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# The Adoption of Blue Ocean Strategy to Sustain Competitive Advantage in the Syrian Food Industry

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## Abstract

This study aims to detect the extent of adoption of the Blue Ocean Strategy in the Syrian food industry companies and its role in improving its competitive advantage. Syrian Companies need to shape their blue ocean strategy in accordance with consumer value, price, cost, and adoption. This permits them to construct a feasible business model and ensure that profits from the blue ocean is created. The study used descriptive-analytical approach. The data were composed of a questionnaire distributed to 293 personnel working in 85 Syrian food companies. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 22) were applied to analyze the data. The result showed there are a substantial interest by Syrian food companies to adopt Blue Ocean strategy indicators in its operations. Also, there was a significant relationship between the adoption of Blue Ocean Strategy and the improvement of sustainable competitive advantage for the investigated companies. The researchers suggested that Syrian companies should emphasize on the importance of the innovation indicator and its role in producing new brands and creating markets free of competition which sequentially contributes to increase in the company's market share. The study achieves a qualitative benefit for both researchers and academics about the concept of BOS because it is the first study that introduces the BOS and its impact on sustainable competitive advantage in Syrian.

**Keywords:** Blue Ocean, Red Ocean, Sustainable Competitive Advantage, Blue Ocean Strategy Indicators, Syrian Food Industry.

## 1. Introduction

The Syrian food industry is one of the most essential industries affecting the Syrian national economy especially post the crisis of 2011. According to the head of Syrian Exporters Union Mohammed Al-Sawah, despite the harsh economic conditions that face Syria, Syrian food products are still entering 90 countries and exports of the food sector is five times the textile sector, and there are Syrian companies whose food exports reached tens of millions of dollars. According to Bayram and Gök (2020), the raw material export share was about 68%, while the share of the total Syrian export for finished products and semi-finished products was 24% and 8%, respectively. Therefore, it is vital to study this industry and discover new trends affecting its progress.

The rapid improvement in the Syrian economy after the 2011 crisis and the high demands for food in the government-controlled areas, food industry firms need to change and adopt unconventional ways and means to reach the top of the competitive pyramid among existing companies in Syria today.

The revenues of any economic sector are determined by the different forces of competition within it and surpass any institution within this sector depends on adopting an effective competitive strategy that allows it to gain and maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage that distinguishes it and ensures its superiority over other competitors. Therefore,

setting strategies are one of the main ingredients for long-term success and survival. Old tradition businesspeople believe that evaluation of competitors' strategies and knowing their activities are good business, on the other hand, this concept has become relatively old in the eyes of those who advocated the application and adoption of the Blue Ocean strategy.

In modern time, so many companies are looking for new strategies with innovative approaches away from traditional strategies. The concept of Blue Ocean emerged as a solution to the old and traditional business practices in Syria. The blue ocean strategy is the development of the concept of strategic management in the evolving and changing world of business. Kim and Mauborgne (2015) defined blue oceans as those industries and markets that yet to be identified, therefore, they do not exist. Its characteristics are that they are entirely new markets, so they have the potential to generate profitable and attractive returns to organizations. On this basis, the Blue Ocean strategy represents the means to discover market locations that are not competitive. The Blue Ocean strategy is an option for organizations to distance themselves from the bloody competition that characterizes the red ocean (the competing companies) by creating an undisputed market space, so that competition becomes irrelevant (Taleb & Albanna, 2012).

Kim and Mauborgne (2015) summarized the difference between the Red and Blue Ocean strategy, the first involves competition within the current market space while the second involves the creation of unutilized market spaces. The former works to defeat the competitors, while the second considers competition as irrelevant. The first focuses on exploiting the current demand and conducting value and cost analysis, while the second focuses on the creation of new demand and acquisition. Finally, the first makes the firm's actions follow the strategic option of differentiation or cost leadership, while the second focuses on organizational activities as a whole to strive for uniqueness and cost leadership together.

In this research, the researchers will be studying the blue ocean strategy according to its four factors indicators (eliminate, reduce, increase, and create) and its relationship with the dimensions of sustainable competitive advantage (Quality of product/Service, Customer Response, Organization Effectiveness and Efficiency, Flexibility, Cost and Creativity), which will be clarified thoroughly later in the paper.

The authors motivation for this study came from their knowledge that blue ocean strategy pursues to turn strategic management on its head by sustaining competitive advantage with innovation as the main objective, in which businesses produce consumer demand resulting in increased profitability in the industry. To test the dominance of Blue Ocean Strategy through both the long and short terms, a theoretical model is outlined that postulates that as long as there are profits to be had in the food sector. Looking at entire industry in this way over time would tell if Syrian food companies succeeded by creating new markets (blue oceans) to sustain competitive advantage. If companies succeeded by creating new markets that attracted consumers over the long term, industry profits and the number of vendors would both steadily increase

### 1.1. Problem Statement

Many food industries companies in Syria operate in an unstable environment, which characterized by the limited ability of these companies to invest their technical and marketing capabilities to suit the needs of their customers or even stand up and meet the competition in the surrounding countries. Moreover, the problem is compounded by the status quo and economic sanctions imposed on the Syrian government for more than 9 years. Also, restrictions on import and export due to the United States and its allies' arbitrary measures and economic embargo, which requires these companies to redouble their efforts to adopt new strategies and innovative approaches that contribute to overcoming the difficult circumstances surrounding them.

According to (Understanding Market Drivers in Syria, 2018) the main problem facing many companies in Syria is lack of experienced marketers and knowledge of the competitive methods. In addition, the failure to apply modern management methods and relying on family experience, as well as the non-application of modern technology and innovative products, resulted in a lack of competition. Findings from the Syrian Economic Science Association Research in 2017 showed that market competition has a direct and strong relationship to the companies' sustainability.

We will shed the light on the food industry companies in the Syrian Arab Republic and examine their adaptation of Blue Ocean strategy as a modern competitive strategy, especially in light of the rapid changes and transformations taking place in Syria today. The researchers will examine the achievement of sustainable competitive advantage by exploring the principles and indicators of Blue Ocean strategy and its impact on the food industry companies. Therefore, the research problem is to what extent food companies in Syria adopt the blue ocean strategy; does this strategy promote a sustainable competitive advantage?

### 1.2. Research Objectives

- I. Identifying the extent to which food companies adopt the BOS as a competitive strategy by discovering the undetected gaps unnoticed by competitors.

- II. Identifying the extent to which competitive superiority is achieved by employing the dimensions of sustainable competitive advantage (product/service quality, customer response, effectiveness and efficiency, Flexibility, cost, and creativity) by adopting the BOS.
- III. Testing the relationship between BOS indicators (eliminate, reduce, increase, and create) and sustainable competitive advantage.
- IV. Studying the impact of the BOS indicators (elimination factors, reduction factors, increasing factors, and creation factors) to enhance sustainable competitive advantage in food industry companies in Syria.

### 1.3. Significance of the Study

This study draws its importance from the subject matter, which is the extent of BOS impact on the sustainability of Syrian Food Industry Companies. The study has two important aspects: cognitive and practical. Cognitive side: The study achieves a qualitative benefit for researchers and academics about the concept of BOS because it is the first study that introduces the BOS and its impact on sustainable competitive advantage in Syrian Food Industry. In addition to the potential significance of this study for scholars in the field of strategic management which could emerge clearly in the future. In the practical aspect, the study deals with investigating food industry companies in Syria after the 2011 crisis, and the attainment of sustainable competitive advantage through the adoption of the principles and indicators of the BOS.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) Concept

The BOS emerged as a new strategy because of the rapid development and changes in the business world. Moreover, the modernization of the strategic management concept and theories has motivated Professor Chan Kim and his assistant Renee Mauborgne at Harvard University to create the Blue Ocean phenomenon. BOS is a reliable design with strategic thinking concentrating on generating new markets where the competition is irrelevant. Thus, the BOS is a business strategy that stimulates the creation of a new market space rather than competing in the existing industry (Kim *et al.*, 2008). Debi (2006) points out that companies who want to improve their quality and performance; must adopt this strategic move that contribute to the creation of positive business indicators when these moves strategically implemented, it will create a new space and thus a new blue ocean.

Many researchers contributed to the definition of the BOS. For example, Kim and Mauborgne (2015) defined Blue Ocean as all the industries that do not exist today with unknown market space and have not been reached by competitors, and competition is irrelevant because competitive rules are not yet in place. It is a business strategy, which dives into untested market space and free from the competition (Massoudi, 2018). It is a strategy that creates new value for the organization, customer and breaking the rule of substitution between differentiation and low cost (Baxter & MacLeod, 2008). According to previous definitions, the researchers concluded that BOS is the discovery of the remote areas of the market that were not discussed by one of the competitors through the creation of value.

### 2.2. Red and Blue Oceans

The red ocean is a familiar and known market saturated with goods and services where companies introduce their products, and the markets are crowded with competitive conflict. Kim and Mauborgne (2015) believe that the strategies that are determined by the level of demand and the availability of resources are called the red ocean, which represents the existing places. On the other hand, the Blue Ocean strategic plan creates new environments for redefining products or services where the nature of competition is not on the table and differentiation and cost leadership strategies are sought at the same time.

Blue Ocean strategies are similar to prospecting strategies in terms of searching for new markets and products. The risk that business faces when it enters a new market or seeking to create a new demand forced them to stay in the Red Ocean. Sloan and Pollak (2006) reviewed the most important differences between blue oceans and red oceans as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Differences Between Red and Blue Ocean (Sloan & Pollak, 2006).

Comparison	Red Ocean Strategy	Blue Ocean Strategy
Market Area	Competition within a market	Creating a new market area
Competition Nature	Beat the competition	Competition doesn't exist
Demand Nature	Exploitation of current demand	Creation of new demand
Cost and Value Strategy	Trade-off between value and cost	Breaking value-cost trade-off

Organizational activities	Low cost or differentiation	Low-cost and Differentiation
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### 2.3. Blue Ocean Strategy Indicators

The researchers based the selection of BOS indicators on a previous literature and opinions of researchers who agreed on these indicators, such as Kim and Mauborgne (2015), Siegemund (2009), Saxtoft (2008), Choyt (2007), and Yang (2007). The researchers framed these indicators (create, eliminate, reduce, and increase) as questions to narrow the usual strategic logic in red markets:

What can we eliminate among the elements that the industry considers necessary at present?

What can we reduce to lower costs at the current industry level?

What elements can we increase to exceed the industry's current quality level?

What elements can we create that is unavailable already in the industry?

By answering the first two questions, you have the ability to visualize how to cut costs more than competitors do. The answer to the last two questions gives you the ability to visualize the innovative value you can offer customers to create new demand in the market. These indicators are the cornerstone of building Blue Ocean strategy. Saxtoft (2008) explained these indicators:

- I. Increase: represent some things that will have the ability to increase and improve quality in the products required for the consumer, such as increased sales premises, demands, increase the quality level, seeking to meet customers' needs. In this way, the organization seeks to achieve competitive superiority over its competitors in the market.
- II. Eliminate: excluding some unnecessary elements, this exclusion will reduce costs and do not affect sales or quality levels. For example, the elimination of the products sale in one market location or the elimination of certain workers who slows the work process and work at high wages, as well as the elimination of some expenses which can reduce the costs of the production process. Thus, the goal of the organization is to eliminate what is considered unnecessary and has no effect on the work process.
- III. Reduce: reducing some non-work-related actions, which will contribute to reducing costs. Many companies are overstating their customer service, which raises costs without profit, thus, the company reduces the volume of its investment to a certain extent such as downsizing ideas or applications that are harmful to the environment and the development of ideas that stimulate the application of environmental ideas. This can distinguish the organization from its competitors in front of its customers and stakeholders.
- IV. Create: Creating new ideas, finding ways to deliver and offer goods and services to satisfy customers or create new systems or practices that help organizations to improve its product. Innovative organizations have the ability to transform creative ideas into useful outcomes, and managers who talk about making the organization more creative usually want to stimulate innovation. The Blue Ocean organization seeks to create new business and products, as well as create an innovative working environment and innovative production and marketing methods.

Kim and Mauborgne (2017) presented The Value Innovation Model or the strategic model in which the two researchers suggested that value provided without innovation becomes just an addition and innovation without value becomes only a technology. This may exceed the readiness and expectations of customers and offer them something other than what they expect and accept, consequently, the product fails.

### 2.4. Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The interest in sustainable competitiveness and its importance in business organizations have grown rapidly. Organizations use Different types of competition to meet the pace of change and to cope with rapid development, where the sustainable competitive advantage means different things for business organizations. Companies may relate their strategies to suppliers, customers, competitors, low price, desirable characteristics, or different resources owned by one organization without others. Competitive advantage also depends on the company's ability to outperform competitors in any domains of strategic performance (Taleb & Albanna, 2012).

Porter (1996) asserts that competitive advantage is a strategic goal originated from within the organization to achieve a long-term share that does not disappear quickly, renewable and innovated. Others define it as the investment of the financial, human and technological resources to create value for customers. Taleb and Albanna (2012) define it as a set of integrated operations, services, and activities that offers greater value to consumers and helps to outperform competitors by having sustainable resources hard to replicate by competitors.

### 2.5. Dimensions of Sustainable Competitive Advantage

There are substantial empirical studies that describe sustainable competitive advantages, such as (Jie *et al.*, 2013; Awwad, 2011; Massoudi & Ahmed, 2021; Thatte, 2007; Petrovic *et al.*, 2008; Voulgaris *et al.*, 2013). Based on previous studies, the researchers developed six dimensions to measure competitive advantage, namely quality, customer response, cost, efficiency and effectiveness, flexibility, and creativity.

- I. Quality: Quality is a changing situation related to the state of the product or service provided, as well as the individuals, processes and the environment that satisfy customer's needs. Ren *et al.* (2010) stated that quality means satisfying customers and is the basis for achieving sustainable competitive advantage. This is a modern concept of quality definition since the old concept focused on the characteristics of the product only. In addition, achieving quality in all areas of work is a difficult task to achieve, especially as customers change their perceptions of quality.
- II. Customer Response: Achieving and maintaining customer loyalty is a necessary basis for sustaining the competitive advantage for the organization. Taleb and Albanna (2012) state that the customer is the center of the game, he determines his needs first and the role of the organization is to meet those needs. One of the keyways to enhance the competitiveness of the organization is to continue to deliver new services of better quality and faster response than competitors to meet the wishes and needs of its customers.
- III. Efficiency and Effectiveness: Efficiency refers to provide the highest value to the customer as much as the customer believes the quantity of that value. Moreover, it means the aptitude of the firm to adjust and stay in the environment. On the other hand, business organizations are effective when they can achieve their objectives through the means available to them. Daft (2001) defined effectiveness as the capability of the firm to establish available resources and use them efficiently to achieve limited objectives. Moreover, Gabbar (2007) sees effectiveness as a reflection of the organization's negotiating ability to invest in opportunities and obtain something it requires from the scarce environmental resources.
- IV. Flexibility: Is one of the most important competitive dimensions at the level of business organizations because it highlights the organization's ability to adapt to customers' needs and expectations, as well as the innovation in developing its internal resources and adapting to the external environment. Dilworth (1992) defines it as the capacity of the organization to respond to changes in production quantities and product mix. Moreover, Evan (1997) points out that many organizations use flexibility as a competitive weapon that indicates the capacity and ability to adapt successfully to changing environmental conditions. It is the possibility of making fundamental changes in a market location based on creativity, design, and size.
- V. Cost: Reducing the cost of the final product is one of the priorities that most products seek because they reflected on the final price of the product or service, particularly in competitive markets. To achieve competitive advantage, Organizations should determine the cost of raw materials and labor in order to tailor a production system that contributes to reducing the cost of one unit, Porter (1996) states that institution is able to achieve competitive advantage by decreasing the costs of its actions, creating value to the lowermost levels in comparison with competition.
- VI. Creativity: Is one of the distinct characteristics of successful organizations, it is the capacity of these organizations to stay and continue in the market. According to Chesbrough *et al.* (2006), for organizations to survive and grow in the market, they must reexamine in depth its internal mission and strategy, and external conditions such as market structure, customer, competition, and society, because these factors are constantly changing.

## 2.6. Blue Ocean Strategy and Competitive Advantage

Kim & Mauborgne (2017) contend that the blue ocean doesn't pursue competing excellence, due to the trap of competition. This is considered to be as a good measure to be improved. Yet, in the end, the achievement of BOS can be considered a competitive advantage. few studies in the past were related to the implementation of the BOS with the achievement of competing superiority such as Shared (2019) in Saudi Arabia and Bataineh and Alomyan in Jordan. According to Shared (2019) the four-dimensional influence of the BOS referred to as The Four Action Framework on competing excellence. The author found that BOS's dimensions are positively influence the performance of Al-Rajhi Bank of Saudi Arabia. Shared also cited six paths in his research but did not test the impact of tool on competing excellence. Shared (2019) also designates that BOS elements (Eliminate, Reduce, Raise and Create) positively correlate to competing excellence which consist of service quality, innovation, flexibility, cost, and customer response.

Moreover, in Telecommunication sector in Irbid, Jordan also provides evidence of the strong influence of BOS elements on competing excellence. From their funding, it is showed that the three-elements: create, raise, and reduce positively influence competing excellence. While the eliminate element which has no positive effect on competing excellence. Some other studies have been done by Namboodiri *et al.* (2019), Dehkordi *et al.* (2012), Hanifah *et al.* (2015), and Shared (2019). Bibliography study conducted by Namboodiri *et al.* (2019) By reviewing BOS related articles and

analyze them using the grounded theory method. From the study, they collected 68 first-tier themes, and 9 second-level themes, which were categorized to be three main themes consisting of “innovative governance”, “integration of functional complexity”, and “catalysts” or “drivers for development”.

Besides, Dehkordi *et al.* (2012) focuses solely on describing the differences between red ocean and blue ocean market and managers’ practical role. Hence, companies were found competing in the red ocean continuously to win the competition amid a diminished and less attractive market share, while the blue ocean is a market where competition is not relevant. The authors added that BOS can be used as a new business model due to its ability to increase profits by creating new market. However, its implementation requires the involvement of right staff with practical ability, emphasis on leadership.

Additionally, Dehkordi *et al.* (2012) didn’t specify any clear influence of the BOS' on competing for advantage, even though it contributes to the formation of new market. Likewise, Hanifah *et al.* (2015) labels the case of the BOS implementation in a Japanese company in Indonesia. They named Four Action Framework, but Hanifah *et al.* (2015) failed to deliver evidence on the company employs the dimension of the framework in producing new market (See Figure 1). Based on the above clarification, the researchers concluded that the previous research results on the BOS's impact on the competitive advantage still have not resulted in a bold conclusion. Because of the varied methods and inconsistencies of the tools used by the researchers.

Similarly, a review of the implications of the BOS implementation and sustaining competitive advantage is still not getting satisfactory assessment. Departing from this point of view, this study proposes a framework for study the effect of BOS on sustaining competitive advantage. Thus, the researchers postulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the blue ocean strategy in terms of its indicators individually (create - eliminate - reduce - increase) and sustainable competitive advantage dimensions combined.

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant effect of BOS indicators (eliminate index, reduce index, increase index and create index) in enhancing sustainable competitive advantage in the food industry companies in Syria.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed framework:

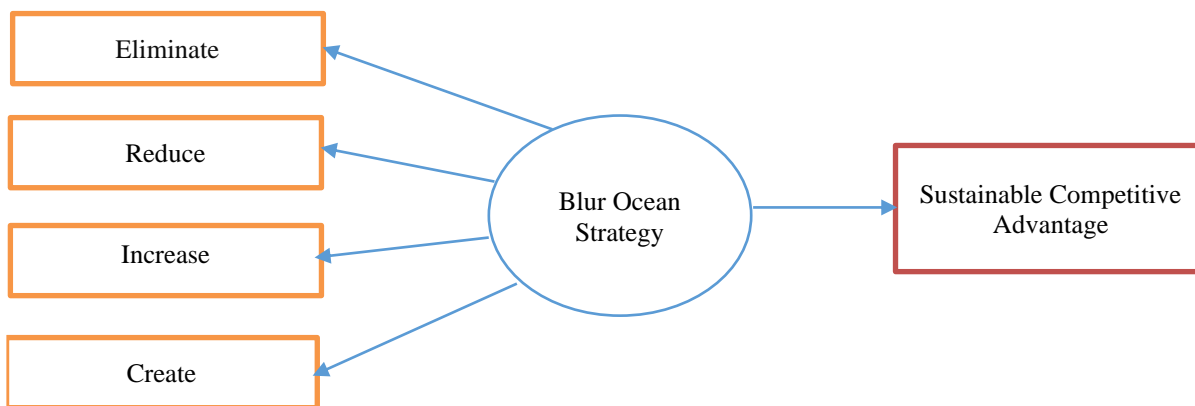


Figure 1. Proposed Framework.

### 3. Methodology

The researchers used a descriptive-analytical method in order to achieve the study objectives. The researchers will present the phenomenon of Blue Ocean; analyze the collected data and test the connection between its components. Two variables were used; the dependent variable is the sustainable competitive advantage dimensions (product quality/ service, customer response, organization effectiveness, organization efficiency, flexibility, cost, creativity). And independent Variable: BOS indicators: (eliminate, reduce, increase, and create).

The data were collected by questionnaire distributed to the studied companies. The reasons for choosing a questionnaire survey were: It is affordable ways to gather quantitative data, they offer a way to gather vast amounts of data on any subject, it was quick and easy to collect results, it allowed the researchers to allow you to gather information from a large audience.

The population of this study is 85 companies that were taking part in the Food Industries Exhibition at Damascus Fairgrounds City (Over 85 companies take part in “Syria Food” Exhibition, 2018). The sample of the study was 300

personnel representing company managers, marketing managers, production and operations managers. 293 valid responses were collected. The questionnaire consists of three main sections: Demographics (gender, age, education, experience, and occupation), Blue Ocean indicators composed of 20 statements distributed equally on the following 4 domains (create, increase, reduce, eliminate). Finally, the sustainable competitive advantage dimensions with 24 statements distributed equally on the following 6 dimensions (quality, creativity, flexibility, cost, customer response, and efficiency and effectiveness). The five-dimensional Likert scale was used to measure the responses of the questionnaire.

The researchers applied the following statistical tools to analyze the data: descriptive statistics to evaluate the study sample, Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation. Also, to determine the reliability and consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was applied. Additionally, to calculate the internal consistency and structural validity of the questionnaire and test the relationship between the variable, Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used. Finally, the researchers used Multiple Linear Regression and independent Samples T-Test to test the hypothesis.

### 3.1. Sample Description

This section includes a presentation of data analysis and test hypothesis, answering the study questions and to explore the main findings of the questionnaire. The respondents' general data included gender, age, position, and education level. In addition, companies' location, years in operation, and size of capital.

Table 2. Sample Description.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	176	60.1	60.1	60.1
	Female	117	39.9	39.9	100.0
Valid	18-30	170	58.0	58.0	58.0
	31-40	87	29.7	29.7	87.7
	More than 40	36	12.3	12.3	100.0
Valid	Less than 5 years	108	36.9	36.9	36.9
	6-10 years	90	30.7	30.7	67.6
	11-20 years	74	25.3	25.3	92.8
	More than 20 years	21	7.2	7.2	100.0
Valid	CEO	43	14.7	14.7	14.7
	Marketing	89	30.4	30.4	45.1
	Production	91	31.1	31.1	76.1
	Other	70	23.9	23.9	100.0
Valid	Less than High School	77	26.3	26.3	26.3
	High School	110	37.5	37.5	63.8
	Bachelor Degree	79	27.0	27.0	90.8
	Post Graduate Degree	27	9.2	9.2	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table 2 illustrates the respondents' demographic description. In gender distribution where (60%) male and (40%) female. The dominance of male respondents is due to several factors including the nature of customs and traditions that prefer male. Also, the nature of the industrial work requires pressures and hard physical work for significant periods.

The ages of the respondents, where (87%) were less than 40 years old. This shows the effective role of youth in Syrian Food Companies.

Work experience shows (36.9%) of respondents have less than five years in experience. Also, (30.6%) have between 6-10 years of experience. On the other hand, (25.3%) have 11-20 years of experience. Finally, (7.2%) have more than 20 years of experience.

In regard to position in the companies, (14.7%) of respondents were company presidents, (30.4%) were marketers, (31.1%) were involved in production work, and (24%) held different positions such as engineers, accountants, assistant managers, sales and public relation.

Finally, the educational level of respondents where (37.5%) had high school diploma, (27%) had bachelor degree, (9.2%) had post-graduate degree, and (26.3%) had less education than high school.

### 3.2. Companies' General Information

The following section will describe the 85 food industry companies concerning years of existence, location, and the total capital of each company.

Table 3. Years of Existence.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Less than 5 years	32	37.6
	5-20 years	42	49.4
	20-30 years	11	13.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3 shows that (49.9%) of the companies studied been in existence for more than 5 years and (37.6%) are new companies that were established after the crisis of 2011. This shows the entrepreneurial spirit of Syrian investors especially in risk taking. A (13%) of companies studied had been in the Syrian market for more than 20 years.

Table 4. Company's Location.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Damascus	21	24.7
	Homs	9	10.5
	Aleppo	22	25.8
	Hama	6	7.0
	Tartous	9	10.5
	Latakia	12	14.1
	Suwaidaa	5	5.8
	Hasaka	1	1.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4 shows that the industrial city of Aleppo had the biggest share of the food companies in the study (25.8%), followed by Damascus with (24.7%), and Latakia with (14.1%), the rest of the companies were in other small cities.

Table 5. Company's Capital.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	\$100,000-500,000	15	17.6
	\$500,000-1,000,000	36	42.4
	\$1,000,000 and more	34	40.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 5 shows that (82.4%) of the companies had capital worth more than \$500,000, the rest were small companies with capital of less than \$500,000.

### 3.3. Reliability

The researchers applied Cronbach's Alpha to measure the reliability of the questionnaire; the result of the test is illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Reliability Statistics.

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Create	0.871	5
Increase	0.732	5
Reduce	0.849	5
Eliminate	0.822	5
Quality	0.775	4
Creativity	0.776	4
Flexibility	0.839	4

Cost	0.789	4
Customer Response	0.832	4
Efficiency and Effectiveness	0.835	4

The results in Table 6 showed high value of Cronbach's Alpha between (.871 and .732). Therefore, the questionnaire statements are highly reliable and consistent. This result gives the research the absolute confidence of the validity of the questionnaire in analyzing the data and answer the research question.

### 3.4. Structure Validity

Structure validity measure the objective attainment and shows the correlation between study variables. As shown in Table 7, all Coefficients are statistically significant at the level where ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ). Thus, all variables in the questionnaire are valid.

Table 7. Pearson Correlation for All Questionnaire Statement.

Variable	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Create	0.871**	0.000
Increase	0.819**	0.000
Reduce	0.833**	0.000
Eliminate	0.865**	0.000
Blue Ocean Strategy Indicators	0.922**	0.000
Quality	0.625**	0.000
Creativity	0.721**	0.000
Flexibility	0.852**	0.000
Cost	0.669**	0.000
Customer Response	0.833**	0.000
Efficiency and Effectiveness	0.849**	0.000
Dimensions of Competitive advantage	0.947**	0.000

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

## 4. Discussion and Analysis

### 4.1. Analyzing the OBS Statements

The mean, standard deviation and T test were used to determine the degree of approval for BOS indicators. The result is shown in the Table 8.

Table 8. One-Sample Statistics for Blue Ocean Strategy.

	Mean	SD	T	Sig.	Rank
Create	3.58	0.74	8.01	*0.000	4
Increase	3.96	0.76	14.17	*0.000	1
Reduce	3.93	0.68	13.11	*0.000	2
Eliminate	3.68	0.75	8.21	*0.000	3
<b>All Indicators</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>0.69</b>	<b>12.23</b>	<b>*0.000</b>	

Table 8 shows that the mean score for all blue ocean strategy indicators equals 3.78, and the t-test score was 12.23 with a probability value (sig.) less than 0.05, and this indicates a substantial homogeneity of the sample with the Blue Ocean Strategy indicators in general. The highest indicator was "increasing", while the "creating" indicator had the lowest approval level. These results indicate that blue ocean indicators create new markets, innovate new products and brands, and attracting new customers. In addition to attracting new customers which will increase the market share and the growth of the company, it will increase its profits. As for the indicator that received the highest response, the researchers attributed this to the interest of companies to the need to increase the quality of their products. This result corresponds with (Albyati & Saeed, 2016); what emerged from the study is that many companies seek to improve the way their products are presented through improvements in their products. In addition to using new methods of marketing and introducing systems that are more responsive to customers' needs. As for the indicator "creating" which receive the lowest acceptance score, the researchers attributed this to companies who have the ambition to innovate and activate

their role in achieving a competitive advantage, but some companies do not have full awareness of modern forms of innovation or technology because of the high risk and cost involved. Current markets are discouraged by the deteriorating economic situation and weak purchasing power in Syria.

These findings have corresponded with some studies such as (Kamuhuro, 2018) which clarified that the Blue Ocean Strategy tools and its framework for action can help organizations to add innovative value to their products as well as creating new markets. Also, a study by (Zhao & Jinwei, 2010) specified that the utilizing of blue ocean strategy tools and principles help companies to enhance the competitive advantage of existing markets and create new customers from other industries.

#### 4.2. Analysis of Sustainable Competitive Advantage Statements

The mean, standard deviation, and T-test were used to determine the degree of approval for sustainable competitive advantage variable. The result was illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9. One-Sample Statistics for Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig.	Rank
Quality	4.08	0.74	14.41	*0.000	1
Creativity	3.78	0.79	10.11	*0.000	5
Flexibility	3.83	0.69	11.78	*0.000	3
Cost	3.61	0.81	7.77	*0.000	6
Customer Response	3.82	0.77	11.25	*0.000	4
Efficiency & Effectiveness	3.87	0.70	14.14	*0.000	2
<b>All Competitive Advantage</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>13.99</b>	<b>*0.000</b>	

Table 9 shows that the mean score of all sustainable competitive advantage statements is equal to 3.83 with a t-test score of 13.99. Also, the probability value is smaller than 0.05, this indicates a substantial agreement of the respondents with the feature statements. Overall, "quality" had the highest approval score, while the "cost" field had the lowest approval level. The researchers attributed this to the interest of Syrian companies in the dimensions of competitive advantage and sustainable application to their firms in order to attain the competitive advantage and all the dimensions are not less important, but it was noted that the respondents focus on the quality of the product and consider it more important. While some owners of companies studied stressed that continuous improvement of the product to suit the needs of customers is the main factor and stressed the importance of other factors, which are considered complementary to each other to achieve excellence and uniqueness of the company.

These outcomes do correspond with other studies such as (Lădaru *et al.*, 2012) which stressed on the role of quality and continual improvement of the product, which leads to customer satisfaction. Also, as indicated by (Alnosur, 2016) that the continuous review of the level of renewable services introduced to customers contributes to achieving a competitive position for the company.

#### 4.3 Testing the Hypothesis

Testing Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the blue ocean strategy in terms of its indicators individually (create - eliminate - reduce - increase) and sustainable competitive advantage dimensions combined.

Hypothesis 1 was tested by Pearson Correlation Coefficient. Table 10 indications that the value of correlation coefficient is 0.855 and that the probability value is below the significant level 0.05. This proves a statistically significant relationship between the blue ocean strategy and sustainable competitive advantage.

Table 10. Correlations Between BOS and Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

		Blue Ocean Strategy	Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Blue Ocean Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.855*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	293	293
Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	0.855*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	

	N	293	293
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\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

This is attributed to the importance of BOS indicators and its role in achieving competitive advantage. The adoption of strategic indicators (create, increase, reduce, and eliminate) had a significant impact on the overall performance and growth of the company through the creation of new markets and the search for new demand, as well as the adoption of value innovation as a towards the launch of blue market and achieve the competitive advantage of low cost and value innovation.

The results of Table 10 correspond with earlier studies like Alhaddi (2014), confirming that companies implementing Blue Ocean Strategy indicators achieved high growth and high profitability. Also, Silva (2011) confirmed that through the implementation of the BOS, innovation can be achieved. Finally, Al-Taie (2006) emphasized that encouraging innovation in the production process helps companies achieve market competitive advantage through the implementation of the BOS.

Table 11. Correlations Between Create and Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

		Create Strategy	Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Create Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.727*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	293	293
Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	0.727*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	293	293

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient score of 0.727, is presented in Table 15. The probability value (sig.) is less than 0.05. This shows a statistically noteworthy relationship between the creating strategy and sustainable competitive advantage.

The researchers attribute the importance of creating to its role in establishing of a new brands and products; this will help the firm in escaping from the competitive markets to non-competitive markets. The strategy of the Blue Ocean creates value that benefits the customer and the company and thus achieves the competitive advantage. These results were consistent with Al-Mutairi (2012), which indicates the essential role of creating and innovating new and distinct markets that contribute to achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

Table 12 also present that the correlation score of 0.817, and that the (Sig.) value is below the significance level of 0.05. As a result, there is a significant relationship between the strategy of increasing and sustainable competitive advantage.

Table 12. Correlations Between Increase and Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

		Increase Strategy	Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Increase Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.817*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	293	293
Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	0.817*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	293	293

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The researchers attributed this to the importance of increasing strategy, which is to increase some of the elements that have the aptitude to advance product quality required for the consumer, such as increasing the places of sale, presentation, increasing the quality level, and seeking to satisfy customers' needs. Thus, in this way the organization seeks to achieve competitive excellence. These outcomes were consistent with previous studies (Al-Taie, 2006), which indicated that the application of the increasing in organizations helps the organization achieve competitive advantage. The Eurasian study 2016 also confirms that the Blue Ocean strategy, including the increase indicator, helps the

organization to enhance competitive advantage through opening branches of the organization as well as finding scientific ways to deal with suppliers.

**Table 13. Correlations Between Reduce and Sustainable Competitive Advantage.**

		<b>Reduce Strategy</b>	<b>Sustainable Competitive Advantage</b>
Reduce Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.772*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	293	293
Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	0.772*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	293	293

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In regard to the correlation between reduce and sustainable competitive advantage as seen in Table 13, the correlation coefficient was 0.772 with probability less than the significance level of 0.05. This shows a strong relationship between the reduction and the sustainable competitive advantage.

The researchers attributed this to the importance of the reduction indicator, which contributes to reducing the total costs by reducing some unnecessary work procedures that contribute to reducing costs. Many companies exaggerate the provision of service to customers that raise costs without profit, for example reducing some ideas or applications harmful to the environment or the development of ideas that stimulate the application of new ideas, which may distinguish the organization from its competitors to customers and stakeholders. These results were consistent with the (Albyati & Saeed, 2016) studies, as reducing costs and raising value through rapid response will result in a competitive advantage.

**Table 14. Correlations Between Eliminate and Sustainable Competitive Advantage.**

		<b>Eliminate Strategy</b>	<b>Sustainable Competitive Advantage</b>
Eliminate Strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.855*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	293	293
Sustainable Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	0.855*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	293	293

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 14 illustrates the correlation between eliminate and sustainable competitive advantage with the coefficient score of equal to .855, with probability value below the sig. level of 0.05. It is an indication that the eliminating strategy and the sustainable competitive advantage have significant relationship between them.

The researchers attributed this to the elimination of some marketing and operating activities that result in high expenses, as well as the elimination of unnecessary production equipment and marketing personnel will contribute to enhancing the competitive advantage. This outcome was consistent with previous studies such as (Lădaru *et al.*, 2012), which emphasized the elimination of expensive storage costs and organizing the purchasing cycle, which helps to achieve an advantage for the company.

According to the results of correlation, we accept the research hypothesis that (There is a statistically significant relationship between the blue ocean strategy in terms of its indicators individually (create - eliminate - reduce - increase) and sustainable competitive advantage dimensions combined)

Testing Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant effect of BOS indicators (eliminate, reduce, increase and create) on adopting sustainable competitive advantage in food industry companies in Syria.

To test this hypothesis, multiple linear regressions were applied to determine the impact of BOS indicators on the adoption of sustainable competitive advantage.

The correlation coefficient = 0.866, and the adjusted R2 coefficient = 0.762. This indicates that 76% of the change in the competitive advantage is explained by the linear relationship and the remaining 24% may be due to other factors

affecting the competitive advantage, such as the experience of the owners of companies or the age of the company in the field of providing expertise.

The value of the *f* calculated test is 80.151 and the significance level is 0.000. According to the regression results, we accept the research hypothesis that (There is a statistically significant effect of BOS indicators (eliminate, reduce, increase and create) on adopting sustainable competitive advantage in food industry companies in Syria).

Table 15. Regression Analysis.

Independent Variables	Regression coefficient	T-test	Sig.
Constant	0.428	2.355	0.022
Create	0.122	1.968	0.032
Increase	0.353	4.953	0.000
Decrease	0.311	4.377	0.000
Eliminate	0.081	1.356	0.218
<b>Correlation Coefficient = 0.866</b>		<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> coefficient = 0.762</b>	
<b>F Test = 80.151</b>		<b>Sig. = 0.000</b>	

**Create Strategy:** The value of *t*-test is equal to 1.968 and (Sig.) level is equal 0.032, is lesser than 0.05, indicating that there is a positive impact of the creating strategy in adopting sustainable competitive advantage. This demonstrates the essential role of create strategy in generating new markets for companies and thus achieving a competitive advantage through the creation of new products and marks for the company.

**Increase Strategy:** The value of *t* test is equal to 4.953 and the significance value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This means that there is a positive effect of the increasing strategy to the adoption of sustainable competitive advantage. Increasing means, the improvement of the quality of the products and increases the places of sale and supply.

**Decrease Strategy:** The value of *t* test is 4.377 and the significance is equal to 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the decrease strategy has a positive effect on adopting sustainable competitive advantage. The decreasing strategy is an important factor in reducing costs as owners seek to reduce their fixed costs and operating costs, as well as reduce the volume of investment, especially in light of the economic recession and the weakness of purchasing power in Syria.

**Eliminate Strategy:** The value of *t* test is 1.356, and the probability value is 0.216, which is greater than 0.05. This means that the elimination strategy has no effect in adopting the sustainable competitive advantage. The results of the analysis show that there is no effect of the elimination strategy on the adoption of sustainable competitive advantage. The elimination strategy may be more desirable to work if the sample of the study is larger than the current number. The exclusion of some elements from the industry may be a burden on the owners of companies or rather expensive.

In conclusion, there is a significant impact of the increase indicator on the improvement of the quality of the product or service. Therefore, the customers are going to be satisfied, attracting more customers, and increasing the market share. In regard to decreasing strategy, it affects the reduction of fixed and operational costs, this will help the organization to grow and increase its profits. The creating strategy will help the company to produce new products and continuously develop its services, which will help to create new markets and avoid competition. Finally, the elimination strategy has results show the lack of impact of the elimination strategy in adopting sustainable competitive advantage and this may be due to companies to adopting the decreasing strategy as a safe alternative to the elimination index which may result in an unbalanced risk.

These outcomes were consistent with other studies such as Al-Taie (2006) where the promotion of innovation in the production process and its design helps companies achieve a competitive edge in the market. Also, these results are consistent with Alhaddi (2014), which highlighted that, the creation innovative can reduce competition. As for the increase strategy, the results were consistent with Adila (2014) study results which indicated the increase in distribution channels for customers and the opening of new markets. In regard to decreasing index, the results were consistent with Albyati and Saeed (2016), which showed that the reduction in costs and the increase in the value submitted to the customer, will be reflected positively in achieving a competitive advantage for the company. Finally, Zhao and Jinwei (2010) study indicated that the reduction in investment services contributes to the reduction of the total costs of the company. As for the elimination strategy, the results showed that there is no effect on the adoption of the competitive advantage, due to the forefathers' reasons mentioned earlier.

## 5. Conclusion

Through the objectives that the researchers tried to achieve, a number of results have been reached such as: A noteworthy interest and consent by Syrian food industry companies for the application of BOS indicators in general. This indicates how well owners are aware of the application BOS principles and tools in creating new markets and product innovation attract customers to increase market. Also, there is considerable interest in the study areas related to sustainable competitive advantage (product quality /Service - Creativity - Flexibility - Cost - Customer Response - Organization Efficiency and Effectiveness). The result showed a major acceptance rate by the sample respondents of these areas and its role in achieving sustainable competitive advantage. Finally, with regard to the BOS indicators, there is a strong relationship between BOS in terms of its individual indicators and sustainable competitive advantage combined.

The researchers suggested that Syrian Companies should emphasize on the importance of the innovation indicator and its role in producing new brands and creating markets free of competition. This creates new demand that contributes to increasing the market segment of the firm. In addition to encouraging employees to provide creative ideas that help in decreasing the total costs, and work to strengthen the research and development department so that they are responsible for creating and developing innovative ideas. Also, Syrian Companies must emphasize on the increase indicator and its role in the development of product quality, and continuous improvement of the method of product presentation, further diversify new ways of marketing and introduce modern systems to increase production and satisfy customer needs, as well as opening new branches of the company. Also, adherence to the reduce indicator, which helps companies to reduce errors in the production processes and improve the quality of its products, as well as reducing high storage costs and other costly elements of the company such operational and marketing costs. Finally, Syrian Companies should emphasize on the eliminate indicator through the exclusion of activities and actions that lead to increase the total cost as well as excluding activities and people who are a huge burden on the company, this includes eliminating the company's flaccid production systems. This will generate revenues, increase growth, and achieve a competitive advantage.

The limitations of the study include the difficulty of securing an appointment and direct access with some owners and top managers in the companies' studied. Thus, we depended on middle and lower-level managers.

This study sought to explore the impact of blue ocean strategy indicator on sustaining the competitive advantage in Syrian Food Industry companies. Future studies can be done on factors impeding the implementation of blue ocean strategy in Syrian food industry. This article further suggests a study to be done on the effectiveness of strategic management practices by other industry in Syria.

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