Tikrit Journal of Administrative and Economic Sciences, Vol. 22, No. 75, Part (2): 907-934
Doi: www.doi.org/10.25130/tjaes.22.75.2.45

Tikrit Journal of Administrative and Economics Sciences
مجلة تكريت للعلوم الإدارية والاقتصادية
EISSN: 3006-9149
PISSN: 1813-1719

Identifying the Most Threatening Competitors by Using Strategic Group Dynamics

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Keywords:
Dynamics of Strategic Groups, Competitors' Priorities, Restaurant Sector.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Article history:

Received	06 Oct. 2025
Received in revised form	01 Nov. 2025
Accepted	01 Nov. 2025
Available online	30 Sep. 2026

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Abstract: The study aims to test the availability of strategic groups, discuss its dynamics, and determine competitors' priorities using cluster analysis, by studying a group of strategic dimensions represented by (prices, cleanliness, size, product variety and external appearance) for (9) restaurants operating in the city of Tikrit /Iraq as a field for the study. Data and information are collected using the case study method by looking at the price lists for its products, observation, interviews, and direct questions to the management of those restaurants and living with them, the study reaches a set of conclusions, the most important of which is the existence of strategic groups in the restaurant sector with varying sizes and powers of influence, and that its dynamics can be within and outside the strategic group. Competition priorities between competitors can also be determined according to the degree of danger of the competitor using strategic groups.

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تحديد أخطر المنافسين تهديدا باستخدام ديناميكيات المجموعات الاستراتيجية

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المستخلص

تهدف الدراسة إلى اختبار مدى توفر المجموعات الاستراتيجية ومناقشة ديناميكيتها وتحديد أولويات المنافسين باستخدام التحليل العنقودي، وذلك من خلال دراسة مجموعات الأبعاد الاستراتيجية المتمثلة في (الأسعار، النظافة، الحجم، تنوع المنتج والمظهر الخارجي) لـ (9) مطاعم عاملة في مدينة تكريت (جمهورية العراق) مجالاً للدراسة. تم جمع البيانات والمعلومات باستخدام منهج دراسة الحالة من خلال الاطلاع على قوائم أسعار منتجاتها والملاحظة والمقابلات والأسئلة المباشرة لإدارة تلك المطاعم والمعيشة معهم، وتوصلت الدراسة إلى مجموعة من الاستنتاجات أهمها وجود مجموعات استراتيجية في قطاع المطاعم متفاوتة الأحجام وصلاحيات التأثير، وأن ديناميكيتاها يمكن أن تكون داخل وخارج المجموعة الاستراتيجية. كما يمكن تحديد أولويات المنافسة بين المتنافسين حسب درجة خطورة المنافس باستخدام المجموعات الاستراتيجية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ديناميكيات المجموعات الاستراتيجية، أولويات المنافسين، قطاع المطاعم.

1. Introduction

To make decisions and effective strategic planning, corporate leadership must have an understanding of their competitors, so it is not surprising that strategy researchers are interested in how executives define and think about competing organizations and other stakeholders (Anand et al., 2013). Porter believes that the first step in a structural analysis Industries are the description of the strategies of all important competitors along competitive strategies. This activity allows the industry to be mapped into strategic groups. (Porter, 1998).

Strategic groups are an important unit of competitive analysis and are usually identified through distinct corporate similarities or cognitive maps (Han et al., 2022). Because companies that are in the same strategic group generally closely resemble each other in many ways besides their general strategies, understanding it tend to have similar market shares and also to be affected and respond similarly to external events or competitive moves in the industry Because their similar strategies. This last characteristic is important in using the strategic group map as an analytical tool (Porter, 1998), as this analytical tool helps managers to evaluate their current strategic position (Ghiasi et al., 2022). against the position of competitors and thus determine aspects of competition and collaboration with them, as strategic groups are interested in understanding how collaboration can be formed between

competitors and why competing organizations can cooperate, and the actors Their likely involvement and factors affecting the longevity of this collaboration (Reaney and Cullinane, 2022).

the study (Anand et al., 2013) indicates that the topic of strategic groups is still one of the important topics that many studies recommend conducting studies about it, especially in developing economies such as the Iraqi economy, as well as the study (Leask, and Parker, 2006). confirms that strategic group theory continues to provide a useful approach to management research, which allows for detailed assessment and comparison of firm strategies within industry in developing economies. (Leask, and Parker, 2006; Wry et al., 2006) confirms that strategic groups act as references for external parties when evaluating the company's reputation. This means that the evaluation of the company by external parties is not limited to evaluating its internal situation only, nor the general external environment, but also the task environment.

(Peng et al., 2004) argue that the strategy group has become an attractive middle ground between firm- and industry-level analyzes in strategic management research. (McNamara, et al. 2003) also believes that the structures of strategic groups are important because of its impact on procedures and strategic performance. What increases the importance of strategic groups analysis is the possibility of its application even in turbulent environments and markets such as the Iraqi environment, as A study (Tripsas and Gavetti) found that even in periods of market turmoil there is likely to be a stable, albeit short-term, market structure comprising core strategic groups in many sectors due to the cognitive mind maps of decision makers trying to balance a long-term vision. and interaction/agility that generates strategic inertia (Rebière and Mavoori, 2019).

The process of identifying an organization's competitors who are in the same strategic group to which that organization belongs is extremely important in order to determine priorities for dealing with competitors and identify the most dangerous competitors to the organization's existence, because competition between organizations that belong to a different strategic group is weak (httpshbrarabic.com).

Successful organizations know that in the vast world of competition there are priorities in identifying competitors and their level of danger and dealing with them. It is not possible to respond to all competitors, and there

is also difficulty in cooperating with them as a whole and containing them. Therefore, organizations try to identify a group of competitors who share many characteristics with it. They follow similar strategies in order to focus on them and predict their reactions and how to deal with them, because this type of competitors represents the greatest threat that threatens the existence of each other more than others. Hence, the researcher resorted to using the strategic group analysis method to diagnose competitors in the restaurant sector in the city of Tikrit. And then to determine the most dangerous competitors to each other and who have priority when formulating the strategy directed towards competition, and Are there actually strategic groups in the industry? This controversy still exists and has been raised by many researchers, as the two main disagreements in strategic group research are whether strategic groups actually exist? And if so, does it affect the company's performance? What is the best methodological approach to identifying them? (Murthi et al., 2013; Rebière and Mavoori, 2019).

This study attempts to identify the presence of strategic groups in the restaurant sector operating in the city of Tikrit in the Republic of Iraq, because Iraq's economy is one of the developing economies, and based on the recommendation of some of the previously mentioned studies and the study (Peng et al., 2004).which recommended the necessity of conducting such studies in developing economies due to the importance of taking the complete theory of strategic groups into account the experience of many managers, companies and industries in these emerging economies.

Therefore, the scientific originality of the current research is that it was applied in an emerging, complex, and turbulent environment from which it is difficult to obtain information, which is the Iraqi environment. According to the researcher's knowledge, strategic groups have not been tested in the Iraqi environment yet, which gives this study scientific originality in the field of its application and the results that it reached. And the possibility of increasing understanding of strategic groups by studying it in such an environment.

The research was divided into six points. The first point covered an introduction to the research, and the second point dealt with a review of previous studies to clarify the theoretical framework of the research and build its hypotheses. The third point included clarifying the research methodology and tools, as the cluster analysis method was used to identify

strategic groups and group them in the form of clusters, each cluster representing a strategic group. It includes a group of grapes that represent organizations with similar strategies. It is also a method that shows and measures the closeness of strategic groups to each other. After that, we discuss in the fourth point the most important results reached by the research to be discussed in the fifth point, and finally the sixth point, which deals with the most important conclusions that were reached. to it.

2. Literary reviews

2-1. The concept of strategic groups and the dialectics of existence: This paragraph includes the concept of strategic groups and delving into the dialectic of their presence in the industry, as follows:

2-1-1. The concept of strategic groups: A large body of research has explored the strategic group concept first identified by (Hunt) (Anand et al., 2013, 572) and advocates of the concept (e.g., Hatten and Schendel) argue that industry members can be classified into groups. According to key characteristics, such as strategy and structure. (Combs et al., 2004) Strategic groups can be described according to (Hunt) as a group of competitors within an industry that follow similar strategies (Han et al, 2022: 4)..

The concept became clearer due to the study (Porter), based on the insights of (Bain) and (Hunt), he proposed the strategic group as a theoretical construct that extends between the two extremes of complete monopoly and perfect competition. It is a middle-level classification for understanding competition between organizations (Han et al., 2022). He also said about the strategic group as a technique that is an analytical tool designed to assist in structural analysis. It is an intermediate frame of reference between looking at the industry as a whole and looking at each company individually as a unique company. (Porter,1998). he described the term as a group of companies that follow a similar strategy. (Anand et al., 2013) Or it is a group of companies in an industry that follows the same strategy or a similar strategy along the strategic dimensions (Porter, 1998).

Because a company does not compete with all other companies in its markets, but only with those that share common resources and strategies. This means that companies belonging to the same group are able to respond in the same way to disruption, rely on each other, and accurately anticipate the reaction of the rest of the group (Prior and Surroca). Likewise, the response to disruption will be to follow a common competitive strategy for

the firms in the strategic group, which reduces the relative importance of some strategic variables and increases the relative importance of some others (Araya). (Jara et al., 2022).

(Bogner et al) defines it as a group of organizations with similar operational models and strategies (Reaney and Cullinane, 2022) and (Thomas and Pollock) argue about the theory of strategic groups that within an industry, companies with similar asset configurations will pursue competitive strategies. and similar performance results (Chittoor and Ray, 2007). This means that the company within the group makes strategic decisions that cannot be easily imitated by companies outside the group without significant costs, time spent, or uncertainty about the outcome of those decisions. (McGee. 2014).

(Caves and Porter) believe that the philosophy on which the theory of strategic groups is based is that companies in the group develop similar ways of responding to competitive challenges and environmental changes (Murthi et al., 2013). Strategic groups are neither elites nor social classes. They cut across hierarchies, their members do not carry cards or identification, and may follow different lifestyles and follow different beliefs. However, they are united by one common goal: securing current and future opportunities to access resources; To share opportunities for resource allocation and distribution (Evers and Gerke 2009).

An industry might also have only one strategic group if all companies followed essentially the same strategy. On the other hand, each company can be a different strategic group. However, there are usually a small number of strategy groups that capture the basic strategic differences between companies in an industry. For example, in the major appliance industry there is one strategic group. (Porter,1998).

It appears from the above that all concepts, despite their differences, agree that the strategic group is a group of organizations that share similar strategies among themselves, and an organization characterized by unique characteristics may form an independent strategic group on its own.

2-1-2. Discussing the dialectics of the existence of strategic groups: Although strategic groups theory, to which a large body of diverse literature and research has been devoted over the past three decades, serves as a basis for providing insights into the types and interactions of strategy groups deployed in markets, there is little dissatisfaction with it and researchers have

noted its theoretical underpinnings. It has been criticized by a number of researchers (Barney and Hoskisson; Hatten and Hatten; Thomas and Venkatraman) and most of these criticisms can be traced back to two main questions posed by (Barney and Huskisson): The ontological question: Do strategic groups exist? truly? Another useful question is: Does performance depend on strategic group membership? (Peng et al., 2004; Rebière and Mavoori, 2019).

(Barney and Hoskisson) argue that the impact of strategic group theory research will be limited until these assertions are tested. These major assertions in strategic group theory remain untested for a variety of theoretical and empirical reasons, and until these tests are complete, the contribution of the strategic groups concept will be unclear if it does not. These tests built credibility for the concept of strategic groups (Rebière and Mavoori, 2019).

Although most models assumed the existence of strategic groups and used methods such as cluster analysis or factor analysis to detect the groups, increasing dissatisfaction has been expressed in recent years about the limitations that have plagued the empirical models that have been used to prove their existence (Murthi et al., 2013) It may be necessary to abandon this concept and develop models in which the strategically relevant features of firms are those that are idiosyncratic. Previously? (Hatten and Hatten) took the extreme position on strategic groups by saying "…groups do not exist and a strategic group is not an anthropomorphized unified competitive force of many firms. It is merely an analytical convenience" (Rebière and Mavoori, 2019).

This talk led us to another question: Is the strategic group an official organization in the sense that there is an official agreement among the organizations that fall within a group so that we can say that this is a strategic group or not? Then it leads us to another question: Is there an informal prior agreement for us to judge whether this is a strategic group or not? This question led me to another question: Is the strategic group those organizations that follow the same strategies or have some or all of the common characteristics or similar behavior despite the absence of a formal agreement or the presence of an informal agreement? What do we call this organizational? It is, in the end, a type of informal organization. What is meant?

to answer these questions, we can benefit here from the division mentioned by (Rebière and Mavoori, 2019). by presenting a group of definitions about the concept of strategic groups, in a different cognitive or conceptual manner, according to the proposals of many researchers and authors, and it started from the idea The Indian story says that a group of blind people were asked to give a description of an elephant. Each one gave a different description of the same elephant. The one who held the elephant by the tail said it was a butterfly. The one who held the trunk said it was a snake. The one who held the leg said it was a pillar, and so on... and these are the definitions for the groups. The strategy is as follows: (Rebière and Mavoori, 2019, 186; Reger and Huff, 1993).

A. Overlapping strategic interactions: This means identifying the organizations that belong to the strategic group based on the overlapping strategic interactions between these organizations. Each group of organizations has overlapping strategic interactions, which we call a strategic group (Dranove, Peteraf, and Shanley).
B. Joint ownership, close market relationships, and social interactions: This means that the organizations that fall within the strategic group are linked by a relationship of common ownership, close relationships in the labor market, or social interactions such as friendship and kinship (Yiu and Hoskisson).
C. Similarity of strategies deployed in certain markets: means grouping organizations into a specific strategic group that depends on the strategy followed by that organization. For example, organizations can be classified according to this classification into three groups according to the competitive strategies developed by Porter (the group of low-cost organizations, the group of differentiated organizations, and the focus group).) (Cool and Schendel).
D. Coordinated behavior through market signals (Baumard): This means that there is a group of organizations that follow the same behavior every time in reaction to an event.
E. Unequal competition within the industry: that is, the presence of a group of small-sized organizations competing with a group of small or medium-sized companies (Mas-Ruiz and Martínez,)
F. Competition: means the existence of a group of organizations seeking to achieve a similar competitive position, which we can call a strategic group (Porac; Paton; and Kanfer).

G. Mobility barriers: that is, the presence of a group of companies that are located in an area of industrial factors that is impossible or difficult to enter. We call it a strategic group (McGee and Thomas).

H. Administrative cognitive maps: This means that there is a group of managers who make similar decisions because of the cognitive similarity between them (Reger and Huff, 1993).

It is clear to us from what we presented above that strategic groups may have formal agreements and partnerships between them through joint ownership, and there may be intentional informal agreements, and there may be neither formal nor informal agreements, but rather they follow coordinated behavior resulting from the similarity of the cognitive and perceptual maps of managers when making strategic decisions, and this It is consistent with the results of the study (Evers and Gerke 2009) in saying that members of strategic groups are not necessarily members of a network nor members of an organization, although this is not excluded either.

In my study, I believe that the absence of a formal entity or the absence of a prior informal agreement between members of strategic groups in some industries is what prompted many researchers such as (Hatten and Hatten) to say: "The groups do not exist and the strategic group is not a unified, monolithic competitive force." For many companies, it is merely an analytical convenience" (Rebière and Mavoori, 2019).

2-2. Dynamics of organizations and the strategic group: Strategic group insights can have a key role in exploring industry dynamics in terms of structure changes, and consequent changes in competitive conditions, by evaluating both prior changes in asset structures and key competencies of firms (McGee et al., 1995). While we note that early studies focused mostly on identifying strategic groups in different industrial environments and on analyzing performance differences between strategic groups, research interest has recently shifted toward strategic group dynamics. Studies on strategic group dynamics are concerned with the evolution of strategic group structures, including changes in membership. The strategic group, and changes in the average strategy of the strategic group (Schimmer and Brauer, 2012). Here we can divide the dynamics of companies and the strategic group into the following types:

2-2-1. Dynamics of companies within their strategic group: This movement results from the companies within the strategic group when some

Doi: www.doi.org/10.25130/tjaes.22.75.2.45

companies try to reposition themselves within the group in order to achieve a higher profit within their group, and these profits are subject to a group of factors, which are: (McGee. 2014).

- ❖ Differences in scale of companies within a strategic group: Although companies within the same strategic groups are likely to be similar in the scales of their operations, differences in scale may exist and may operate to the detriment of smaller companies in the group as there are aspects of strategy subject to economies of scale.
- ❖ Differences in cost of mobility in a strategic group: If there are absolute cost advantages of being early in establishing brand names, identifying raw materials, etc., then a later entrant in a particular strategic group may face some disadvantages with respect to incumbent firms. Timing in this case is a factor that may affect profit spreads. This may also be the case if the existing company also owns assets from its operations in other industries that could be used jointly.
- ❖ The company's ability to implement or implement its strategy in an operational sense: Some companies may be superior in their ability to organize and manage operations, develop creative advertising themes, achieve technological breakthroughs with certain inputs of resources, etc. While these are not structural advantages of the kind created by mobility barriers, they may be relatively stable advantages if the market is for managers, scientists, and creative employees.

The dynamics of companies within the strategic group towards each other may differ from the dynamic of companies with companies located within other strategic groups, or even with companies located within the same strategic group, but different in terms of size, as a study (Mas-Ruiz, and Ruiz-Moreno,2017) has proven that large companies will not respond to every attack from their group, regardless of the market in which the attack originates. Moreover, large companies react only to the attacks of smaller competitors in the loan market, while a group of smaller companies reacts not only to large companies, but also to the actions of smaller competitors of their group in the deposit market. (Mas-Ruiz, and Ruiz-Moreno 2017).

(Caves and Porter) suggested from the perspective of the economics of industrial organizations that firms within a group are likely to collude with each other to build mobility barriers around the group, and thus, firms within a particular strategic group face different conditions from firms in other groups. These conditions will in turn lead to similar performance of firms

within a group and performance differences across groups (McNamara, et al., 2003).

2-2-2. Dynamics of companies outside the strategic group: It is the process of companies moving from one strategic group to a second strategic group. Companies may tend to change strategies to exploit opportunities as they arise, but switching to a new strategic group may be fraught with risks because the necessary investment can be large and the perceived opportunities may be short-term. Thus, companies generally choose not to change combinations because it is unclear whether the performance improvements gained will exceed the costs they will incur (Mascarenhas and Aaker), (Combs et al., 2004,882).

The process of moving an organization from one strategic group to another may not be easy due to mobility barriers. (Cool and Schendel 1987) believe that mobility barriers are "structural forces that prevent companies from freely changing their competitive positions" (Brege et al., 2021).

Maps of strategic groups are based on the concept of mobility barriers. It represents a natural result of the existence of strategic groups. It is factors that prevent or block the company's movement from one strategic location to another. The mobility barrier is essentially a restriction on replicability or imitation. It acts as an entry barrier, but it works to the benefit of the group within the industry rather than the industry as a whole (McGee. 2014).

The transition process faces many obstacles related to market strategies, such as the product line and use of technology. There are obstacles related to suppliers and cost characteristics of production and marketing. There are obstacles related to the characteristics of the organization such as owners and organizational structure, as shown in Table (1).

Table (1) Sources of mobility barriers.

Market-related strategies	Supply and cost characteristics	Characteristics of firms
Product line	Economies of scale:	Ownership
User technologies	Production	Organization structure
Market segmentation	Marketing	Control systems
Distribution channels	Administration	Management skills
Brand names	Manufacturing processes	Boundaries of firms:
Geographic coverage	R&D capability	Diversification
Selling systems	Marketing and distribution systems	Vertical integration
		Firm size
		Relationships with influence groups

Source: McGee and Thomas (1986), p. 151.

A longitudinal study was conducted of the dynamics of the strategic group over periods of economic stability, growth, and decline in international offshore oil exploration. Some changes were observed in the group's strategy during economic growth and decline, as it was noted that the rates of movement between groups were higher during economic decline than during stability or growth. Mobility was also higher between similar groups than between dissimilar groups. (Mascarenhas, 1989) Some studies have even found, contrary to many previous perceptions, that it is possible for firms to associate with multiple strategic groups. (Anand et al., 2013).

2-2-3. The dynamics of the strategic groups itself: It is the intensity of competition or movements between strategic groups present in the industry, and the pattern and intensity of competition among it, as (Porter) sees, depends on three factors: (McGee. 2014)

- ❖ Number and size of distribution of groups: ceteris paribus, the more numerous and equal in size the strategic groups are, the greater the competition. On the other hand, if one strategic group constitutes a small portion of an industry while another represents a very large portion, it is likely that Strategic variation has little effect on rivalry because the power of the small group to influence the large group is probably low.
- ❖ Strategic distance among groups: This is the degree to which strategies in different groups differ in terms of key strategic decision variables. The greater this distance, the more difficult implicit coordination becomes and the stronger competition in the industry becomes.
- ❖ Market interdependence between groups: The diversity of strategies increases competition among groups even more, as market interdependence is high. However, those strategic groups that possess high mobility barriers are relatively isolated from competition.

2-3. Motives for forming strategic groups and its strength: The literature on strategic groups (Caves and Porter; Dranove et al.; Hatten and Hatten,) suggests that cooperation among organizations is likely when its interests overlap. Organizations may form a strategic group to limit new entrants or share best practices. Or collusion to control the market (Reaney and Cullinane, 2022).

Another opinion holds that the reason for the formation of strategic groups is the existence of a common threat, which suggests that competing organizations cooperate when it is exposed to common threats, but seriously, cooperation is likely to form and continue only when the participating

organizations have complementary identities, as free identities enable representatives to coalesce around " group" to secure common interests. The group forms its own identity and cooperates in the long term to achieve interests. However, actor groups with conflicting identities struggle to maintain cooperation when facing common threats (Reaney and Cullinane, 2022).

The strength of group identity is important for all members of the strategic group and its performance, and this is confirmed by (Peteraf and Shanley) that the performance of members improves when all members identify strongly with the group. If the group identity is weak, performance may not be improved, and the group's existence may falter.

(Brewer and Kramer; Kramer and Brewer) believe that there is a critical factor that affects the strength of group identity, which is “outgroups” or common competitors. Many studies support the idea that common competitors enhance cooperation among members of strategic groups. A study of (Ingram and Inman) found for Canadian and American hotels that the presence of a common external group (i.e., cross-border firms) increased the salience of the central characteristics of local organizations, enhancing coordination among previously competing organizations within the group and working together to confront the common competitor (Reaney and Cullinane, 2022).

2-4. Characteristics of the strategic group and steps to determine it: The strategic group consists of competing companies, which have similar approaches and characteristics in the competitive struggle in the market, and these characteristics can be identified as follows: (Gierszewska and Romanowska): (Majkowska and Komor, 2017)

- Providing comparable products in terms of quality, technical level and modernity.
- Use similar distribution channels.
- They are vertically integrated to the same degree.
- Provides similar services, maintenance, and technical support,
- Focused on meeting the needs of the same customer groups.
- Lead advertising campaigns in a similar manner.
- Use identical product technologies.
- Offer products at similar prices.

As for the steps to identify strategic groups, (Feigenbaum, Tang, and Thomas, 1990; Feigenbaum and Thomas, 1990) believe that there are a set of main steps in this process through identifying strategic groups, which are: (McGee. 2014,).

- Choosing the strategic field (industry).
- Choose the organizational levels to be merged (institutional, business, or functional).
- Identifying the variables that achieve the best corporate strategies.
- Determine a stable time period.
- Grouping companies into strategic groups.

2-5. Determine the strategic dimensions to measure strategic groups: According to (Hunt) and later (Porter) members of strategic groups implement similar strategies along specific strategic dimensions. According to (Hunt), these dimensions are cost structures, degree of vertical integration, degree of product differentiation, formal organizations and control and reward systems. (Brege et al., 2022). (Porter) also mentions a broader spectrum of strategic dimensions that frame a competitive strategy, for example size, by using the relative size of the company in its industry as a proxy for strategic group membership, where he divided companies in each industry into two categories defined as industry leaders and followers. He argued that: The leader/follower dichotomy may be particularly appropriate for dividing strategic groups in a sample limited to consumer goods industries [because] while the composition of strategic groups varies from industry to industry, the leadership group should include those strategic groups In an industry characterized by strategies potentially achieving economies of scale in production technology, vertical integration, captive distribution, in-house repair and service facilities, national advertising and others, if these economies exist in the industry. The leadership group should also include strategic groups with broad product lines and large sales forces. On the other hand, the group of affiliates is likely to include strategic groups made up of companies pursuing specialized or narrow-line strategies, regional strategies, non-integrated strategies and others. Thus, the leader/follower distinction captures some of the variation between strategic groups (Mcgee and Thomas, 1986). (Porter) also mentions specialization, brand identification, pay versus pull (on demand) and channel selection (Brege et al., 2022).

As for (Lalani) considers decisions related to the services that must be provided, markets, growth, and pricing as strategic dimensions (Ghiasi et al., 2022), while (Hatten and Hatten) defined them as four dimensions: (Mcgee and Thomas, 1986) are (price, advertising, number of brands, percentage of market share). While some studies classified companies into strategic groups according to the company's social responsibility, as in the study (Toppinen et al., 2011).

In the field of restaurants, the current study sees us relying on Porter's classification in order for the researchers to confirm the reliability of this classification for grouping companies into strategic groups ((Ghiasi et al., 2022). It is a comprehensive classification and subject to many experiments and has proven its effectiveness. It has not been tested in the Iraqi environment, and for this reason it was done. It was adopted in this study in the practical aspect.

From the above, we can determine two research hypotheses:

- ❖ It is not possible to diagnose the presence of strategic groups and determine their dynamics in the restaurant sector in Tikrit.
- ❖ It is not possible to determine the priorities of competitors according to the degree of risk of their dynamism using the analysis of strategic groups in the restaurant sector in Tikrit.

3. **Research methodology:** The current research adopted a case study method for all (9) restaurants operating in the city of Tikrit. Data and information were collected from the documents and menus available for these restaurants, as well as questions directed to the management of those restaurants and direct observations recorded by the researcher while he was in those restaurants. The researcher was able to It collects data and information on the five strategic dimensions of (prices, cleanliness, size, product variety, and external appearance). The hierarchical cluster analysis method was used to analyze the data and information collected to reach the results of the research, as well as using some measures of central tendency and dispersion to describe and diagnose The reality of the research dimensions.
4. **Results:** It was shown previously that the strategic dimensions on the basis of which strategic groups are classified differ from one industry to another and from one researcher to another, and despite the difficulty of obtaining the necessary data and information about all of these strategic dimensions

from the restaurant sector operating in the Iraqi environment as it is an emerging environment and there is no cooperation and there is There was fear and apprehension on the part of some of the management of these restaurants in giving the information. One of the restaurant management even told the researcher that he feared that the researcher might want to obtain the information to open a competing restaurant. Likewise, the management of another restaurant refused to give any information to the researcher despite making most of this information available to the public because of They are employees of the restaurant and not the owners of the restaurant, and they cannot give any information without the permission of the restaurant owner, which forced the researcher to search for information about the restaurant owner and obtain information from the restaurant owner after a lot of effort. Therefore, conducting real research in such an environment is extremely difficult because there is no The culture of non-transparency and non-disclosure is still widespread, so the researcher can describe the strategic dimensions about which he was able to collect information from the researched field and conduct a cluster analysis for it, as follows:

4-1. Describing and diagnosing the strategic dimensions of restaurant employment in Tikrit: This paragraph includes five general dimensions:

4-1-1 Prices: Price means the cash amounts paid by the customer to obtain a service or product from the restaurant. This study examined the prices of a group of products provided by those restaurants, as shown in Table (2) below.

Table (2): Description and diagnosis of the prices of products and services provided by restaurants operating in Tikrit

Strategic dimensions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Quzzi	9	12000.00	18000.00	16000.0000	2000.00000
Grilled mix	9	13000.00	20000.00	16555.5556	2403.70085
Mix grilled half a person	9	8000.00	10000.00	9777.7778	666.66667
Rice and broth	9	4000.00	6000.00	5000.0000	500.00000
Chicken with rice	9	8000.00	18000.00	12888.8889	3407.50805

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Strategic dimensions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Chicken in the hall	9	15000.00	18000.00	15666.6667	1000.00000
Takeaway chicken	9	10000.00	15000.00	11444.4444	2242.27067
flee as a thief	9	8000.00	18000.00	14666.6667	3427.82730
Veal sandwich	9	2000.00	5000.00	3055.5556	1013.79376
broth on meat	9	9000.00	18000.00	15444.4444	2877.11275

The first column from the left in Table (2) shows the names of the products offered by restaurants operating in the city of Tikrit. The second column that follows it shows the number of restaurants that were covered in the current study, which is (9). The other columns show some measures of central tendency and dispersion for product prices. Shown in the first column of Table (2), the third column shows the minimum prices for these products, as the lowest value reached (2000.00) for the product (Veal Sandwich). The fourth column shows the maximum prices, as the highest value reached (20,000.00) for the product (Grilled mix). The fifth column of Table (2) shows that the highest arithmetic mean for these products was for the product (Grilled Mix), which reached (16555.5556), while the lowest arithmetic mean was for the product (Veal Sandwich), which reached (3055.5556). The last column shows the standard deviation of the price values of these products. As it appears from Table (2), the highest value of the standard deviation for these products was for the product (flee as a thief), which reached (3427.82730), while the lowest value of the standard deviation was for the product ((Rice and broth), which reached (500.00000).

4-1-2. Cleanliness: This dimension includes aspects of cleanliness specific to each restaurant in terms of the cleanliness of the place, the plates on which the products are served, the seating areas, and the trays on which the food is served, as well as the other internal contents of the food. Restaurants have been divided into three **c**ategories, the first category is high. Cleanliness was given a rank (3), and the second category was moderate cleanliness and a rank was given (2). The third category was for restaurants with low cleanliness and a rank was given (1). As shown in Table (3), the mode values shown in Table (3) also appear, as most of the restaurants achieved It was

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ranked (2) with a median of (2) and a standard deviation of (0.71711), which indicates the low dispersion of these restaurants and its high homogeneity.

Table (3): Description and diagnosis of cleanliness for restaurants operating in Tikrit

cleanliness							
N Valid	Missing	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
9	0	2	2	0.71711	2	1	3

4-1-3. Size: This dimension includes the size of the restaurant, as it has been divided into three categories: the first category is large in size and given the rank (3), the second category is medium-sized and given the rank (2), while the third category is for small-sized restaurants and given the rank (1). As shown in Table (4), the mode values shown in Table (4) also show that most of the restaurants obtained rank (2), with a median of (2) and a standard deviation of (0.70711), which indicates a decrease in the dispersion of these restaurants and an increase in their homogeneity.

Table (4): Description and size diagnosis of restaurants operating in Tikrit

Size							
N Valid	Missing	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
9	0	2	2	0.71711	2	1	3

4-1-4-Diversity of Products: This dimension includes the variety of products offered by each restaurant, as the restaurants were divided into three categories: the first category with a high assortment and given a rank (3), the second category with a medium assortment and given a rank (2), and the third category is For restaurants with a low assortment, a rank was given (1), and as shown in Table (5), the mode values shown in Table (5) also show that most of the restaurants obtained a rank (1). This reflects the poverty of most of the surveyed restaurants due to the wide assortment of products, and the median value was also (2) A standard deviation of (0.83333), which indicates a decrease in the dispersion of these restaurants and an increase in their homogeneity.

Table (5): Description and diagnosis of the product variety offered by restaurants operating in Tikrit

product variety							
N Valid	Missing	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
9	0	2	1	.83333	2	1	3

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4-1-5. External Appearance: This dimension dealt with the aspects of the external appearance of each restaurant in terms of the size of the external building and its beauty. Restaurants were divided into three categories: the first category was highly aesthetic and was given a rank (3) and the second category was medium aesthetic and was given a rank (2) As for the third category, it is for restaurants that are low in aesthetics and are given a rank (1). As shown in the table (6), the mode values shown in table (6) also show that most restaurants obtained the rank (1) with a Median of (2) and a standard deviation of (70711). Which indicates a decrease in the dispersion of these restaurants and an increase in their homogeneity.

Table (6): Description and diagnosis of the external appearance of restaurants operating in Tikrit

external appearance							
N Valid	Missing	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
9	0	2	1	0.71711	2	1	3

4-2. The results of the cluster analysis on the strategic dimensions of restaurants employment in Tikrit: This paragraph includes four stages:

4-2-1. table of Case Processing Summary: Table (7) shows a summary of the case treatment, as it becomes clear that the actual number of cases (restaurants) included in the analysis is (9) restaurants, which constituted (100%) of the total cases, and that the number of missing cases is (0) cases, meaning there are no missing cases, and The total number of cases is (9) cases, which is the sum of the actual cases and the missing cases.

Table (7): Case Processing Summary of restaurants operating in Tikrit

cases					
Valid		Missing		Total	
N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
9	100.0%	0	.0%	9	100.0%

4-2-2. Proximity matrix table: Table (8) shows the Proximity matrix among the cases (restaurants). The table shows each pair of cases together and for all cases, and it appears in the form of a matrix. We note that the degree of kinship between Al-Mazhaq Restaurant and Al-Arish Restaurant is (7.000E7), as well as the degree of kinship between Al-Mazak Restaurant and Al-Fallujah Restaurant. It is (7,000E7), while we see that the closest restaurant to Al-Mazhaq Restaurant is Layali Degla Restaurant, with an amount of (1,400E8), and that the farthest restaurant from Al-Al-Mazhaq Restaurant is Super King Restaurant, with an amount of (9,425E7), and so on for the rest of the restaurants as shown in Table (8).

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Table (8): Proximity matrix of restaurants operating in Tikrit

Proximity Matrix									
Case	Squared Euclidean Distance								
	1: Al-Mazhaq	2: Al-Arish	3:Al-Fallujah	4:Azaam	5:Sltan	6:wahaa	7:Bay Rock	8:Layali Degla	9:Super King
1: Al-Mazhaq	.000	7.000E7	7.000E7	4.100E7	3.000E7	2.200E7	6.800E7	1.400E8	9.425E7
2: Al-Arish	7.000E7	.000	1.000	1.670E8	4.800E7	6.000E7	6.000E7	1.100E8	1.663E8
3: Al-Fallujah	7.000E7	1.000	.000	1.670E8	4.800E7	6.000E7	6.000E7	1.100E8	1.663E8
4:Azaam	4.100E7	1.670E8	1.670E8	.000	1.050E8	4.900E7	1.250E8	2.310E8	1.523E8
5:Sltan	3.000E7	4.800E7	4.800E7	1.050E8	.000	3.800E7	7.200E7	1.700E8	1.873E8
6:wahaa	2.200E7	6.000E7	6.000E7	4.900E7	3.800E7	.000	3.800E7	1.360E8	1.453E8
7:Bay Rock	6.800E7	6.000E7	6.000E7	1.250E8	7.200E7	3.800E7	.000	9.000E7	1.563E8
8: Layali Degla	1.400E8	1.100E8	1.100E8	2.310E8	1.700E8	1.360E8	9.000E7	.000	8.725E7
9:Super King	9.425E7	1.663E8	1.663E8	1.523E8	1.873E8	1.453E8	1.563E8	8.725E7	.000
This is a dissimilarity matrix									

4-2-3. Agglomeration schedule: It appears from the Agglomeration schedule (9) that in the first stage of the agglomerating stages, the second case (Al-Arish Restaurant) was agglomerated with the third case (Al-Fallujah Restaurant), as it were closer to each other and formed the first cluster, as the value of the coefficient between it was (1.000), and this indicates that there is closeness. It is large between it, because the management of the restaurant (Al-Arish) was the one who ran the restaurant (Al-Fallujah), according to what he said, while we note from table (9) that the second cluster was formed from the first case (Al-Mazhaq Restaurant) with the sixth case (Wahaa Restaurant) and so on for the rest. Cases.

Table (9): Agglomeration Schedule of restaurants operating in Tikrit

Stage	Cluster Combined		Coefficients	Stage Cluster First Appears		Next Stage
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2		Cluster 1	Cluster 2	
1	2	3	1.000	0	0	4
2	1	6	2.200E7	0	0	3
3	1	5	3.400E7	2	0	4
4	1	2	5.933E7	3	1	5
5	1	7	5.960E7	4	0	7
6	8	9	8.725E7	0	0	8
7	1	4	1.090E8	5	0	8
8	1	8	1.468E8	7	6	0

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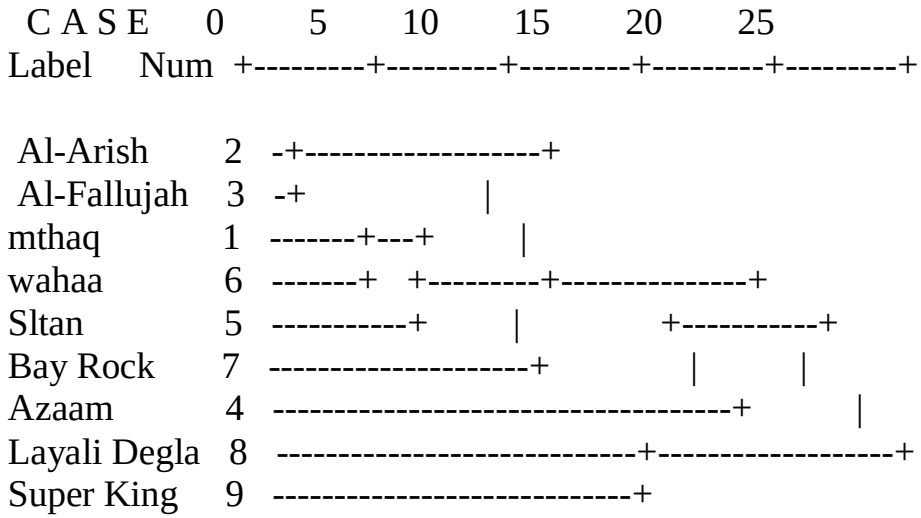
The figure below shows this graphically, as it appears from Figure (1) that the first cluster was formed through the meeting of the second case (Al-Arish Restaurant) with the third case (Al-Fallujah Restaurant). As for the second cluster, it appears from Figure (1) that it resulted from the connection of (Al-Mazhaq Restaurant). with the (Wahaa restaurant), and so on for the other clusters, as shown in Figure (1) that the longest distance among the clusters is (25), and the shorter this distance indicates the closeness and homogeneity of the restaurants to each other and vice versa.

Figure (1) Clustering of restaurants together

Hierarchical cluster analysis

Dendrogram using Average Linkage (Between Groups)

Rescaled Distance Cluster Combine



4-2-4. Membership table of the case (restaurant) in the strategic group:

Table (10) shows the membership of the cases (restaurants) and its clustering within the strategic group to which it belongs, as it appears that there are three strategic groups. The first group included the largest number of restaurants with (6) restaurants, which are each of (Al-Mazhaq, Al-Arish, Al-Fallujah, Bay Rock, Sltan and Wahaa. The second strategic group included only one case (one restaurant), which is (Azaam). The third strategic group included only two cases (two restaurants), which is (Superking, Layali Deglaa).

Table (10): Membership of the case (restaurant) in the strategic group

Case	3 Clusters
1:Mthaq	1
2: Al-Arish	1

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Case	3 Clusters
3: Al-Fallujah	1
4:Azaam	2
5:Sltan	1
6:Wahaa	1
7:Bay Rock	1
8:Layali Degla	3
9:Super King	3

5. Discussions:

5-1. The analysis of strategic groups is a fuzzy method for analyzing competitors, that is, it is a method for analyzing areas that are neither completely white nor completely black. It mediates or extends between the classification of perfect competition and the classification of complete monopoly. In most of its forms, it is either monopolistic competition or oligopoly. Which can be considered the most common case among the cases of competition in which strategic groups are formed, as shown by the results of the research,

but it can be a case of perfect competition, which is rare, when there is one strategic group that includes all the organizations operating in an industry, and the impact of these member organizations on prices this industry is non-existent. It can also be in the case of a complete monopoly, which is few. This is the case when the strategic group in an industry is one company, and as indicated by the results of the research, where the restaurant (Azaam) appeared, which is one restaurant that formed a strategic group on its own, and this result is consistent with what was mentioned. (Porter 1998) where he said that a single company can form an independent strategic group on its own, and here a point of contention arises, which is whether the members of the strategic groups agree among itself, that is, is there an agreement among the members of the strategic group for us to say that it is a strategic group, or is that not a requirement?

Some studies, such as the study (Reaney and Cullinane, 2022), confirm this, that is, there must be a prior agreement on cooperation and collusion, but it do not deny that there are no strategic groups without the presence of this agreement, because the intention of the strategic group is that these strategically similar organizations will respond. its action towards events and environmental changes is similar, regardless of their agreement

or disagreement, and the intention of identifying strategic groups is to simplify and increase understanding of the nature of competition, and these matters are achieved whether agreement is reached among similar organizations or there is no agreement, even if it is in the latter case (i.e. the presence of an agreement among organizations Similarity) is more apparent than in the first case.

It is also possible to benefit from the analysis of strategic groups even in the presence of turbulent markets such as the Iraqi market, as a study (Tripsas and Gavetti) found. Even in periods of market turmoil, there is likely to be a stable, albeit short-term, market structure that includes basic strategic groups in many sectors due to the cognitive mental maps of decision makers trying to achieve balance (Rebière and Mavoori, 2019). This means that Organizations in developing economies, such as the Iraqi economy, raise many aspects that may enable the development of the theory of strategic groups that originated in the Western world and which have not been tested in the Iraqi environment, according to the researcher's knowledge so far, which gives this study scientific authenticity in the field of its application and the results it has reached. Especially since it was applied in a turbulent and complex environment and with a high degree of risk resulting from the difficulty of obtaining information from that environment.

5-2. The results showed the presence of strategic groups in the restaurant sector operating in the city of Tikrit. Three strategic groups were found. The first group included the largest number of restaurants, with (6) restaurants. The second strategic group included only one restaurant. The third strategic group It included only two restaurants, and this result is consistent with the study (Cool and Schendel, 1987; Peteraf and Shanley, 1997,). as well as the study (Murthi et al., 2013) which confirmed the existence of strategic groups as a relatively stable phenomenon in Long term and it are not just random events. Here the first research hypothesis can be rejected and we accept the alternative hypothesis which states the existence of strategic groups in the restaurant sector operating in Tikrit.

What we notice from this is that the strategic groups differ in its size, the degree of its strength, and its influence on the industry in which it operates, and thus on the nature and unity of competition in it, as it is not possible to make the size and strength of the influence of the first strategic group identified by this study equal to the size and strength of the second and

third strategic groups in this study. Because the first group is larger in number and size, which makes it the strongest in this industry. Likewise, the third group is larger in size and has more influence on the industry than the second strategic group, which included only one restaurant. We also conclude from the above that the strategic group may contain only one company that forms a group. strategy alone. We also conclude that increasing strategic groups in an industry increases the intensity of competition in that industry.

5-3. The results showed the degree of similarity among competing restaurants, and this means the possibility of determining competition priorities among competitors according to the seriousness of the competitor by determining the degree of similarity with it, which the greater it leads to an increase in the risk of the dynamic of that competitor, using the technology of strategic group analysis, in two directions. The first direction is to determine priorities. Competition with competitors who fall within the same strategic group.

As it appears from Table (10) related to the research results, the competition priorities for the (Al-Arish) restaurant with competitors who fall in the same group with it is the (Al-Fallujah) restaurant, which represents the greatest risk because it follows the same strategic dimensions followed by the (Al-Arish) restaurant, which means that It shares the same customers who have the same needs and desires, so (Al-Arish) Restaurant should focus and pay more attention to (Al-Fallujah) Restaurant when it conducts the process of analyzing competitors and their dynamics. Thus, for the rest of the competitors within the same strategic group, the priority of competition is for all restaurants that fall within the same group of Restaurant Al-Arish.

The previous discussion, although it contradicts the(Caves-Porter) hypothesis, which asserts that the literature on strategic management usually argues that similar companies tend to compete less aggressively with each other because similarity would prompt it to more closely recognize mutual interdependencies and anticipate Competitors move precisely, making tacit collusion easier, but (Cool and Dierick) argue that it is not clear why competition among group members should be less intense than competition coming from firms in other groups (Fuentelsaz and Gómez 2006).

However, the current study found that in the case of organizations working in developing economies, such as Iraqi organizations, there is no collusion and agreements among members of one strategic group because the members of the group work without prior planning and each alone, which makes his first enemy and the most dangerous to it is the one who shares the strategic characteristics and dimensions, which increases the intensity of competition. among members of one group.

The second trend is in determining competition priorities with competitors who fall within other strategic groups. As shown by the results of Table (10), the competition priorities for (Al-Arish) restaurant with competitors who fall within another strategic group are the restaurants that fall within the second strategic group and for all... The members who belong to this group, which is one restaurant (Azaam), then the priority of competition comes to the restaurant (Al-Arish), the restaurants included in the third group, which are two restaurants (Layali Degla, Super King). Here, the second research hypothesis can be rejected and we accept the alternative hypothesis, which states that competitors' priorities can be determined according to To the extent of the seriousness of their dynamism, using the analysis of strategic groups, the restaurant sector in Tikrit.

6. **Conclusions:** It is clear from the above that there are strategic groups in the restaurant sector operating in Tikrit, with varying sizes and powers of influence on this industry. It is subject to the four states of competition. It may be in a state of perfect competition or a complete monopoly, which is rare. The strategic group may be in a state of oligopoly or a state of monopolistic competition, which is the most common. It is also possible to determine the dynamics of strategic groups in the restaurant sector operating in the city of Tikrit. It is also possible to determine the priorities of competition among competitors for organizations operating in developing economies according to the degree of threat of the competitor using the technique of analyzing strategic groups, in two directions. The first direction is to determine the priorities of competition with competitors who are located Within the same strategic group, the competitor who is closer has a greater degree of dynamic risk to the restaurant that is similar to it, and thus the degree of dynamic risk increases accordingly.

The second trend is to prioritize competition with competitors who fall within other strategic groups because there are two types of dynamism for the strategic group, It are: the internal dynamic of a single strategic group,

which occurs within the strategic group and occurs because of two forces: An external force: which here is either due to the joining of one or more old or new members to the current strategic group, or the departure of one or more members from the current strategic group, which changes the internal composition. For that group, or it appears when the company moves from within the strategic group to which it belongs to outside it to another strategic group, and it occurs in three directions: either joining a group that is higher than its current group in the industry, or lower than its current group, or in a line parallel to its current group, and this result is consistent with the study (Schimmer and Brauer, 2012).

Or an internal force: It is the result of the movement of companies that fall within a certain strategic group within the same group. It occurs as a result of a change in the company's position within the group and it occurs in three directions. The first is upward, meaning it obtains a higher ranking within its strategic group, and the second is downward, meaning it obtains a lower ranking within its group. The third strategy is in a horizontal line, meaning it maintains its current position and moves at the same level to its current location, and this result is consistent with the study (Schimmer and Brauer, 2012) as well.

The second type of dynamism is the dynamism of a single strategic group within the industry: The second movement of the strategic group is when the position of the strategic group in the industry changes as a result of the emergence of new variables and events, and it also takes place in three directions, either above or below the industry, or in a straight horizontal line, and this is similar to Our solar system, the Earth (as a company) moves within the (strategic) solar system around the sun within the (strategic) solar systems, and a second movement of the (strategic) solar system as a whole takes place in cosmic space (as an industry), which is surrounded by none but God Almighty, and this dynamic applies. on both developing and developed economies.

Finally, this article can also add a new future science to our empirical knowledge about the competitive dynamics of strategic groups in the emerging economy, after it has now revealed the existence of three strategic groups in the restaurant sector, by re-studying after a certain period in the same sector and for the same restaurants to ensure the stability or The dynamics of the investigated restaurants within or outside their strategic groups.

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