



**CREATING AND COMBINING RESOURCES FOR COMPETITIVE  
ADVANTAGE: EVIDENCE OF THE BRASILIA HAMBURGER SHOPS**

**CRIAÇÃO E COMBINAÇÃO DE RECURSOS PARA VANTAGEM COMPETITIVA:  
EVIDÊNCIAS DAS HAMBURGUERIAS DE BRASÍLIA**

**CREACIÓN Y COMBINACIÓN DE RECURSOS PARA LA VENTAJA COMPETITIVA:  
EVIDENCIA DE LAS HAMBURGUESERÍAS DE BRASILIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** to analyze the characteristics of the resources available in private brand hamburger shops.

**Design/method/approach:** the research was undertaken with a qualitative approach, using multiple cases study, which is classified as exploratory and descriptive. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with owners of 5 hamburger shops in Brasília. Data analysis was performed using categorical content analysis.

**Results:** only a small set of resources was able to generate a competitive advantage, which reinforces the idea of heterogeneity amongst firm resources. It is noteworthy that firms' longstanding in the market or with investment capital presented the greatest amount of distinguishing resources, reiterating the role of path dependency and management capacity. The results show that even rare resources, but not difficult to imitate or replace, when used together, can generate sustainable competitive advantages. The analysis identified a set of resources that represent the minimum characteristics that a firm must possess in this market so as not to be at a competitive disadvantage.

**Originality/value:** using resources jointly to achieve sustainable competitive advantages is a perspective not described in the classic works of the Resource-Based View. Thus, this is the main contribution of the study.

**Keywords:** Strategy; Competitive Advantage; Resource-based View.

**RESUMO**

**Objetivo:** analisar características de recursos disponíveis em hamburguerias de marca própria.

**Design/metodologia/abordagem:** procedeu-se com a abordagem qualitativa, em um estudo exploratório e descritivo de múltiplos casos. Foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas a proprietários de cinco hamburguerias de Brasília. Os dados foram analisados por meio de análise de conteúdo categorial.

**Resultados:** apenas um conjunto restrito de recursos foi capaz de proporcionar a situação de vantagem competitiva, reforçando a ideia de heterogeneidade de recursos. Destaca-se que empresas com mais tempo de mercado ou com acesso a capital para investimento foram as que mais apresentaram recursos distintivos, reiterando o papel da dependência de trajetória e da capacidade da gestão. Os resultados evidenciaram que mesmo recursos raros, mas não de difícil imitação ou substituição, quando empregados de forma conjunta, são capazes de gerar vantagens competitivas sustentáveis. Também foi possível mapear um conjunto mínimo de recursos que uma empresa deve ter neste mercado para não ficar em uma situação de desvantagem competitiva.

**Originalidade/valor:** a perspectiva de utilização conjunta de recursos de não difícil imitação ou substituição para o alcance de vantagens competitivas sustentáveis não é descrita nos trabalhos clássicos da Visão Baseada em Recursos, sendo a principal contribuição do presente estudo.

**Palavras-Chave:** Estratégia; Vantagem Competitiva; Visão Baseada em Recursos.

**RESUMEN**

**Objetivo:** analizar las características de los recursos disponibles en las hamburgueserías de marca privada.

**Metodología:** se procedió con el enfoque cualitativo, a través de un estudio de casos múltiples, que se clasifica como exploratorio y descriptivo. La recopilación de datos se realizó a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con los propietarios de hamburgueserías en Brasília. El análisis de datos se realizó mediante análisis de contenido categórico.

**Resultados:** solo un conjunto limitado de recursos fue capaz de proporcionar una situación de ventaja competitiva, reforzando la idea de recursos heterogéneos de estas empresas. Es de destacar que las empresas con más tiempo en el mercado o con acceso a capital para inversión fueron las que presentaron mayor cantidad de recursos distintivos, reiterando el papel de la dependencia del camino y la capacidad de gestión. Los resultados muestran que incluso los recursos raros, pero no difíciles de imitar o reemplazar, cuando se usan juntos, son capaces de generar ventajas competitivas sostenibles. El análisis permitió mapear un conjunto de recursos que representan las características mínimas que una empresa debe tener en este mercado para no estar en desventaja competitiva.

**Originalidad/valor:** la perspectiva de uso conjunto de recursos que no son difíciles de imitar o sustituir para lograr ventajas competitivas sostenibles no se describe en los trabajos clásicos de la Visión Basada en Recursos, siendo el principal aporte del presente estudio.

**Palabras clave:** Estrategia; Ventaja competitiva; Visión basada en recursos.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, the area of business strategy began to be systematized later than in other areas of administration. Bertero, Vasconcelos and Binder (2003) highlight the scant use of Brazilian cases in courses in the area in past decades. Most of the cases used were translations of foreign cases from the Harvard Business School collection. The field of strategy has gone through difficult times as an area of study, emphasizing the need to develop its own thinking for hypercompetitive environments (Albino, Gonçalves, Carrieri, & Muniz, 2010), given the increased competition between companies from the most diverse sectors of the contemporary economy (Chen, 2010).

Strategic thinking can be understood through four perspectives: classical, evolutionary, systemic and procedural (Whittington, 1993). However, whatever their different perspectives, the study of strategy involves attempting to understand why certain companies achieve and sustain competitive advantage and obtain better performance than their competitors (Furrer, Thomas & Goussevskaia, 2008). Competitive advantage basically refers to the condition in which a given resource could provide a better situation for the organization in relation to its competitors (Tunes & Monteiro, 2017). Core competencies of the organization become important for achieving sustainable competitive advantage (SCA), which is obtained when competitors are unable to easily imitate a firm's resources (Gaya, Struwig, & Smith, 2013).

Among the theoretical perspectives that seek to explain SCA, the Resource-Based View (RBV) stands out, a theoretical approach deepened and expanded by Barney (1991; 2001). The RBV aims to identify characteristics of resources that lead the organization to SCA (Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Grant, 1991; Peteraf, 1993). In general, if a company has resources that are classified as valuable, rare, or difficult to imitate or replace, it is possible that they may enjoy SCV in relation to their competitors (Barney, 1991; 2001). In the context of RBV, the VRIO model (an acronym for Value, Rarity, Imitability and Organization) is suggested as a useful tool for the identification and maintenance of resources that provide SCA (Cubrellate, Pascucci & Grave, 2008, 2007). This model allows the practical application of RBV, and may be an important support for strategy in Brazilian organizations.

One branch of business that has stood out in the Brazilian market is food, which represents 35% of all member franchises of the Brazilian Franchising Association (ABF), according to a performance report published in 2019. Within the food industry, the country's burger franchise chains had a total turnover of more than R\$ 700 million in 2017, according to ABF data. Usually, franchisees have at their disposal facilities related to the management of their company's resources, as they can apply and continue the strategies already formulated by the franchisor. Another way to enter the burger market is to start an own brand, creating a micro or small company. In this context, the application to RBV can help identify how the company's resources are exploited, as well as enabling the identification of competitive implications (Barney & Hesterly, 2007). Based on the theoretical framework provided by RBV, this research analyzes the characteristics of the resources available in own brand burger bars.

To achieve the proposed objective, apart from this introduction, the paper presents the theoretical framework that guided the construction of the analytical categories used in the semi-structured interviews, as well as the content analysis. Subsequently, in the method section, the collection and analysis techniques used are described. The fourth section is dedicated to the analysis of the information and its reflection on the theory. Finally, the last section summarizes the main results and presents the theoretical and practical contributions, as well as giving some final considerations about the study.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The rationale proposed by the RBV is to maximize the value generated by the firm through the grouping and use of its resources (Das & Teng, 2000). The RBV analyzes the relationship between the firm's resources and its performance (Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991) based on the assumptions that firms are heterogeneous and that resources have limited mobility (Barney, 1991; 2001; Priem & Butler, 2001; Barney & Hesterly, 2007; Newbert, 2007).

The first premises of the RBV comes from the work of Penrose (1959) and understands firms as sets of productive resources, with each firm having an idiosyncratic set of resources (Furrer, Thomas & Goussevskaia, 2008). As a consequence, resources are heterogeneously distributed among companies. For Penrose (1959), the resources limit a firms' growth possibilities. Not all firms have resources capable of providing superior performance, just as not all firm resources are strategically relevant (Barney, 1991). Strategic resources, which would allow firms to achieve superior performances (Barney, 1991), are naturally scarce (Peteraf, 1993) in other words, they are inelastic in terms of their offer (Barney, 2001; Cubrellate, Pascucci & Grave, 2008).

The second premise of the RBV is the impossibility of circulating or freely transferring resources between companies (Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993). If the resources were freely traded in the market, the higher returns generated by their application in the production process would be dissipated among the competitors (Barney, 1991; 2001). The RBV argues that resources are inelastic in terms of their supply, i.e., their supply cannot be rapidly increased due to variations in demand (Peteraf, 1993; Barney & Arikan, 2001). Both imperfect mobility and the resource heterogeneity are related to the possibility of obtaining and maintaining “Ricardian Rents” (Grant, 1991; Peteraf 1993).

If the resources were evenly distributed, perfectly mobile, or easily traded on the market, it would be impossible to maintain competitive advantage or superior performance (Barney 1991; Grant, 1991; Peteraf, 1993), because the competitive differential provided by the superior resources could be easily replicated by competitors, leading to a situation of competitive equality and the equalization of firms' performances (Peteraf, 1993; Barney, 2001; Barney & Arikan, 2001). Therefore, competitive advantage is the result of inequalities between competitors, and these must be materialized in order to be perceived by the market (Coyne, 1986).

Resources are tangible and intangible assets associated semi-permanently with the firm (Wernerfelt, 1984; Das & Teng, 2000). They include capacities, organizational processes, attributes, information and knowledge that firms mobilize and use to implement their strategies (Barney, 1991). Barney and Hesterly (2007) classify resources into four categories: (i) physical - all physical assets used by the company, including machinery, equipment, location and other fixed assets; (ii) human resources - the company's human capital, training, experience, expertise and knowledge of people associated with the firm; (iii) financial - all the financial capital to which the firm has access, such as: equity, financial reserves and access to finance; and (iv) organizational - attributes related to the organization such as: formal structure of the company, control and coordination systems, relationships with other organizations that form part of the same environment, culture and reputation.

To provide superior performance, and therefore considered strategic, resources must have certain characteristics (Barney, 1991). The first characteristic is value. Resources are valuable when they allow a company to design and implement a strategy to seize opportunities and neutralize threats (Barney, 1991; Barney & Hesterly, 2007). The availability of non-valuable resources may position the firm in a situation of competitive disadvantage (CD) in relation to its competitors, while the presence of valuable resources, but without characteristics of rarity or difficulty replacing or imitating, would lead to a situation of competitive parity (CP) (Barney & Hesterly, 2007).

Resources that are valuable and also rare allow the firm to obtain competitive advantage (Barney, 1991) that can provide better economic returns than those of the competition, even if temporary (Barney & Arikan, 2001), resulting in a temporary competitive advantage (TCA). If these resources are also difficult for the competition to imitate or replace, then they can provide SCA for the firm, due to the possibility of developing a unique strategy that is difficult for the competitors to duplicate (Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991; Hoffman 2000). Valuable, rare and difficult to imitate or replace resources have the potential to generate persistent economic returns for the firm (Barney & Arikan, 2001).

Dierickx and Cool (1989) contribute to the initial arguments against the RBV by arguing that the assets necessary for competitive advantage may have to be accumulated over time. The authors point out the existence of intangible resources that must be developed by firms such as: knowledge, skills and abilities, reputation, consumer loyalty and relationship with suppliers. If a firm is unable to acquire a resource, the alternative is to produce one internally (Wernerfelt, 1984; Dierickx & Cool, 1989), however, due to the unique conditions under which such resources are generated, this alternative is not always viable (Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). Thus, these non-marketable resources act as mechanisms of isolation that allow companies to obtain above-average returns (Barney, 2001; Barney & Arikan, 2001).

Barney (1991) highlights that some firm characteristics are directly associated with the unique historical circumstances of its development that resulted in the resource development (i.e., the specific path taken). In view of the impossibility of emulating the historical conditions for the resource development, they are difficult to imitate or replace by competitors, being potential sources of SCA.

Other aspects associated with the impossibility of imitation or substitution are related to social complexity and causal ambiguity. Resources such as relationships with customers and suppliers, and the firm's reputation, are socially complex (Barney, 1991). Although they might be easily identified by competitors, since they are embedded in socially complex interactions, they are costly to imitate and develop. Causal ambiguity, in turn, deals with the inability to identify or understand how a given resource is used to generate a competitive advantage (Barney & Hesterly, 2007). The failure to identify the strategic resource, or to understand how it is used to generate competitive advantage, makes it impossible to duplicate the strategy (Barney, 1991).

Despite the RBV being recognized as one of the central paradigms of the strategy field (Priem & Butler, 2001; Newbert, 2007), some of its aspects hinder its empirical verification. Ray, Barney and Muhanna (2004) point out that analyzing the relationship between resources and the firm's overall performance may be misleading. Firms can rely on differential resources in some activities and inferior resources in others, so that the superior performance provided by a strategic resource would be overshadowed by the performance of the inferior resource. Different combinations of resources can lead to the same level of performance (Barney, 2001).

Another criticism of the RBV is in its static nature (Priem & Butler, 2001; Newbert, 2007). As highlighted by Kraaijenbrink, Spender and Groen (2009), the RBV is only applicable under relatively stable market conditions. In unpredictable environments, with the emergence of new technologies or markets, the value of a resource may vary dramatically, making it impossible to apply the approach. More important than the stock of resources is the ability to develop and compose them in new configurations capable of generating additional sources of income (Vasconcelos & Cyrino, 2000).

As a way of addressing the criticisms presented, subsequent perspectives derived from the RBV were developed, such as the dynamic capabilities approach (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997) and the knowledge-based view (Grant, 1991, 1996). It should be noted that resources, according to the concept of Barney (1991), also include a firm's intangible assets, such as capabilities, knowledge and skills. Although the specific focus is on the firm's capacities and skills, the proposed logic remains consistent with the original RBV proposal.

The value of a given resource, as well as its rarity, imitability and possibility of substitution, can be understood according to the market in which the firm is located (Barney, 2001). This poses some challenges for empirical research with the RBV. Whether from a quantitative perspective or a qualitative one, the informant ought to know what market he is operating in, so as to effectively assess the value of the resource, as well as its rarity and ease of imitation or replacement by the competition.

Favoreto and Vieira (2014), in a bibliometric review of international publications, indicate a lack of studies on the application of the RBV to small and medium-sized companies, such as those addressed in the present study. In the national context, there are significant opportunities for the application of the RBV in companies of this size, given the significant number of micro and small companies operating in the market. Some of the studies already carried out have explored the technological, textile, retail and food service sectors. Bulgacov, Arrebola and Gomel (2012) analyze how the resources shared between small companies in a technological condominium contribute to the generation of SCA. They identify that differences in resources, individual capacities, and the existence of collaborative relationships in the use of shared resources are determining factors for competitiveness. Sharing in daily activities increased the difficulty for competitors to identify tangible and intangible strategic resources, creating barriers to imitation.

In the textile sector, Pugas, Calegario and Antonialli (2013) verified the existence of heterogeneous organizational capacities amongst firms in a clothing cluster. The results indicated that firms belonging to the local cluster differed in the degree and form of using their capacities. A point to be highlighted was the difference in the way clothing manufacturers use their potential, as the same combination did not always guarantee competitiveness for the different firms. A similar result was seen in the work of Palma and Padilha (2020). The authors report a certain homogeneity between the physical resources of the different firms. The intangible resources, such as brand and reputation, were responsible for the differentiation between firms.

Focusing on the retail business, Hermes, Cruz and Santini (2016) analyzed the competitive advantages for the retail mix of an independent supermarket. The authors identified that location, store atmosphere, target audience and the service provided are all strategies for differentiation that can assure competitive advantage. The conclusions indicate that given the competitive environment in which independent supermarkets operate, strategies aimed at attracting more customers can favor the achievement of competitive advantage.

Hoffmann et al. (2016) carried out a study in the Food Trucks market and identified that the resources that stood out the most were the Truck model, exclusive raw materials, power generation, equipment and good service. The latter was the only strategic resource common to all the companies participating in the survey, a fact that draws attention to the importance of good service in the Food Trucks-based business model. Other studies have highlighted the importance of the chef as a differential resource for restaurants, because this is a human resource with the potential to give the organization SCA (Salazar et al., 2016, 2017). Finally, the application of the RBV in a gourmet bakery highlighted that the resources location, culture, tradition, low turnover and dedication of employees provide SCA for the firm (Massuga et al, 2019).

Empirical studies on the application of RBV in SMEs provide important information about the characteristics of these firms and their resources. However, it is worth mentioning that strategic resources depend directly on the market in which the firm operates, which supports the idea of replicating studies focusing on the analysis of resources in different contexts (Palma & Padilha, 2020). Specifically considering the food service sector, it was seen that resources with the potential to generate TCA or SCA were different, depending on the market, a factor that highlights the relevance of the application of the RBV in burger bars. Notwithstanding, Massuga et al. (2019) suggest the application of the RBV in multiple case analyses, to enable a comparative perspective. We aim to address these research gaps based on the analysis of the resources from burger bars.

### 3. METHOD

This research is classified as exploratory and descriptive. To achieve the research objective, a qualitative case study was carried out. As a research approach, the case study can contribute to the knowledge of organizational phenomena, as it involves empirical investigation of a phenomenon in-depth, considering the context of the real world in which it is immersed (Yin, 2015). The choice of this research method is justified by the interest in understanding the internal dynamics of each firm participating in the research, based on the analysis of its resources.

In qualitative research, the researcher's reasoning is based mainly on human perception and understanding (Stake, 2011). Therefore, one must consider that companies have different cultures that impact the social construction of their reality (Casagrande & Machado, 2016). Since the RBV (Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991) was chosen as the theoretical perspective, it was assumed that the companies studied could reveal different interests and resources, and that these, in turn, might reveal different competitive implications, depending on the context of each company.

More specifically, a multiple case study was conducted from the perspective of theoretical replication (Yin, 2015). The interest was in observing whether contrasting results would be found between the cases concerning the competitive implications from the ownership of certain resources. The data analyzed are primary, collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with owners of the studied firms. A semi-structured script was used because, to achieve the research objectives, it was necessary to understand the interviewees' perspectives on their firm's performance, which could not necessarily be directly observed by the researchers (Stake, 2011).

We followed the four criteria proposed by Flick (2013) in the elaboration of the interview script: non-direction of the relationship with the interviewee; specificity of opinions and definition of the situation from the interviewee's point of view; coverage of a wide range of meanings on the topic; and depth and personal context displayed by the interviewee. The interview script considered four ex-ante categories of resources: physical, human, organizational and financial. Fifteen relevant resources for burger bars were previously identified and later verified as present in all the firms participating in the research. Other resources not previously identified, and not present in all the burger bars, emerged from the interviewees' responses to the questionnaire and were classified as ex-post categories. The questions referred to what had been proposed in the context of the analysis of the VRIO model (Barney, 1991; Barney & Hesterly, 2007), in order to find out whether they considered each resource to be valuable, rare, or difficult to imitate or replace, and whether that resource was properly exploited by the organization (Figure 1).

Is the resource valuable?	Is the resource rare?	Is the resource hard to imitate/replace?	Is the resource duly explored by the organization?	Competitive Implications
No	—	—	No	Competitive Disadvantage (CD)
Yes	No	—	↑	Competitive Parity (CP)
Yes	Yes	No	↓	Temporary Competitive Advantage (TCA)
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustainable Competitive Advantage (VCS)

**Figure 1.** VRIO Model

Source: adapted from Barney and Hesterly (2007).

The interviews were conducted in person and individually, with five burger bar owners located in the city of Brasília. All the interviews took place in the second semester of 2019. The location of the research was selected for its accessibility and convenience. The burger bars analyzed were selected according to the criteria of geographical proximity, advertising of artisanal production, and a focus on a target audience composed of university students. The convergence of the aspects considered characterized the possibility of competition between the firms. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data analysis was performed based on an analysis of categorical content following Bardin's (1977) guidelines. For each case, excerpts from the interviewees' statements were selected to show the presence or absence of each category of resources. Some excerpts were used, to gain a better understanding of the internal context of each organization and the burger bar market in Brasília.

For the data analysis, we followed the three steps proposed by Flick (2013). Initially, a summary of the content analysis was prepared. Then, excerpts from similar statements were grouped. Finally, an analysis was carried out to clarify diffuse, ambiguous or contradictory messages from the participants. From the steps described, it was possible to identify the firm's resources and capacities, classify them as valuable, rare, and difficult for the competition to imitate or replace, and analyze their competitive implications in the context of the market and environment of the burger bars analyzed. To preserve the confidentiality of the interviewees and their firms, the nomenclature A, B, C, D and E was adopted, and the interviewees were referred to be numbers - 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Considering the significant percentage of micro and small companies (MSE) in the Brazilian context, the study considered small, private label burger bars. Brands of large franchise chains were not considered. We opted for the context of MSEs in view of data from the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (SEBRAE), which indicates that in 2018, 98.5% of Brazilian enterprises were micro companies. The projected increase in the number of this type of company in the country is from 4.14 million in 2017, to 4.66 million in 2022, an expected growth of approximately 12.5%. Thus, there is an expectation of increased competition, which reinforces the need for the efficient strategic management of resources and capacities, so that these companies can reach positive outcomes.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The description of the research findings considers two levels of analysis: the respondent firm, since the perceived value of a given resource is intrinsic to it; and the market in which it operates, because the perception of rarity and difficulty in imitating or replacing a resource depends on the interviewee's knowledge of the market and the firm's competitors. In accordance with the RBV perspective and the analysis steps of the VRIO model (Figure 1), each resource was classified according to some characteristics (valuable, rare, difficult to imitate or replace) and, subsequently, its competitive implications were analyzed.

##### 4.1 COMPETITIVE IMPLICATIONS OF EX-ANTE IDENTIFIED RESOURCES

Initially, the analyses related to the fifteen resources defined ex-ante and common to all the firms participating in the study. Figure 2 lists the resources and their competitive implications for each firm.

Typology	Resources	Competitive Implications			
		CD	CP	TCA	SCA
Physical	Location	D	C	A E	B
	Range of products	B C E	A D	-	-
	Equipment	-	A E	B C D	-
Human	Relationship with Suppliers	-	A B C D E	-	-
	Staff Training	C	A D E	B	-
	Service Quality	A	B C D E	-	-
Organizational	Partnerships	D	A C E	-	B
	Advertising	-	A B C D E	-	-
	Stock management	C E	A B D	-	-
	Fast Delivery	D	B E	A C	-
	Payment via Credit and Debit	-	A B C D E	-	-
Financial	Payment via Food Stamps (Not identified ex-ante).	A B D E	-	C	-
		-	-	-	-

**Figure 2.** Resources and Competitive Implications

Source: the authors, from research data.

In relation to the Physical resources, Location and Equipment were able to generate TCA. According to the arguments of the respondents from firms A and E, in the zone where these companies operate there are no competitors with similar products, making them the only burger bar options in the region. The same interviewees, however, point out that it is possible that competitors might spring up in the locality, that is, the resource Location is easy to imitate or replace.

Firm B also has a differential feature in its Location, but this time, one that is capable of generating a SCA. The difference is that this burger bar has a partnership with the owner of the gas station from which it operates. According to Interviewee 2, rental costs are reduced, and its location means that no competitor can open up nearby. In this specific region of Brasília, gas stations operate between residential zones, so there are shops only within the area of these facilities. Through the partnership, the resource Location was identified as an SCA for firm B, since the competition would not be able to imitate the location of the burger bar, which benefits from the presence of users of the gas station, its potential customers.

Based on the arguments of firm B, a behavior of combining differential resources is observed. Location, *per se*, would not guarantee an SCA. However, when combined with another differential resource, the Partnership, there was an increase in its results for the firm, providing a better competitive position. When deployed in a combined manner, the resources end up being endowed with causal ambiguity, making their imitation or replacement more difficult and enabling an SCA (Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). Thus, the perspective is emphasized that the result of the joint allocation would be superior to its use of resources alone (Das & Teng, 2000).

Regarding the resource Equipment, the representative of firm B stated that *"the bread toaster is something that is valuable and rarer; not all competitors have one and it provides higher quality to the product, generating better performance for the company"* (Interviewee 2). In the case of company C, the report was that *"the griddle we have today is rare, it is an American griddle"* (Interviewee 3). However, it was also stated that these resources would be easily imitated, since they are tradable in the market. Therefore, they do not guarantee SCA. Resources that are easily traded in the market do not provide SCA as the better performance they bring can be easily replicated by competitors (Barney 1991; Grant, 1991; Peteraf, 1993; Barney & Arkan, 2001).

Similarly, the representative of firm D reported that he roasts his burgers on a barbecue grill, unlike most of the competitors, who use a griddle. Despite being differential, this resource is understood as easily imitable by the competition. These Physical resources, although differentials, are not associated with any specific knowledge or unique capacity, therefore they can easily be emulated or replaced by the competition. A potential way to make the best use of these resources may be to associated them with a specific knowledge or ability. As highlighted by Dierickx and Cool (1989), firms' knowledge and capabilities cannot be acquired in the market, as intangible resources that must be developed within the firm, being difficult to imitate and, therefore, ensuring differentiation in relation to the competition. Thus, the importance of the ability to develop and readapt resources in a dynamic environment for the generation of advantages for companies is highlighted (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997; Vasconcelos & Cyrino, 2000).

The resource Staff Training was identified as a potential source of TCA. There was a consensus among respondents that training reduces errors in the production process, but the provision of structured training was not identified in most of the burger bars analyzed. Although the interviewees perceive the importance of training, this resource was not effectively applied in the business strategy. Therefore, this resource was considered rare, but imitable by the competition. As Respondent 2 was the only one who emphasized the application of Staff Training in a structured manner, this resource was considered a potential generator of TCA for firm B.

Firm C was the only one that accepted Food Stamps as payment. For Interviewee 3, this payment option is considered a differential in relation to the competition, as it attracts more customers, resulting in increased revenues. Therefore, this resource was classified as valuable. The resource was also considered rare in the context studied, as it was not observed in the competitors, even though it is easy to imitate. Similar to the previous case, it was considered that the possession of such a resource may guarantee a TCA for firm C.

Besides the resources capable of generating competitive advantages, the interviewees indicated some resources that may position the firms in a situation of CD. As can be seen in Figure 2, all the companies were able to identify resources that would provide competitive advantages, as well as resources that could put them at a disadvantage compared to the competition. This finding corroborates the arguments of Ray, Barney and Muhanna (2004) about the difficulty of analyzing the direct relationship between resources and the firm's overall performance. The same firm may have differential resources in some activities and inferior resources in others, making it difficult to verify the relationship between superior resources and performance, as proposed by the RBV (Barney, 1991).



Most of the resources associated with a CD situation relate to intangible assets, such as Service Quality, Staff Training, Partnerships, Stock management and Fast Delivery. In some cases, there is awareness of the problem. Such CDs are opportunities for the improvement of burger bars, especially those without TCAs or SCAs. Regarding Service Quality, firm A reported that it perceives the service provided to be “very precarious,” while firm C emphasized that its service is based on trial and error. These perspectives reveal a weakness in these burger bars, considering the conclusions of Hoffmann et al. (2016) on the importance of good customer service in the food service sector in Brasília. The lack of a structured stock management also reveals weaknesses, as it is necessary to consider that the eventual absence of some inputs may impact the burger production process, negatively affecting sales and resulting in dissatisfied customers.

The resource Fast Delivery was identified as a source of TCA for firms A and C. As reported by the interviewee from firm A, “*Few restaurants have their own delivery system and I am one of them*” (Interviewee 1). Most of the companies that participated in the research use the delivery service provided by the food delivery apps, but as reported by firm C, “*Firms are demanding the services from apps, but they are not very good, as there is no control over the delivery person*” (Interviewee 3). Apparently, the generation of TCA from Delivery is related to the internalization of the delivery service. The internalization would allow greater agility in the delivery of the product and in conditions suitable for consumption, which would contribute to customer satisfaction and firm performance. Following Barney's (1991) arguments, competitive advantage is the result of the competition's inability to imitate. Although for firm C, having its own delivery service may provide some advantage, other burger bars can use delivery services as alternative resources, which would reduce the condition of CD.

Figure 2 shows that the most frequently observed competitive implication is CP. Almost all the Human and Organizational resources resulted in a situation of CP between firms. Resources such as Relationship with Suppliers, Service Quality, Advertising, Stock Management and Payment via Credit and Debit card, although perceived as valuable by the interviewees, did not result in competitive differences between the burger bars analyzed. A good Relationship with Suppliers can help reduce costs, as reported by the representative of firm E: “*We have high bargaining power with suppliers and this means that the company is able to have lower costs*” (Interviewee 5). Besides, interviewees seem to agree that advertising on social networks is important to attract new customers, as well as actions aimed at winning over new customers, as reported by the representative of company B, “*it is essential to keep the customer satisfied*” (Interviewee 2).

This set of valuable resources that positions companies in a CP situation can be interpreted as essential resources for the good operation of this type of business. Although their presence does not result in a differential strategic positioning, their absence would position the firm in a situation of CD. This situation was seen in the response of the representative of firm C when asked about Product Variety: “*we wanted to limit the menu because the more options there are, the easier it is to make mistakes*” (Interviewee 3). A similar situation is seen in the arguments of the representative of firm C, who replied, when asked about Staff Training: “*we often fail to do this, we put the employee in here to train while working, it is something we want to improve*” (Interviewee 3). As highlighted by Barney and Hesterly (2007), non-valuable resources are weaknesses that should be remedied by firms, as they place them at a disadvantage compared to their competitors. In this sense, the lack of variety of products and the lack of staff training can represent a source of CD for the firm of Interviewee 3.

#### 4.2 COMPETITIVE IMPLICATIONS OF EX-POST OBSERVED RESOURCES.

The existence of internal heterogeneity in relation to organizational capacities has already been empirically verified in the context of SMEs (Pugas et al., 2013), that is, the same combination of resources and capabilities does not always ensure the same level of competitiveness. This heterogeneity was also observed among the burger bars participating in the research, both because of the different competitive implications identified, and because of the different resources observed in different firms. As shown in Figure 3, another 5 resources not common to all firms were identified, and their competitive implications analyzed.

Type	Resource	Competitive Implication	
		TCA	SCA
Physical	Themed Décor	C	-
	Awards Received	-	B
Organizational	Fidelity Program	B	-
	Product Differentiation	D	C

**Figure 3.** Resources and Competitive Implications not Common to all Companies

Source: the authors from research data.

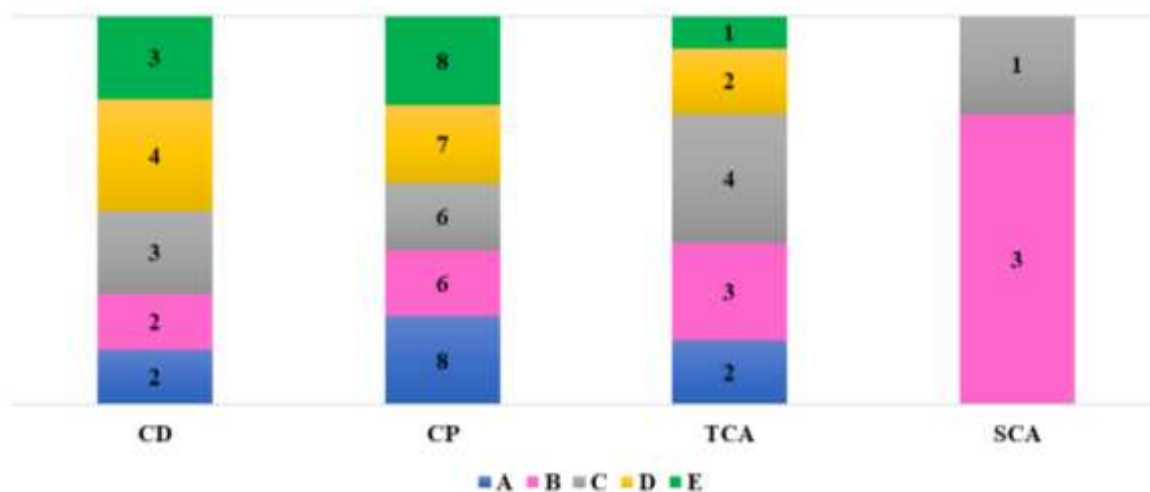
It was reported by the Firm C representative that *"The decoration with the geek footprint attracts customers. The curiosity was the décor, a cozy place, with good music"* (Interviewee 2). Burger bar C had invested in a themed décor focused on the interests of the young public of university students who frequent the region. As reported, this resource proves to be valuable, as it attracts customers and increases consumption. As it was not observed in any other firm participating in the study, this resource was considered rare, although easily imitable. This finding corroborates the findings that the ambiance of the burger bar is one of the resources with the potential to guarantee competitive advantage (Hermes et al., 2016).

Only Firm B reported having received awards for product quality: *"We have a good name and have won, the last two years, as the best burger in Brasilia"* (Interviewee 2). This resource was considered valuable, as it draws the attention of potential customers and was considered rare, being the only burger bar to receive this annual prize. As highlighted by Barney (1991), a firm's reputation is a socially complex resource and, although relatively easy got the competition to identify, it is difficult to imitate. Thus, this resource was considered as a potential generator of SCA for the firm. Another resource described by firm B was its Loyalty Program. As explained, *"for every 15 Brazilian reals they spend, they earn 1 point that can be exchanged for products"* (Interviewee 2). Despite being considered valuable, one can question the rarity and difficulty of imitating this resource. Although no other burger bar reported having a similar resource, there are similar programs in restaurants, therefore it would not be difficult for the competitors to imitated.

In relation to Product Differentiation, Firm D reported that *"We have searched a lot, but we have found only one with similar quality to ours"* (Interviewee 4). This resource offers differentiation in relation to the competition, being rare, but easily imitated if there is a demand for the same supplier. In the case of Firm C, the product differentiation provides SCA, as it depends on the know-how of employees, who prepare the burgers to their own recipe, being rare and difficult to imitate. In the words of the interviewee: *"Our special sauce, which only we have, is another differential of our company, we have already received many compliments"* (Interviewee 3). Here, we see the existence of an intangible asset, based on a knowledge/capacity developed over time and that cannot be accessed by other companies, as explained by Grant (1991; 1996), Barney (1991) and Peteraf (1993).

#### 4.3 RESOURCE SETS - COMPETITIVE IMPLICATIONS

Figure 4 was elaborated based on the identification and evaluation of the ex-ante and ex-post resources. In it, we see that burger bars B and C stand out in relation to the number of resources capable of generating competitive advantages, whether temporary or sustainable.



**Figure 4.** Observed Competitive Advantages (total by company).

Source: the authors from research data.

Firm B is the one with the largest set of differential resources. It is also the firm that has been in the market the longest, having begun its activities in 2016 and operating for four years as at the time of the interview. The other burger bars had been operating for just over 1 year at the time of the interviews. Despite this apparently small difference, a report from the IBGE (2019) highlights that during the period 2013 to 2017, only 42.6% of Brazilian firms survived for more than 4 years. The 1-year survival rate, from 2016 to 2017, was 73.2%. Considering this difference in survival rates, we see that staying in business for more than four years is a challenge for Brazilian firms, especially for micro or small size, such as those in the context of this research.

The firm with a longer time in the market was also the one with more differential resources. This finding corroborates the arguments of Hoffmann et al. (2016) that time in the market time the competitive implications, due to the time necessary for the development of competitive resources, enabling the creation and adaptation of strategic resources. Firm strategies depend on the set of accumulated resources (Das & Teng, 2000; Favoreto & Vieira, 2014). Thus, the role of path dependence for the development of competitive resources is emphasized (Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997).

A different perspective is provided by burger bar C, which started its activities in 2018 and had only been in the market for one year at the time of data collection. As shown in Figure 4, firm C has the second largest set of differential resources among the research participants. In this case, time in the market cannot explain the amount of differential resources observed for his firm. According to the report of Interviewee 3, the firm received an initial investment that enabled it to pay for the themed décor and hire its own delivery person (differential resources). This reality does not seem to be the pattern among the firms analyzed. The firm A interviewee indicates that costs need to be reduced because the company did not have any initial investment, and all the money comes from its operation. *"Our company is a company that is pulled instead of pushed, (...) as the demand grows and the firm grows, we are able to make investments with what comes in"* (Interviewee 1).

The result suggests that the availability of capital, especially in the analyzed context of SMEs, is a differential resource. However, although difficult to access, financial resources are not difficult to imitate. In this sense, the organizational capacity of firm C in observing its market and identifying resources that would position it differently from the competition and develop these resources, is highlighted. The role of management is important in monitoring market conditions and configuring resources and strategies, in order to better respond to the environment (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997; Cubrellate, Pascucci & Grave, 2008), developing valued and perceived characteristics to meet the demand (Coyne, 1986; Hoffman 2000).

Few resources resulted in competitive advantage, although all five firms analyzed were able to identify at least one resource capable of generating a competitive differential. This result reinforces the idea of heterogeneity of resources proposed by Barney (1991). Attention to a set of resources, and not just to a specific differentiating resource, seems to be essential for the survival of the firms that are the focus of this study. For instance, the search for a good customer experience through Service Quality, Fast Delivery and Decoration was a set of resources that had different competitive implications depending on the firm. The importance of intangible resources for the burger bars was seen, given the number of implications of both TCAs and CDs observed in the cases studied, relating these to the findings of Palma and Padilha (2020) on the role of intangible resources in firms' strategies.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper analyzes the characteristics of the resources of own-brand burger bars, through a multiple case study with five small firms operating in the city of Brasília. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews, carried out in person and analyzed with categorical content analysis. Each resource identified was classified according to the perspective of the RBV.

The results allowed us to identify a set of resources that is present in all the companies analyzed and without any distinctive characteristics (e.g.: Relationship with Suppliers, Service Quality, Advertising, Payment via Credit and Debit cards). Although considered valuable, the fact that these resources were present in all firms creates a situation of CP. From a practical perspective, these resources can be understood as the minimum set of characteristics that a firm ought to have to enter and compete in the market properly. Although these resources do not result in an advantage over the competition, if they are lacking, or of poor quality, this can represent a situation of CD for the firm.

A more restricted subset of resources was identified, that are capable of generating competitive advantage for the firms. Several resources were mentioned as not being present in their competitors, through easily emulated or replaced by similar resources. It is interesting to note that the joint allocation of resources, which is initially easy to imitate, enabled

one of the firms interviewed to achieve a lasting competitive advantage. Rare resources, but easy to imitate or replace, when they are allocated jointly, allowed the creation of an ambiguous situation in which it is difficult for competitors to identify the source of competitive advantage, enabling the best use of resources and a more defensible competitive position. This result demonstrates the possibility of generating SCAs from imitable or replaceable resources. This is a theoretical contribution of the present study, since this perspective is not described in classic RBV papers. From a practical perspective, this result suggests an alternative path for the development of competitive resources.

The results showed that the companies with the greatest number of distinctive resources had specific characteristics. The first company interviewed had been on the market for over four years – a relatively short time, but still longer than the average life expectancy of a micro or small firm, and the average operating times of the other firms analyzed. Apparently, length of time in operation plays an important role in the development of strategic resources in small businesses; the longer a firm stays in the market, the more opportunities it will have to adapt and develop its resources to the characteristics of that market, reiterating the dependence of these aspects for the creation of strategic resources.

The second characteristic highlighted was the availability of capital for investments. Although access to finance may be a problem for small businesses, it is understood that financial resources are not rare or difficult to imitate. Additionally, bad allocation of resources would not generate advantages for the firm. Thus, the firm's capacity to configure differential resources capable of meeting the needs of the environment in which it operates, differentiating itself from its competitors, stands out. More relevant than the availability of financial resources is the ability to monitor and react to the market.

All the firms interviewed presented resources identified both as sources of competitive advantage and as sources of CD. This highlights a problem with empirical operationalization of the analysis of the relationship between resources and firm performance. As described by Barney (2001), a firm with differential strategic resources in one sector may have its advantage diminished or even eliminated by the presence of inferior resources in other sectors, thus not resulting in superior performances.

This research has some limitations. No data were gathered that would enable a comparison of performance between companies, so the competitive implications of the resources were interpreted only in relation to the characteristics of the resources as described by the interviewees. A second limitation lies in the method; theoretical saturation was not carried out during the interviews, so new observations could generate new evidence. Thus, the results presented here should not be understood as definitive. For future research, the replication of the present study in other markets is suggested, to investigate whether the present results are idiosyncratic for Brasília or whether they are valid for other markets. New research could also collect primary or secondary information about the relationship between resources and business performance.

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