazmi & Ahmed, 2021) toward sustainable competitiveness (Teece et al., 2009). However, the literature that discusses and relates uncertainty and the ability of organizations to be prepared for turbulence is still not well explored. Because sudden changes demand readiness, strategic planning, and strategic flexibility to maintain sustainability (Arsawan, De Hariyanti, et al., 2022).

During, sustainable competitive advantage has been a concern of scholars. Previous studies (Huang et al., 2015; Srivastava et al., 2013) describe how organizations explore temporary advantages to build long-term competitive advantages. This means that organizations that have the ability to manage resources have better potential to build a sustainable competitive advantage (Krishnan, 2021). However, this is still not mapped out in the literature so it is still in a partial context. Mapping potential resources includes the ability to adopt technology (M.-H. Chen et al., 2015; B. Zhang et al., 2013), increasing supply chain performance (Asree et al., 2018; Singhry, 2015), and expanding innovation (Chatzoglou & Chatzoudes, 2018; Parwita et al., 2021; Tu & Wu, 2021). At the individual level, increasing creativity, innovation, and employee performance is a practice to increase organizational competitiveness (Arsawan et al., 2022). Besides that, increasing intellectual capital encourages increased knowledge management, innovative work behavior, and innovation culture (Dabić et al., 2019; Mohammad Shafiee, 2022; Rehman et al., 2022).

Although drivers of sustainable competitive advantage have been studied in various literature, predictors such as strategic flexibility have never been explored in this relationship. Whereas strategic flexibility is an important construct that has an impact on strengthening the organization in the face of various uncertainties (Brozovic, 2018; Xiu et al., 2017). Literature indicates the important role of strategic flexibility in building innovative human resources (Xiu et al., 2017), improving strategic alignment, building organizational innovativeness (Nassani & Aldakhil, 2021), and strengthening the internal condition of the organization in facing environmental dynamism (Cingöz & Akdoğan, 2013). In addition, strategic flexibility is proven to improve performance (Yang et al., 2015) and maintain organizational continuity (S. H. Khan et al., 2020).

This study is expected to contribute to enriching the literature on the sustainability of organizations in three main ways. First, the resulting recommendations assist researchers in studying these two topics to produce a new map regarding how to link the two constructs as an effort to build sustainable competitiveness. The strength of the relationship between the two constructs can provide guidance on how an organization prepares a strategic plan to anticipate change (Iborra et al., 2020; Mandal & Saravanan, 2019). Besides that, the resulting strategic planning encourages the organization to have an open innovation orientation (Alassaf et al., 2020; Hameed et al., 2021) so as to produce change-oriented values (Acuña-Opazo & González, 2021; Felipe et al., 2017). Second, this study is expected to find other evidence that can assist organizations in maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage. Strategic flexibility is considered an important predictor of innovation and business performance (Cingöz & Akdoğan, 2013; Guo & Cao, 2014a; Nassani & Aldakhil, 2021; Xiu et al., 2017) but it has not been well explored in terms of sustainable competitive advantage. By mapping the literature on the two relationships, it can be an important finding for future researchers on this topic. Finally, for managers, it can serve as guidance on how to build a sustainable competitive advantage by paying attention to the resources they have, both tangible and intangible. Organizational capability in mapping all resources (Barney, 1991; Lo & Liao, 2021; Sabetzadeh & Tsui, 2015) is expected to encourage the formation of performance and competitiveness (S. Z. Khan et al., 2019; Prieto-Sandoval et al., 2019). Thus, conducting a systematic literature review on strategic flexibility and sustainable competitive advantage makes sense.

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MATERIAL AND METHOD

To achieve research objectives, we use bibliometric analysis with the help of VOSViewer by applying cluster analysis or scientific mapping (Mukherjee et al., 2022) as well as mapping relevant information, such as the most popular keywords and authors, as well as issues related to the topics discussed (Kholidah et al., 2022)(L. Zhang et al., 2022)(Agbo et al., 2021). Bibliometrics analysis functions such as: identifying the direction of development of a particular scientific discipline with the interpretation of published article data (Koval et al., 2023). The advantages of bibliometric analysis are that it is more objective and has a wider scope (Mukherjee et al., 2022). This research looks at the roots of a field of knowledge by identifying publications that have contributed most to the development of knowledge in the field (Marx et al., 2014). Data search was carried out by identifying databases that considered publication based on quality by taking articles that had gone through a peer review process in the form of research papers, reviews, and literature reviews in the Scopus-ScienDirect database. Scopus is the largest database of abstracts and citations from peer-reviewed literature (Koval et al., 2023; Suryantini et al., 2021), thereby providing opportunities in collecting publications related to sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility.

A Data search was conducted in April 2023 with limited keywords for sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility. Some of the criteria for selecting data are the year of publication between 1998-2023, review and research articles, the scope of Business, Management and Accounting, Decision Sciences, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, Psychology, Social Sciences, Engineering, Computer Science, Energy, Environmental Science, and Arts and Humanities. The two keywords "strategic flexibility" and "sustainable competitive advantage" was downloaded in the form of a research information system *RIS which were then fed to Mendeley for further analysis.

RESULT

This study uses a bibliometric approach to a number of articles, namely review articles (3) and research articles (241) so that the article data analyzed were 244 articles spread across 25 journals (Figure 1) in 10 subject areas (Figure 2).

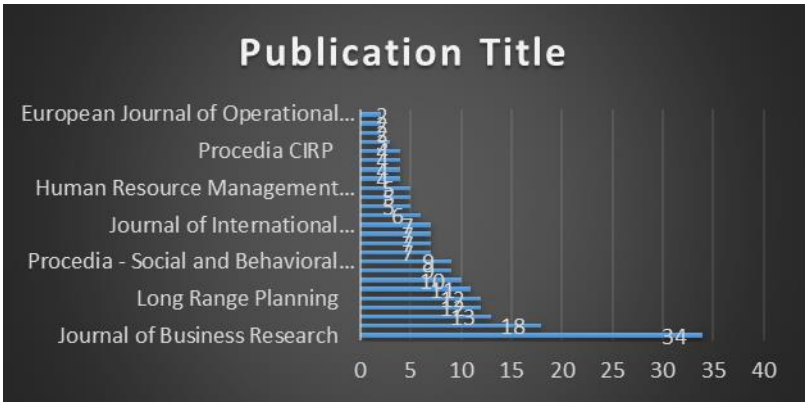

Figure1: Statistic article on publication title

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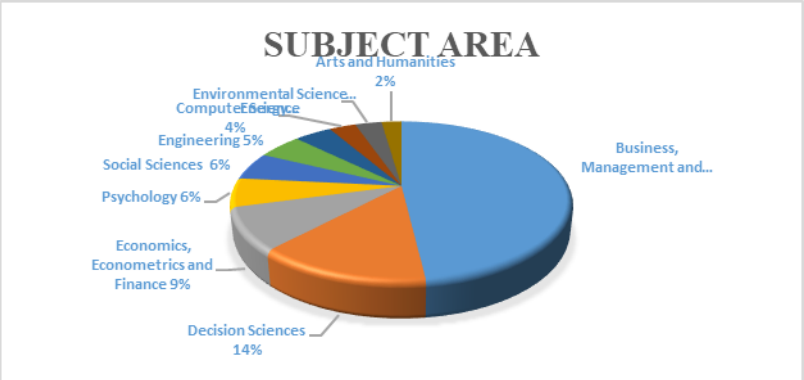

Figure 2. Subject Areas

From Figure 1, information is presented regarding the greatest probability of articles relating to sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility in the Journal of Business Research (which is stable in quarter 1) of 34 articles and the smallest in Knowledge-Based Systems (starting to occupy quarter 1 of 2010), International Journal of Research in Marketing (stable in quarter 1), European Journal of Operational Research (stable in quarter 1) with 2 articles from 1998-2023. Most of the articles collected were accepted in the subject area Business, Management and Accounting with a percentage of 48% and the smallest was in Arts and Humanities with 2%. From this data collection, it shows that articles related to sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility have a high probability of being published in reputable journals Q1 and related to business management.

Figure 3: Publication growth

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 3. there has been an increase in publications related to sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility. This means that there is a great opportunity to conduct research related to these two topics in future research. The increased attention of researchers regarding the two topics proves that organizations understand more about preparing strategic flexibility in dealing with various uncertainties (Gorondutse et al., 2020a; Miroshnychenko et al., 2021b; Nassani & Aldakhil, 2021). In addition, scholars consider that the topic of sustainable competitive advantage is an organization's way of increasing value in market competition by maintaining its sustainability (Haseeb et al., 2019; Krishnan, 2021; Lu et al., 2021).

Furthermore, to achieve our research objectives, we use the VOS Viewer software to carry out a bibliometric analysis with the aim of mapping the research conceptual structure regarding the sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility. This study performs mapping analysis based on text data. The data is processed in the form of a research information system * ris then extracted based on title and abstract, with a

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minimum number of occurrences of term 5 so as to find 371 thresholds out of 4.676 terms. Based on the data analyzed with VOSViewer, 4 clusters were obtained with the results of the analysis in network visualization, overlay visualization, and density visualization which are shown as follows:

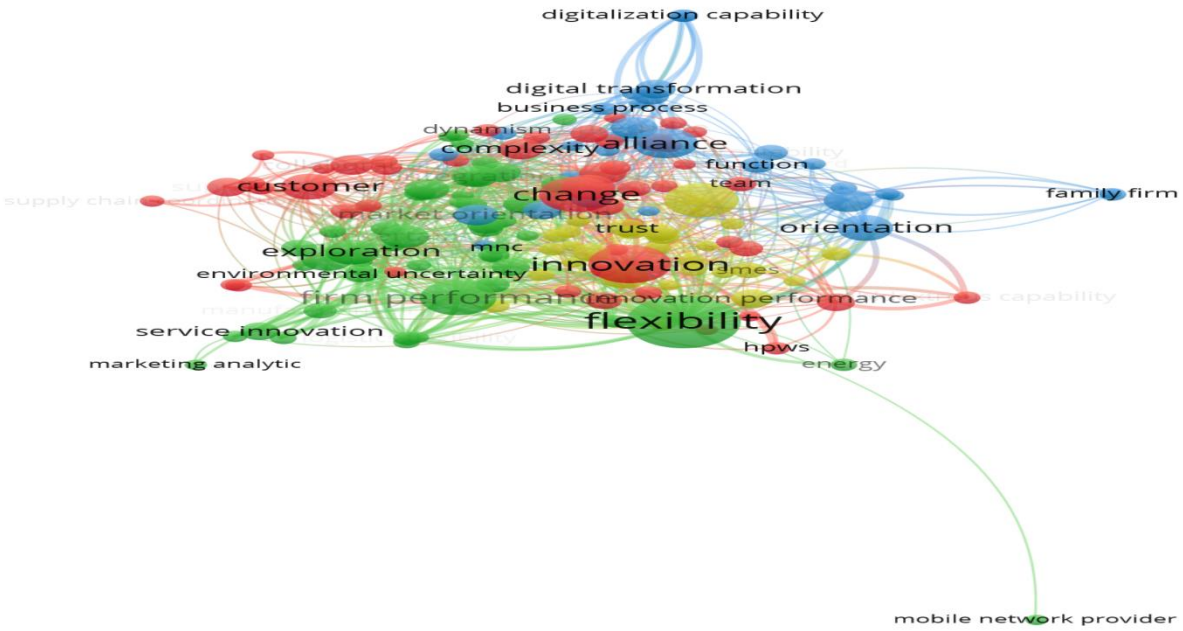

Figure 4. Network visualization

Cluster 1 (red): adaptability, alignment, ambidextrous capability, application, black box, building, business strategy, CEO, change, collaboration, complexity, construction, CRM, culture distance, customers, differentiation strategy, dynamism, environmental dynamism, external environment , firm innovativeness, globalization, HPWS, innovation, innovativeness, intellectual capital, knowledge collaboration, knowledge creation, knowledge management, leadership, manufacturing, marketing, marketing strategy, modularity, opportunity creation, organizational performance, portfolio, potential absorptive capability, RBV, reconfiguration capability, relationship learning, strategic information system, strategic management, superior performance, supplier, supply chain management.

Cluster 2 (green): action, competence, competency, covid, crisis, effectiveness, energy, entrepreneur, entrepreneurial orientation, environmental uncertainty, exploitation, exploration, firm performance, flexibility, global manufacturing, high level, intangible assets, integration, international performance , logistics performance, manifestation, market turbulence, marketing analytic, MNES, mobile network providers, organizational performance, positive relationship, postphenoment, resource and development, resilience, responsiveness, service innovation, strategic agility, strategic orientation, supply chain agility, supply chain management , sustainable competitive advantage, sustainable development goals, uncertainty, volume flexibility.

Cluster3 (blue): absorptive capacity, acquisition, alliance, board, business process, circular economy, competitive intensity, coopetition, current study, digital transformation, digitalization capability, enterprise, familyness, family firm, function, infrastructure capability, market orientation, notion, open innovation, operations performance, organizational learning, orientation, process technology, procurement, profitability, region, risk.

Cluster 4 (yellow): business model innovation, corporate social responsibility, digital platform, dynamic capability, dynamic strategic planning, employee participation, financial performance, foreign market,

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innovation performance, international business internalization, marketing capability, MSEM, retailer, SMEs, transformational leadership, trust, warranty payment.

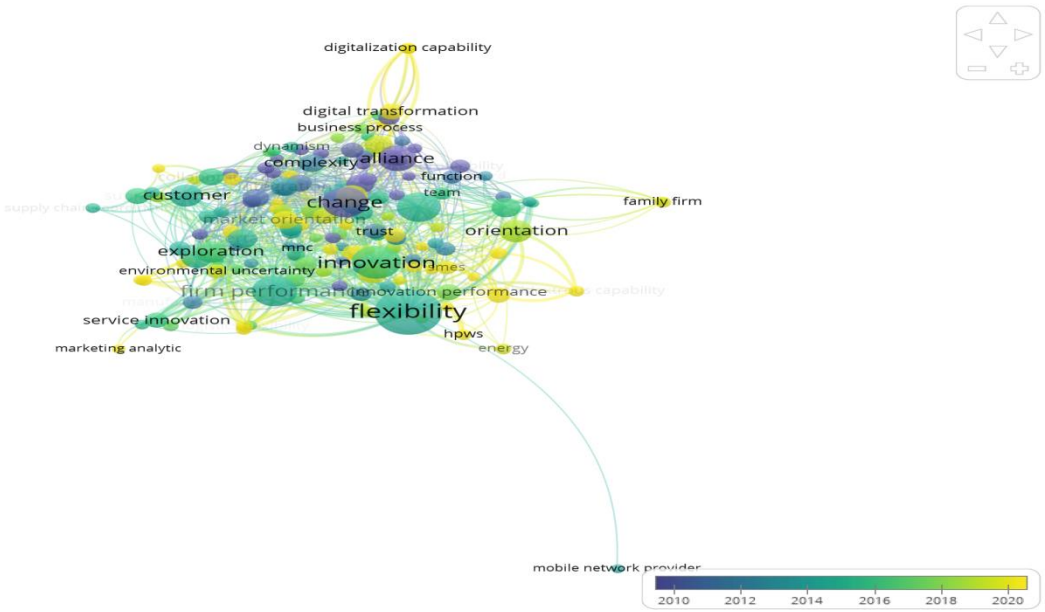

Figure 5: Overlay visualization

From the overlay visualization, we found the latest variables related to sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility in 2020, namely: digitalization capability, digital transformation, hpws (high-performance work system), logistic flexibility, marketing analyst, environmental uncertainty, market orientation, SMEs, ambidextrous capability, collaboration, energy, organizational performance.

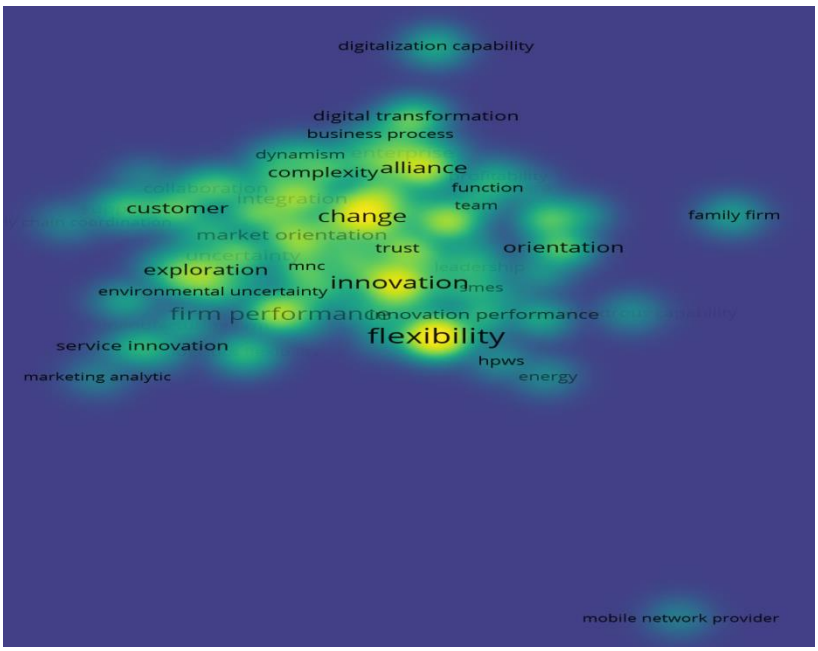

Figure 6. Density Visualization

Figure 6 shows that there are many concepts that are rarely researched related to sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility. For future research, it can be linked to mobile network providers, digitalization, digital transformation, marketing analytics, service innovation, high-performance work systems, environmental uncertainty. The results of this density show that future research shows that SCA and SF topics are related to digitalization. Based on the visualization results, it was found that topics for future research related to sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility are firm performance, innovation, digital transformation, digitalization capability, exploration, customer, market orientation, alliance, complexity, ambidextrous capability, and environmental uncertainty. It can be seen the direction of future research development related to marketing and digitalization.

DISCUSSION

This study conducts co-occurrence analysis based on text data titles and abstracts. From the results of the analysis found strategic flexibility related to sustainable competitive advantage, change, uncertainty, innovation, firm performance, customers, and exploration. Meanwhile, sustainable competitive advantage is related to flexibility, market orientation, strategic orientation, and customers. This means that there is a direct relationship between sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility in an environment of uncertainty and change.

This study aims to map "sustainable competitive advantage" and "strategic flexibility" for more than three decades. Based on this analysis, it resulted in several findings in enriching the literature in the field of business and strategic management. First, optimizing organizational capabilities in strategic flexibility, especially in an uncertain external environment (Arsawan, Kadek, et al., 2022) (Miroshnychenko et al., 2021a)(Guo & Cao, 2014b). With strategic flexibility, organizations have the ability to act quickly by identifying and making changes to adapt (Shimizu & Hitt, 2004)(Gorondutse et al., 2020b)(Arshad et al., 2018). This study proves the application of dynamic capabilities theory in the utilization of resources in dealing with environmental changes (Vătămănescu et al., 2019).

Second, this study provides an overview of how organizations reconfigure capabilities to deal with environmental changes that threaten sustainable competitive advantage (Guo & Cao, 2014b). Namely by focusing on marketing orientation and customers (T.-Y. Chen et al., 2017) and digitalization (Knudsen et al., 2021)(Rahatulain et al., 2020). Third, regarding future research potential, there are still many new variables that can be developed in research related to sustainable competitive advantage and strategic flexibility that have not been explored in the relationship between constructs or research models, such as (1) mobile network provider, (2) energy, (3) knowledge management, (4) collaboration, (5) alliance, and (6) acquisition.

CONCLUSION

There are two main conclusions that can be drawn from this study that may contribute to future research. First, visualization shows the strategic role of flexibility in building a sustainable competitive advantage. The increase in the number of publications shows that this topic is increasingly in demand by researchers and the need for further studies, especially related to marketing and digitalization in organizational innovation. Second, it provides an overview for further research regarding variables that have not been explored but are directly related, such as: (1) firm performance, (2) innovation, (3) digital transformation, (4) digitalization capability, (5) exploration, (6) customer, (7) market orientation, (8) alliance, (9) complexity, (10) ambidextrous capability, and (11) environmental uncertainty. Suggestions for further research are that it requires further testing regarding the relationship between variables to find a causal relationship between variables.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Authors Affiliation

Ni Putu Santi Suryantini[1]
Doctoral Program of Management Science, Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
Email: santisuryantini@student.ub.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4759-7671

Moeljadi[2]
Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
Email: moeljadi@ub.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1438-0169

Siti Aisjah[3]
Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
Email: aisjah@ub.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2450-2051

Kusuma Ratnawati[4]
Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
Email: kusuma@ub.ac.id
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8308-2034

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