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NON-ZERO-SUM STRATEGY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: INTEGRATION OF EFFICIENCY, ADAPTIVE SELLING, AND ESG (ENVIRONMENTAL, *SOCIAL, GOVERNANCE)* INVESTMENTS

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Abstract

The acceleration of digitalization and global technological disruption has changed the business competitive landscape from a linear model to an interconnected ecosystem. However, most business actors are still trapped in the zero-sum game paradigm of the belief that one party's profits can only be obtained at the expense of the other. This research offers a conceptual alternative through a non-zero-sum strategy approach that is oriented towards collaboration, shared *value* creation, and balance of interests between stakeholders. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of the three strategic pillars of digital-based operational efficiency, adaptive sales growth, and sustainable investment based on ESG (*Environmental, Social, and Governance*) principles as a complete framework in building a collaborative business model in the digital era. The method used is a literature study with content analysis from various national and international sources to formulate a conceptual model that is relevant to the Indonesian business context. The results of the study show that the integration of the three pillars forms a non-zero-sum strategy that is able to increase competitiveness while maintaining economic and social sustainability. This research contributes to enriching the strategic management literature through the development of collaborative paradigms that are applicable to the digital and sustainable business ecosystem.

Keywords: Non-Zero-Sum Strategy, Operational Efficiency, Adaptive Sales, Esg, Business Sustainability, Strategic Collaboration.

Introduction

The changes in the global business environment in the digital era are happening very quickly and complexly. This transformation not only drives technological innovation, but it also changes the way organizations create value, interact with customers, and compete in the marketplace. Companies are now faced with a new challenge: how to maintain competitiveness without having to sacrifice the principles of sustainability and social responsibility. Competition that was previously linear has now shifted to multidimensional, where technology, consumer behavior, and business ethical values are intertwined in determining the direction of growth.

However, many business actors still operate with the old mindset that places business as a zero-sum arena, which is a situation where one party's profits must be obtained through the other's losses. This mindset gives birth to practices such as price wars, capital burning, aggressive expansion, and market dominance that often oppress small businesses and consumers. In the long run, this kind of competition model actually weakens the business ecosystem because it creates imbalances and lowers the value of sustainability.

This paradigm began to receive widespread criticism from academics and practitioners. (Davidai, 2022) of Columbia Business School says that the zero-sum perspective creates "*seesaw view of the world*"that is, a world that only knows the logic of win-lose without room for all parties to grow together. In this context, business is no longer just about the accumulation of profits, but also about how to create shared value (*shared value*) which provides social and economic benefits in a balanced manner. (Porter, M. E., & Kramer, 2011) in concept *Creating Shared Value* emphasizing that modern business strategies must be able to combine profitability with real social contributions.

In response to this shift, a non-zero-sum strategy approach offers a new framework that emphasizes collaboration, efficiency, and sustainability. Through this strategy, the company is encouraged to build *co-growth* with stakeholders including consumers, investors, the government, and the community. This approach is becoming increasingly relevant amid the increasing flow of digitalization and awareness of environmental responsibility.

The novelty of this research lies in the effort to integrate the three strategic dimensions of operational efficiency based on digitalization, adaptive sales growth, and sustainable investment based on ESG principles in one conceptual framework of a non-zero-sum strategy. If previous research has tended to address these three aspects separately, then this study places them in an integrated manner to answer the challenge of modern strategic management: how to build competitiveness without sacrificing sustainability. This integrative approach is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution, especially for companies in Indonesia that are adapting to the digital economy and global sustainability demands.

Thus, this research does not simply repeat the common idea of collaboration, but offers a conceptual model that synergistically connects the operational, market, and sustainability dimensions. This makes the non-zero-sum strategy not only an ethical slogan, but also a new strategic framework for organizations that want to grow inclusively, resiliently, and responsibly in the digital era.

Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature study method (*library research*). This approach was chosen because the themes studied are conceptual and multidisciplinary, covering the fields of strategic management, digital transformation, and business sustainability. The main focus of this study is not on quantitative hypothesis testing, but on an attempt to build a theoretical synthesis that explains the relationship between operational efficiency, adaptive sales growth, and ESG-based investments within the framework of a non-zero-sum strategy.

The data sources used in this study are in the form of secondary data collected from various scientific publications and credible documents. Data was obtained through systematic searches of national and international journals, strategic management textbooks, and research reports from well-known institutions. Some of the key references used as the basis for the analysis include *the Business School Working Paper*, as well as national journals such as HOMANIS (Humanities, Management, Accounting, and Information systems) and the National Accounting *Conference-ANC*. The selection of sources is carried out by considering the relevance, academic validity, and novelty of the data.

The analysis technique used is *content analysis* with the following stages:

1. Identify key concepts, namely operational efficiency, adaptive selling, ESG investment, and non-zero-sum paradigms in business.
2. Categorization of literature, by grouping library sources based on themes and contributions to the conceptual framework.
3. Narrative synthesis is the process of connecting findings between sources to build a new understanding of the relationship between conceptual variables.
4. Contextual interpretation, where the author interprets the results of the study by considering the state of digital business in Indonesia and its relevance to sustainable management practices.

The selection of the literature study method is considered the most appropriate because this research topic is still relatively new and requires a cross-perspective combination of management theory, digital economy, and corporate social responsibility. Through this approach, the research is able to explore in depth the concept of non-zero-sum strategies and formulate a conceptual model that can be used as a basis for the development of empirical research in the future.

Results And Discussion

1. General Analysis and Study Findings Patterns

The results of a systematic review of various national and international literature sources show that the non-zero-sum paradigm in strategic management marks a fundamental shift from competitive to collaborative logic. In the traditional paradigm, companies tend to view success as the result of market dominance and the elimination of competitors. However, the non-zero-sum approach offers a new orientation that places shared success as the primary measure of organizational performance.

Literature analysis shows a stronger tendency to integrate three main dimensions in the framework of a sustainable business strategy, namely (1) digitalization-based operational efficiency, (2) adaptive sales growth, and (3) selective investment that follows ESG (*Environmental, Social, and Governance*) principles). These three dimensions form an integrated strategy system that not only strengthens financial performance, but also creates social and environmental value in a sustainable manner.

These findings are consistent with the thinking (Porter, M. E., & Kramer, 2011) about *Creating Shared Value* (CSV), which states that companies that are able to combine economic and social value will create a more durable competitive advantage. Moreover (Davidai, 2022) confirming that companies that abandon the zero-sum mindset tend to have a higher capacity for innovation and adaptation because they operate in a mutually beneficial ecosystem.

2. Operational Efficiency in a Non-Zero-Sum Context

Operational efficiency is the main foundation in the implementation of a non-zero-sum strategy. Based on the results of the literature review, efficiency is no longer understood simply as an effort to reduce costs, but as a system of shared value creation through increased productivity and resource optimization. (Gulo, P., Hutagalung, S. R., & Wau, 2025) emphasized that the efficiency supported by the management accounting information system is able to accelerate the flow of information and reduce data asymmetry between divisions. This allows organizations to make more accurate decisions and be responsive to market changes.

The application of digital technology such as *Enterprise Resource Planning* (ERP), data *analytics*, and the Performance Dashboard encourages business process efficiency while increasing transparency between work units. In a non-zero-sum context, this means that every part of the organization benefits from the same efficiency process no unit benefits at the expense of the others. (Widodo, 2023) It even emphasized that digital-based efficiency is able to create shared performance benefits, namely simultaneous cross-functional performance improvements.

From a managerial perspective, the operational efficiencies associated with collaboration actually expand the innovation space. When resources are used optimally without exploitative practices, companies can channel their excess capacity to support the development of new products or social activities that have a positive impact. Thus, efficiency becomes a bridge between financial success and social responsibility.

3. Adaptive Sales as a Form of Market Collaboration

The second dimension is adaptive selling, which demands the ability of companies to adapt their marketing strategies to increasingly dynamic consumer behavior. (Farhan, 2024) shows that digital transformation has transformed the marketing function from a mere selling process to a process of building a customer experience (*customer experience*). Adaptive sales strategies emphasize the importance of flexibility, personalization, and continuous interaction between companies and consumers.

This approach shifts the sales orientation from competition to market collaboration. In a non-zero-sum paradigm, companies seek to create value together with customers through *a co-creation* model. For example, digital community-based marketing strategies implemented by GoTo, Grab, or Tokopedia allow the creation of long-term relationships between brands and consumers. This kind of relationship not only increases customer loyalty, but also expands the potential of product innovation based on direct feedback from users.

In addition, the integration of technologies such as *customer relationship management* (CRM) and consumer behavior analytics helps companies understand market needs more deeply. This strategy avoids destructive practices such as price wars, as the focus is not on competition, but on the creation of mutually beneficial differential value between the company and the customer. Thus, adaptive sales is an effective means of realizing the principle of non-zero-sum in the market realm.

4. ESG-Based Selective Investment as a Pillar of Sustainability

Selective investment based on ESG principles is the third pillar of a non-zero-sum strategy. The results of the literature review show that companies with a high commitment to ESG tend to have a more stable long-term performance and a stronger corporate reputation (Outlook, 2024). This approach confirms that investment decisions are no longer based solely on financial calculations, but also consider social and environmental impacts.

(Porter, M. E., & Kramer, 2011) emphasizing that investment practices that pay attention to social and environmental dimensions can create *shared value* through supply chain efficiency, emission reduction, and environmentally friendly product innovation. In the Indonesian context, ESG-based investments are also relevant to the government's regulatory demands related to the green economy and *sustainable finance*. Thus, selective investing is not only a business strategy, but also a form of ethical responsibility towards society and the planet.

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The integration of ESG in the investment decision-making process reinforces the non-zero-sum paradigm because it minimizes conflicts of interest between companies and external stakeholders. The company not only pursues profits, but also builds social legitimacy which is an important capital for the sustainability of the business in the future.

5. Integrative Synthesis and Managerial Implications

The three strategic dimensions of operational efficiency, adaptive selling, and ESG-based selective investment, if systematically integrated, will result in a sustainable collaborative business strategy framework. Efficiency serves as a structural foundation, adaptive sales as a bridge to market interaction, and ESG-based investments as a guide to long-term sustainability.

This integration creates synergies that strengthen competitiveness while fostering social value. The results of the synthesis show that companies that apply this model not only survive in the midst of global economic uncertainty, but are also able to be drivers of positive change in their business environment. Managerially, the implication is the need to shift the paradigm from destructive competition to *co-oppetition* , a form of strategic collaboration in which even competitors can be partners in the creation of shared value.

Thus, a non-zero-sum strategy can be seen as an evolution of the modern business paradigm oriented towards sustainability, collaboration, and balance of interests. This approach is relevant for companies that want to strengthen their reputation, expand their value network, and ensure business continuity in an increasingly complex digital era.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the non-zero-sum strategy paradigm is a relevant strategic approach to answer business challenges in the increasingly competitive and dynamic digital era. In contrast to the zero-sum model that places competition as a win-lose game, the non-zero-sum approach emphasizes the importance of collaboration, shared value creation, and a balance of interests between stakeholders.

Through a comprehensive literature review, this study found that the successful implementation of a non-zero-sum strategy is highly dependent on the integration of three main pillars, namely operational efficiency, adaptive selling, and selective investment based on ESG (*Environmental, Social, and Governance*) principles.

1. Operational efficiency serves as a foundation for companies to build a system that is productive, transparent, and oriented towards continuous improvement without sacrificing other parties.

2. Adaptive selling reflects an organization's ability to understand changing consumer behavior and build collaborative relationships that result in long-term loyalty.
3. ESG-based investments strengthen social legitimacy and ensure economic sustainability through environmentally and socially responsible business practices.

These three dimensions, if implemented in an integrated manner, form a strategic framework that not only drives financial performance but also strengthens the ethical and social position of the company in the long run. Thus, a non-zero-sum strategy is not only a managerial tool, but also a new paradigm in building a fair, resilient, and sustainable business.

The results of this study also confirm that the success of businesses in the future will largely depend on the ability of companies to change a competitive mindset to a collaborative one. Cross-sector collaboration, digitalization of business processes, and commitment to sustainability are important prerequisites for the creation of shared value that is balanced between economic, social, and environmental interests.

Suggestion
Based on the results of the study, it is suggested that a non-zero-sum strategy be implemented comprehensively through strengthening operational efficiency, implementing digital-based adaptive sales, and integrating ESG-based investments in managerial policies. Companies need to foster a collaborative and transparent culture to create sustainable shared value without sacrificing economic performance. Governments and financial institutions are also expected to strengthen policy support that encourages sustainable business practices through incentives and regulations that are in line with the principles of social responsibility. On the other hand, further research is expected to deepen this study through an empirical approach so that the implementation of non-zero-sum strategies can be tested comprehensively and provide concrete recommendations for the business world in Indonesia.

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