

Competitive Intensity, Strategic Capabilities and Strategic Business Choices: Competitive, Cooperation or Coopetition. The Case of Tunisian Manufacturing Industries

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Abstract: This research propose to study the comparative explanatory factors (external and internal) of coopetition, cooperation and competitive strategies and consequently to explain the croissant recourse to coopetition in the detriment of other strategies. By adopting a quantitative hypothetico-deductive approach based on the structural equations method in data analysis, the study show that a highly intensity of competition coupled with a high need in strategic capabilities favors coopetition. However, when the intensity of competition is limited but the need for strategic capabilities is slightly higher, companies are better off adopting pure cooperation. Moreover, competitive strategies are conducted in a high competition's intensity and in an exceed's strategic capabilities situations.

Key words: Competitive intensity, strategic capabilities, competitive strategy, cooperation, coopetition

INTRODUCTION

This research is enrolled on the new approaches dealing with the explanatory factors of coopetition strategies relative to competitive and cooperative strategies. These factors are no longer solely external such as shorter product life cycles, industrial concentration, sectoral maturity, environmental uncertainty (Gnyawali and Park, 2009; Chiambaretto and Fernandez, 2016) but also internal such as the insufficiency (the possible availability) of resources and strategic capabilities (Bengtsson and Kock, 1999; Fernandez *et al.*, 2010).

It is no longer a question of limiting ourselves to an external or internal study of the strategic choices of coopetition compared to competitive and pure cooperation strategies but rather to wonder about the composite determinants of these strategic choices. From this perspective, two main types of factors may explain the recourse to coopetition strategies in the detriment of other strategies (competitive and cooperative). External factors refer in particular to the intensity of competition (Porter, 1980) and continue now a days, in the face of the new competitive reality, more than ever rough, to request certain strategic choices. Nevertheless, these factors are insufficient in themselves to give an almost complete explanation of strategies. Internal factors concern the distinctive capabilities of companies that make it possible to adopt one strategic choice over another.

The explanatory factors of coopetition, cooperation and competitive strategies have given rise separately, despite unequally, to several empirical studies (Murray, 1988; Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven, 1996; Spanos and Lioukas, 2001; Gnyawali and Park, 2009). However, comparative studies of the explanatory factors

for these different strategies are still shy (Hillman *et al.*, 2009; Gnyawali and Park, 2011; Chiambaretto and Fernandez, 2016).

The purpose of this study is therefore, to fill this void and to study the comparative explanatory factors of coopetition, cooperation and competitive strategies in the Tunisian manufacturing industry and consequently explain the croissant recourse to coopetition in the detriment of other strategies. The question will then be: in view of the intensification of competition and given the availability of their strategic capabilities should companies exclusively pursue competitive strategies face to cooperative strategies or rather simultaneously that is to say coopetition strategies?

In order to provide some answers to these questions, we organize these study into six sections. The first presents the theoretical framework of the study (competitive forces approach and RBV). The second deals with the development of hypothesis and the conceptual model of research, the third will present the research methodology. The fourth will be devoted to the results of the survey. The fifth will present the discussions of the results and finally, the last section presents the managerial implications.

Theoretical framework:

The determinants of strategic choices: Although, the analysis of the external environment in general was evoked by the first model of strategic analysis (SWOT), it was necessary to wait the researches by Porter (1980, 1985) to explicitly integrate the role of sectoral aspects in the competitive process.

Competitive forces approach (Porter, 1980): Two main approaches characterize competition research: the

structural approach and the behavioral approach. As for the structuralist approach, it postulates that the intensity of competition depends on the structural factors and not on the conscious actions of firms as in the context of the behavioral approach. In addition, companies only seek to adapt to the demands of the environment (demand and technology). According to Le Roy, his extensions in management sciences can be split into two approaches: a direct approach (Porter, 1980) and an indirect approach that explain the decision by adaptability to the environment (Ansoff and McDonnell, 1990).

We focus our interest exclusively on Porter's approach which is part of this structuralist (direct) approach to industrial economics (SCP). This approach breaks with a narrow view of competitive relationships based exclusively on relative market share with strategic analysis tools (matrices) while offering an expanded analysis of competition. Porter (1980) assumes that the origin of the competitive advantage lies in the environment. He proposed an attractive model of sector analysis, much richer than that of the SCP Model, in order to guide managers in their strategy formulation process. This researcher introduced the notion of "force" to better explain structural factors. According to this researcher (1980), "the structure of a sector has a strong influence on the determination of the competitive game's rules and on the strategies to which the firm is able to resort". For him, the intensity of competition within a sector of activity depends on the state of the five structural forces (existing competitors, potential entrants, substitute products, customers, suppliers).

According to Galbreath and Galvin (2008), Porter's "competitive forces approach" (Teece *et al.*, 1997) provides companies with a comprehensive framework enriched by analytical techniques for analyzing the industry and its evolution, understanding competitors and their positions relative to these competitors while translating this understanding into a competitive strategy that supports their market position. However, it was been criticized for its exclusive focus on external factors to explaining strategic choices. In fact, unlike Porter's confirmations in the same sector, companies may not achieve the same levels of performance thanks to the strategy. Hence, the emergence of the resource approach.

The resource based view: The essential reference of this approach remains to Penrose (1959) who considers the company as a collection of physical and human resources who are deployed by the managers. Their combination allows each company to create unique, subjective and specific productive opportunities for growth. Indeed, according to this researcher, this "inner world" has a capacity similar to that attributed to the external forces

such as competitive pressure or customer requirements. Thereafter, we note the works of the Harvard school that stipulates that strategic choices are based not only on the study of environmental opportunities and threats but also on evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the company. The latter leads to the identification of the distinctive competences of the company. However, it is important to note that the resource approach did not know a real institutionalization that from the proposals of Wernerfelt (1984) who first used the term Resource Based View (RBV) which while taking inspiration from the SWOT Model, refers resources to the strengths and the weaknesses of a company. Nevertheless, it was necessary to wait Barney (1991) research to consider resources as sources of sustainable and durable competitive advantage who defines resources as: "all assets, capabilities, organizational processes, attributes of the firm, information, knowledge, etc., controlled by a firm that allows it to design and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness. "This definition which seems to us the most complete, integrates the company's capabilities in the field of resources.

The resource approach is therefore, a true renewal in the study of strategy where the company is seen as a collection of unique resources that can influence its evolution and strategic choices besides its competitive advantage and rents (Barney, 1991). Compared to the neoclassical approach which considers that resources are mobile and homogeneous, the resource approach considers that companies are heterogeneous due to the resources that they disposed and that resources are not perfectly mobile between companies (Barney, 1991). According to Barney (1991), the choice between Porter's two generic strategies (1980) depends on the presence or absence of certain resources. Fernandez *et al.* (2010) ensure that the theory RBV encourages the company to pursue individual strategy.

Although, most founding research does not explicitly distinguish between the term "resources" and "capabilities", Amit and Schoemaker (1993) while looking like the business to a "bundle of resources", consider that the latter correspond to the assets that it owns and controls while the capacities correspond to their ability to exploit and combine these resources through the organizational routines in order to complete their path. These capabilities are based on specific, tangible and intangible information processes that develop through complex interactions between resources.

Nevertheless, capabilities can be described as strategic when they allow firms to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (cost/differentiation), to increase the efficiency of production, to improve deliveries and consequently to increase competitiveness (Day, 1994; Spanos and Lioukas, 2001 and DeSarbo *et al.*, 2005). In this research, we focus on certain types of strategic

capabilities that are most cited in the literature including: managerial, technological, marketing, market linking and information technology.

Complementarity of the Porter's approach and the RBV: While these two approaches present differences in the explanation of strategic choices and competitive advantage but also similarities that it is reflected by their complementarity (Amit and Schoemaker, 1993; Peteraf, 1993). According to Spanos and Lioukas (2001), the RBV shares with Porter's approach the idea that above-average returns are possible, thus, encouraging the acquisition of an attractive strategic position. Although, the first approach links strategic choices to exogenous factors while the second explains them by intrinsic factors. According to Wernerfelt (1984), these two approaches constitute two sides of the same coin. Indeed, according to the insights by Barney and Griffin (1992), value creation stems logically from the internal capacities of the strategy adopted and from the strategy to the competitive environment by Spanos and Lioukas (2001). These ideas were also defended by Barney *et al.* (1994) who explained that the examination of the skills needed to implement the strategy should not be done in any way independently of the analysis of the firm's competitive environment and vice versa (Penrose, 1959; Amit and Schoemaker, 1993). This idea is similar to that of the SWOT Model where resources correspond to "strengths and weaknesses" while the analysis of the competitive environment corresponds to "opportunities and threats".

The comparison of these two approaches and their integration in a composite framework finds justifications in the following points (Spanos and Lioukas, 2001): complementarity in the explanation of the source of competitive advantage and performance (internal with external determinants): the intersection of studied phenomena namely sustainable competitive advantage and strategic choices.

The strategic choices of companies:

Competitive strategies: Popularized by Porter (1980), the term "competitive strategy" has been widely studied in the literature of strategic management including the research by Dess and Davis (1984), Miller (1988). By Porter (1980), proposed a typology of generic strategies (business strategies) based on two dimensions: competitive advantage and the field of competition. It's about the strategy of domination by costs, differentiation and concentration. Porter (1980) confirms that an enterprise must choose only one of these strategies to gain a strong competitive position and avoid getting bogged down in a middle path that necessarily implies a permanent position of low profitability (Hambrick, 1983; Dess and Davis, 1984; Porter, 1980, 1985).

Pure cooperation strategies: From the beginning of the 1980s, the need for collaboration between companies intensified, in particular because of the increasing complexity of products, the acceleration of the pace of innovation and the spread of technology and the expansion of investments and the fields of knowledge necessary for their mastery (Dussauge *et al.*, 2000; Stuart, 2000). On the same subject, Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven (1996) and Stabell and Fjeldstad (1998) argue that the use of collective strategies is increasingly recommended in competitive contexts and environmental uncertainties.

Unlike a market transaction, the partnership is created "when a customer and providers agree to share risks and responsibilities in designing and implementing a function or subset of a complex product, coordinating their skills and resources, it is a true strategic collaboration based on sharing, trust and mutual dependence. Partners work together to increase their earnings and increase their competitive advantages".

Gonzalez argues that the recourse to the vertical cooperation is the only solution in contexts marked by rare and isolated skills where companies are becoming increasingly incapable of owning and developing, lonely, resources for the development of products and services that have become more and more complex (Sakakibara, 1997; Dyer and Singh, 1998).

Pure cooperation can be carried out in the different activities of the company whether with suppliers or customers (Roy and Sanou, 2014). The providers play an important role as they are most able to provide critical information about technologies. On the other hand, customers allow the company to gain access to the market among others for its innovation and they are best able to provide reliable information regarding the needs of users and markets. For Miotti and Sachwald (2003), it is the nature of the resource's need (complementary or/and similar) that dictates to companies the most appropriate partner to achieve the desired objectives (innovation, lower costs). According to Roy and Sanou (2014), pure cooperation brings together all the partner's resources and skills in order to carry out their project and innovate. Because they are not competitors, trust is established, thus, intensifying cooperation, sharing of information, resources and skills. However, cooperation presents a potential risk of opportunism of partners seeking to acquire the skills of their partners to become strong future competitors (Le Roy and Sanou, 2014).

Coopetition strategies: Until, the early 1990's, cooperation and competition were seen as the two opposite extremes of a broad continuum. No prospect of bringing them together has yet been planned. However, since, the end of the 1990's and with the unprecedented intensification of competition, the shortening of product life cycles and the increase in research and development

costs, a new strategic standard has invaded many sectors consisting in the simultaneous combination of cooperative and competitive strategies (Luo, 2004). According to Roy and Sanou (2014), the idea of cooperating while remaining in competition constitutes a break with the classical conception where the increase of competition implies necessarily a decrease in cooperation and vice versa. Indeed, these two strategies are based on two opposing paradigms (the theory of industrial organizations and socio-economic theory) that are even incompatible (Fernandez *et al.*, 2010).

Coopetition is thus, a new field of singular research (Dagnino and Padula, 2002). Indeed, it is not an extension nor of the theories of cooperation nor the theories of competition. Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1996) refer to game theory to propose a first theory of coopetition from the “value network”. Based on game theory, resource-based theory and social network theory, Lado *et al.* (1997) state, in turn that firms increasingly combine aggressive and cooperative strategies.

Several definitions have gradually emerged. Bengtsson and Kock (2000) define coopetition as the “dyadic and paradoxical relationship that emerges when two companies cooperate in a few activities and at the same time compete with each other on other activities”. For Le Roy and Yami coopetition is understood as: “a system of actors that interact on the basis of a partial congruence of interests and objectives”. These definitions suggest that a firm is coopetitive when it knows both a high level of competitive aggressiveness and a high level of cooperativity. These two dimensions co-exist in coopetition and reveal its paradoxical nature. The first dimension, assumes that the firm is aggressive when it initiates a large number of complex competitive actions and reactions within a limited time frame (Gnyawali *et al.*, 2006; Ferrier, 2001; Smith *et al.*, 1992). The second dimension is defined as “the propensity of the firm to initiate cooperative actions and to become involved in cooperative actions in its sector of activity”. Bengtsson and Kock (1999) rely mainly on the theory of networks and resource-based theory to define two factors that determine the strategic choice of firms (Table 1).

According to Fernandez *et al.* (2010) because of the increased complexity of products and services, companies are often unable to own and develop lonely the resources needed for their production. Because they are heterogeneous, resources can be complementary and interdependent. This is what drives them to look for the

partner with the most complementary resources, that can often be found at the main competitors. For Gnyawali and Park (2009), several factors are likely to favor the coopetition strategy, namely: the short life cycles of products (characteristics of the industry); high research and development costs, technological convergence. Sanou has shown that the pursuit of a coopetition is determined by sectoral variables such as industrial concentration, the sectoral maturity of the firm’s domestic market; its international presence and its size. Referring to the resource dependency theory, Chiambaretto and Fernandez (2016) argue also that environmental uncertainty favors the coopetition strategies where similar resources can be often found.

In general, coopetition allows companies to benefit both from the benefits of competition (stimulating the search for new productive combinations that generate income) and cooperation’s (access to scarce and complementary resources). However, coopetition reveals a strong risk of imitation of its own resources and skills by the adversary partner who can often be the main motive behind this coopetition (Fernandez *et al.*, 2010).

Development of the model and hypothesis: With reference to Porter’s approach and RBV, our conceptual composite model proposes that the competition’s intensity explains differently the different strategic choices that are also mobilized differently by the nature and sufficiency of the strategic capabilities available to the company Fig. 1.

The impact of competition’intensity on competitive strategy: Tavitiyaman *et al.* (2011) show that when companies understand the effect of each force in the industry they can take either defensive strategies or offensive strategies in order to place themselves in an appropriate position against the pressure exerted by these industry forces. According to these researchers, for hotel companies, the threats of substitutes and the bargaining power of suppliers do not have a significant effect on competitive strategies because of the large number of suppliers in this sector and this that hotels offer similar or mass products and services. The empirical study by Tavitiyaman *et al.* (2011) among 317 hotel companies show that the weak bargaining power of customers and the low threat of new entrants favor strong competitive strategies while existing competition does not show a significant effect on these competitive strategies.

In this sense, Ward and Duray (2000) find, like Bourgeois and Eisenhardt, a positive and significant relationship between the environment in general and the competitive strategy of differentiation. Walker *et al.* show that when the industry is in a growth or start-up phase, market segments are still unidentified or

Table 1: Relationships between competitors

Need in resources	Relative position on sectors	
	Strong	Low
excess	Coopetition	Competition
Strong	Cooperation	Coexistence

Dagnino and Padulla (2002)

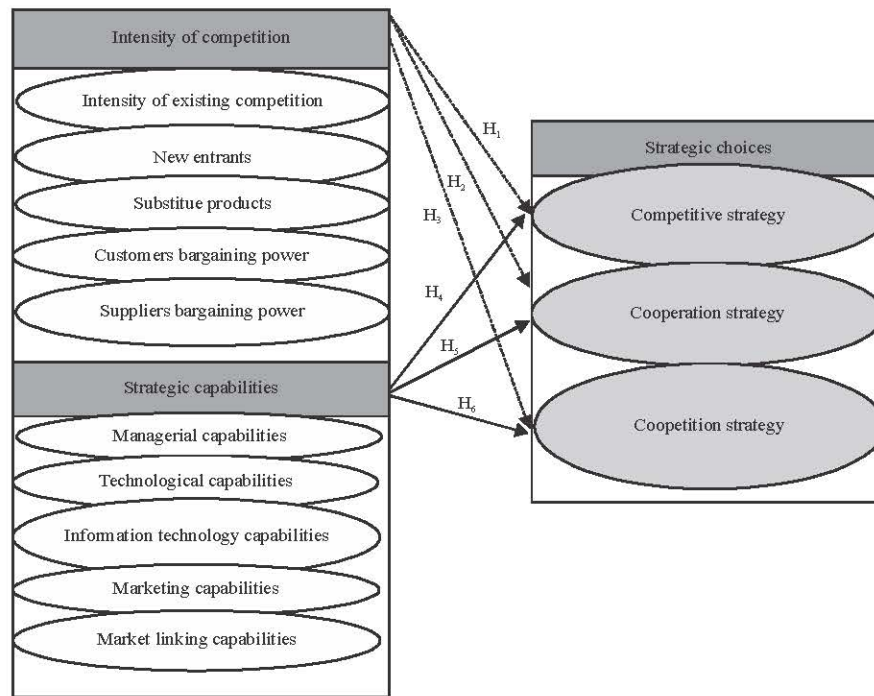


Fig. 1: Conceptual model of research

undeveloped, industrial technology is emerging, the number of competitors is low, the concentration is high and the structure of the industry is changing, all this is an environment conducive to the development of prospector strategies. However, “defendant” strategies are adopted under reverse conditions. As for the “analyzer” strategies, they are continued when the first conditions are mixed with the seconds.

Nevertheless, by referring to Kim (1999), intense competition is supposed to be an environmental condition that encourages a distributor to work together with a supplier. This joint action is guided by the search for a competitive advantage over other distributors. However, its empirical study of three industries in the United States failed to confirm the significant effect of the intensity of competition on vertical cooperation.

Other researchers have gone further in their analysis and show that the competition’s intensity favors cooperation. Chiambaretto and Fernandez (2016) found that when environmental uncertainty is high, companies rely more and more on cooperation than on pure cooperation. By distinguishing between horizontal and vertical cooperation, Hamouti *et al.* demonstrate that in order to succeed in innovating in a highly competitive environment, companies must make greater use of both vertical and horizontal cooperation. With reference to the previous developments, we formulate the following hypothesis:

- H₁: the competition’s intensity favors competitive strategies
- H₂: the competition’s intensity favors pure cooperation strategies
- H₃: the competition’s intensity favors cooperation strategies

The impact of strategic capabilities on strategic choices: On this topic Spanos and Likouas (2001) have established empirically that the availability of specific resource stocks (managerial, marketing and technical capabilities) is necessary to develop competitive strategy and achieve a competitive advantage.

Parnel (2011) confirms in an empirical study conducted in Argentina, Peru and the United States, the positive effect of managerial capacities on competitive strategies of domination by the costs. For their part, Batista *et al.* find that managerial capacities have a positive and significant impact on competitive strategies by costs. For its part, Ortega (2010) shows empirically that technological capabilities have proven to be positive and significant determinants of competitive strategy of differentiation. DeSarbo *et al.* (2005) show that firms with information technology capabilities correspond to “prospector” firms that are able to differentiate their offer and innovate. On his part, Batista *et al.* prove that there is a significant relationship between marketing capabilities and niche focus competitive strategies in the

Brazilian textile sector. Parnel (2011) also argues that a competitive niche strategy requires specific attributes related to marketing capabilities in order to focus efforts on a particular market niche. This researcher, proves also, that market-linking capabilities favor the adoption of competitive niche strategies. Collis and Montgomery (2008), Jusoh and Parnel (2008) also show that the capabilities in the field of market relation serve as prerequisites for the niche strategy. DeSarbo *et al.* (2005) show too that firms with market relations capabilities essentially correspond to “defensive” firms.

As for Mitchell and Singh (1996), it is the cooperation strategy that is targeted when it comes to accessing new markets and technological markets. In the same vein, Doh shows that firms with no specific resources are looking for partners who have it.

Miotti and Sachwald (2003) found that the strategic need for effort in research and development increases the tendency of firms to cooperate. This cooperation with universities aims at complementary resources to work at the technological frontier. For Fernandez *et al.* (2010), when a company has insufficient internal resources to obtain a competitive advantage alone, it tends to engage in a cooperation. Thus with reference to these developments, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

- H₄: the strategic capabilities favors competitive strategies
- H₅: the strategic capabilities favors pure cooperation strategies
- H₆: the strategic capabilities favors cooperation strategies

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Measurement of variables: Using the scale by Al-Rfou, we measured the dimension intensity of existing competition. For other competitive forces we adopt the measurement scales by Weerawardena *et al.* (2006). The different strategic capabilities were measured by the scales by DeSarbo *et al.* (2005).

The competitive dimensions of competitive strategies measured by scale's by Dess and Davis (1984), Zahra and Covin (1993). Concerning cooperation, we chose the Sanchez and Perez (2003) scale. Regarding cooperation, although, the measures used to date, integrate the two dimensions of cooperation (competition and cooperation) they offer only an indirect measure (Fernandez *et al.*, 2010) which revolves around the measurement of competition in the competition (network) or vice versa. In order to fill this gap and take into account the bi-dimensionality of the cooperation and while trying to provide a direct measure, we have tried to measure cooperation through a competitive and a cooperative dimensions. Thus, we measured the dimension “propensity for cooperation” through Luo *et al.*

(2007) scale and the dimension “propensity for aggression” with the Le Roy's scale. We, however did a principal component analysis for the cooperation variable with both its aggressive and cooperative dimensions. We then obtained a synthetic variable of cooperation (Fernandez *et al.*, 2010).

For all items on the chosen scales of measurement, respondents are asked to rate, on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “very low” to 7 “very high” their attitudes towards the different variables.

Sampling, administration and data collection: In terms of sampling, we opted for the quota method. The mother population consists of companies of the Tunisian manufacturing industry (textile and clothing, electrical, electronic and household appliances, chemical and the food industry) any size and activity regime confounded. As for the questionnaire, we had checked the validity of content (consensual appreciation of peers and experts and facial pre-test with 12 companies). Subsequently, we administered, it appreciation of peers and experts in its final version, to the directors (CEOs) of the companies. The 400 questionnaires were distributed but only 236 were returned with a return rate of 59%. Of the 236 returned copies, only 203 were exploitable with an 85.5% rate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before proceeding to the hypothesis tests, we first, checked the reliability and the dimensionality of the different scales chosen appreciation of peers and experts. Subsequently, the use of the structural equations method, revealing a good quality of fit of the global model, allowed us to empirically validate the research hypothesis and obtain the following results.

The relationship between the competition's intensity and competitive strategies is positive and significant, confirming H₁. Concerning cooperation, the competitive intensity presents a negative and significant effect on cooperation. Hence, the reversal of Hypothesis H₂. Finally, the competition's intensity shows a positive and significant impact on cooperation. This allows us to confirm our Hypothesis H₃.

Concerning the second explanatory variable of our model, the results allowed us to affirm the positive and significant impact of strategic capabilities on the competitive strategies. This allows us to confirm H₄.

Thereafter, we found that the strategic capabilities have negative impact on cooperation. Therefore, we reject H₅. Finally, the strategic capabilities have a negative and significant effect on cooperation where the reject of H₆.

The global model test confirmed that face to the competition's intensity, the companies in our sample first adopt the competitive strategy. This suppose that they have the strategic capabilities required and sufficient to

operate individually. This first result converges with Tavitiyaman *et al.* (2011), Smith and Grimm (1987) but differs from Miller (1988, 1992).

For the negative effect of competitive intensity on pure cooperation, we conclude that if this strategy is sought in the context of a low intensity of competition, it is probably due to the fact that in this competitive environment, the innovation sought is not so intense. In fact, the cooperation that consists of working together on supplier's products can provide the company with inputs that correspond to them better but do not allow an innovation of its own products (Roy and Sanou, 2014). Similarly, cooperation with the customer does not allow a radical innovation for the benefit of the company but rather an incremental innovation. We thus, join Chiambaretto and Fernandez (2016) who prove that when the uncertainty of the environment is extremely strong, companies depreciate the use of pure cooperation strategies.

As for the effect of the intensity of competition on cooptation, we note, like Chiambaretto and Fernandez (2016), cooptation strategies are preferred over pure cooperation strategies when environmental uncertainty is very high. This can be explained by the fact that the strategic capabilities needed to cope with this high competitive intensity are found only among competitors. The effect of strategic capabilities on competitive strategies is positive and significant. This suggests that companies adopting competitive strategies can only succeed individually because of the stock of strategic capabilities they hold. This result goes hand in hand with the premises of the RBV. We thus, join Spanos and Lioukas (2001), Parnel (2011).

Empirical findings also confirm that when firms do not have sufficient strategic capabilities, they tend to adopt co-operative strategies. In addition, when this need intensifies they tend to focus on cooptation strategies. Indeed with the intensification of competition, the imperatives of innovation and competitiveness push to seek the most specific resources and which are often found only among the strongest competitors (Chiambaretto and Fernandez, 2016). Similarly, some projects are quite expensive to the point where the company alone can not afford the costs. In the face of weak needs for strategic capabilities, companies can find the missing complementary capabilities of a customer or a supplier, when these needs intensify, companies can find the missing similar or complementary resources only with their competitor who never stops to increase the ambiguity of its resources to distinguish itself from the competition. The use of cooptation is fatal, despite the high risk of transferring key competences.

In a comparative perspective, we conclude that with the intensification of competition, companies tend to adopt competitive strategies first and then cooptation strategies. However, when the intensity of competition tends to diminish, companies are moving towards pure cooperation strategies.

Table 2: Matrix of strategic choices

Explanatory factors/ Strategic choices	Intensity of competition	Strategic capabilities
Cooptation	N°2	N°3
Cooperation	N°3	N°2
Competitive	N°1	N°1

Strategic capabilities, when available, promote the use of competitive strategies. However, when they are insufficient, they push for the adoption of pure cooperation strategies. If this need tends to increase massively, companies are then obliged to pursue strategies of cooptation.

Moreover, by comparing the weight of the two factors studied, we note that the strategic resources hold the strongest weight in the explanation of the strategies of cooptation. This result comes in support of the RBV. However, external factors related to competitive intensity seem to have the strongest weight in explaining competitive strategies and pure cooperation. For conclusion, we can propose the matrix of strategic choices in Table 2.

Managerial implications: The results of this research are of considerable interest to managers of Tunisian companies who can serve as guidelines of diagnostic that can enlighten their path in terms of strategic choices based on different situations of competition and resource's availability. Indeed, the managers must evaluate the availability of strategic capabilities necessary to develop competitive strategies. The study also highlights the critical role of insufficient capacity in guiding to cooperation and cooptation. An important implication of this relationship is that cooperation (pure, horizontal) seem to offer a fruitful alternative to individual strategies. These results also send a message to industrial companies who need to distinguish between the real threats of competitors (rich in resources) versus the fictitious one (poor in resources). Similarly, caution should be exercised with respect to certain companies that do not have resource deficiencies and may offer to cooptate with another company with the sole intention of accessing the competitor's key competencies.

The present results are also important for policy makers who are interested in the development and success of Tunisian manufacturing industries, in the smooth running of competition and the well-being of the consumer. Indeed, the excessive use of cooptation (aggressive), cooperation or competitive strategies with the intention of eliminating a competitor and monopolizing the market can adversely affect the smooth running of competition.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the enrichment of the debate on the determinants of strategic choices. This debate often focused only on extrinsic factors and ignores intrinsic

factors or vice versa. Our study has the merit of showing that these two factors have considerable weight in the determination of strategic choices.

Moreover, this study explains, through the stock of strategic capabilities held why some companies opt for competitive strategies, cooperation or cooptation in the same industry sector. Indeed, the appropriate strategy is linked to the availability of the strategic capabilities studied. However, some limitations of this research need to be raised.

LIMITATIONS

A first limit affects the choice of the Tunisian manufacturing industry to test our conceptual model that does not allow us to generalize the results to other sectors or to other developing countries. An inter-industry or comparison with other developing countries to extend or narrow the scope of our results.

In addition, the present problem can be taken up by integrating other explanatory factors of the strategic choices. Indeed, the study of a broader range of resources and capabilities held by the company can enrich our dissertation and increase the interest and validity of our results. In addition, other structural, cognitive or behavioral factors can provide valuable insights.

Another limitation is the static nature of the resource approach. Indeed, the mere endowment of resources does not guarantee the creation and sustainability of the competitive advantage. It is the ability to integrate, build and reconfigure resources that matters in an environment of rapid change (Teece *et al.*, 1997). New research could sail to these new horizons.

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