The Coopetitive Behavior

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This article aims at presenting a new strategic thinking, that is a revolution compared to the classic readings on competition and cooperation. Through our reading on the subject, we aim at understanding and uncovering the overlap that can exist between the competitive and the cooperative behavior. From the state of the art on the subject, we extracted variety of examples where coopetition as concept was mobilized. This allowed us to demonstrate the use of this strategy in different conditions and scenarios. Finally, we concluded that competition and cooperation can no longer be considered as antonyms, due to companies' internal and external challenges and the possible achievement of common or personal objectives through a combination, resulting in a hybrid behavior.

Keywords: competition, cooperation, coopetition

INTRODUCTION

Strategy, as a term, can reflect various meanings, depending on the context in which it is adopted. In a purely military context, Von Clausewitz (Gervais & Herriau, 2011), states that strategy is an exercise of logic and analysis that takes place before a fight, such as the choice of the terrain, the means, and the moment to engage a battle. Within an economic context, a “strategy” can refer to anticipation, changing and strengthening a situation, whether in a personal or professional context, for an individual or a group of individuals, at the scale of a company or group of organizations, for one state or several states at a time (Lezghed & Grine-Dahmane, 2019). Furthermore, a “strategy” reflects a medium and long-term policy, which explains the relationship between a company and its environment, by involving choices of skills and resources allocation and types of activities to be conducted, in order to achieve better outcomes.

In addition, a phenomena such as globalization, the market’s external liberation and the development of information and communications technology (ICT),have led the economic environment to a strong and global competition. This change in the economic environment, resulted in firms varying their strategic arsenal to ensure their development and sustainability.

Through our reading on competitive and cooperative behavior, we found that these two strategic orientations can no longer be considered as two poles of the same continuum, but as two strategies that can be unified. Thus, forms of cooperation between competing firms became an "accepted" practice that reflects a hybrid inter-firm strategy. It is this union between two notions, considered until now as antonyms that made us ask the following question:

What applications for Coopetition within inter-firm relationships?

In order to provide an answer to our problematic, we first located our research subject according to two visions, namely: the classic vision of the competition/cooperation and the new vision which reflects a fusion between these two strategic orientations. Presenting the strategic guidelines of competition and cooperation is essential, bringing light into the coopetition and works that shaped it. Finally, we will present examples as case studies, with the aim of projecting academic postulates on the reality of inter-firm practices, by analyzing observations and drawing conclusions.

COMPETITION VS COOPERATION: A CLASSICAL VISION

Despite various academic works on management and corporate strategies, it is clear that a bipolar vision linking the two notions of competition and cooperation had always persisted. The followers of each school argue that competition/cooperation allows the development of companies independently. To this end, it is essential to present some works and theories that enriched the two orientations and justify each of these two streams separately.

Competition as the Only Way of Development

Academic research in management science was well marked by the competition. A plethora of researches flourished on competition and rivalry notions, demonstrated several methods and approaches, for instance the approach proposed by Baum & Korn(1996). Their work studied the competition from two perspectives: structural and behavioral. While the first, so-called "structural", defines competition as an asocial relationship between firms that do not know each other, and influence one another indirectly and unwittingly (Le Roy, 2004a), considering as "known in advance " others' behavior (Jacquemin, 1994), in an environment that influences the companies without being able to act on it. The second approach, claimed as "behavioral", makes it possible to go beyond the main criticism of the static model where the benefits that have given results in the past, will only continue if the environment remains relatively stable (D'Aveni, 1995).

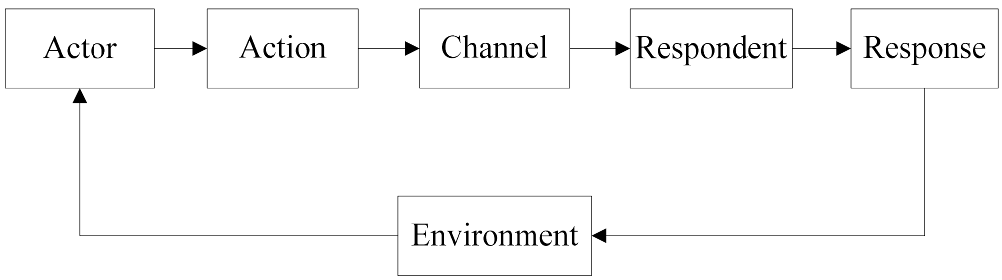
In fact, companies interact with one another, defining their relationship as social, do not ignore each other and identify as rivals (Lezghed & Grine-Dahmane, 2019). This distinction between competition and rivalry, illustrates the non-anonymity between firms, which are aware that their actions may affect their rivals, who may react in a self-protective manner (Thompson, 1995). This second approach of competition, which focuses mainly on the behavior of companies directly observable, illustrates the birth of works on competitive dynamics.

This trend, which is mainly based on interactions' school, has its origins in the Strategic Management Research Group works or the *SMRG* of Maryland University in the United States (Le Roy, 2004b).Through four main models, this movement aims at studying the maneuvers deployed by firms, the reactions that can arise and their consequences on the performance and competitive advantage of firms. *The Action-Response Dyad* comes to highlight the predictability of a company's reactions based on its attackers actions (Chen et al., 1992; Miller & Chen, 1994). The main interest of this model is to determine the nature of the competitive actions and the potential responses of its rivals. As a result, firms' performance is impacted by several variables such as the actor, the action, the respondent, the response, and the competitive environment (Bensebaa, 2003).

The Competitive Event Model, as the experiments conducted on the introduction of a new product and its impact on the stock market (Lee et al., 2000), highlights that the first mover and the fastest imitators will benefit from the largest gains. Hence, it aims at studying the effects of a strategic action on the performance of a firm by questioning the negative effects of imitation on the sustainability of a competitive advantage. According to *the Multi-Point Competition Model*, firms in several markets can act and respond to competitive actions in each of these shared markets (Bensebaa, 2003). This drives to limit the competitive game between firms who share several markets, because the reactions of rivals following an action can be undertaken on each of the shared markets, which mark this model by a competitive reluctance phenomenon.

The Leader-Challenger Model allows to understand the interactions and tensions that can emerge from the rivalry between the leading firm and its first challenger on the market. Here, the bringing together which means the degree of market sharing but also the degree of similarity (Chen, 1996), plays an important role in the characterization of interactions' nature between a leader firm and a challenger. In fact, the more similar the two firms are, the more the probability of a response increases (Roy,2010), thus, making it difficult to engage in actions towards its competitor and consequently lessen competition. Works on competitive dynamics and other previous works may leave the impression that businesses have more advantage to limit their clashes, in order to keep their gains sustainable without entering into a war that can decrease their profit margin.

FIGURE 1
THE COMPETITIVE INTERACTION PROCESS



adapted from (Le Roy & Yami, 2009)

Cooperation as Competition Alterative

In parallel with the purely competitive logic, focused on the company and its individual action, another logic focused on the collective action and sharing between companies, can bring about solution to business seeking durability and development. Business-to-business cooperation is present in recent studies compared to those dealing with competition, motivated by the emergence of several forms of collective rapprochement between firms rather than an individual action. This change in the dominated idea, where the more is there competitive intensity (confrontation), the more the economy is flourishing, towards a mobilization of interactions that illustrates a cooperative behavior, was motivated mainly by the existence of a high degree of interdependence between businesses. This strong interaction of companies in the different markets (customer, capital, labor, supply, etc.), creates a narrow knowledge-bridge between them and promotes the development of cooperative links.

The concept of "Collective Strategies" can be mobilized is this context which allude to a « mobilization of resources and formulation of action within collectivities of organization » (Astley & Fombrun, 1983, p. 578) and the adaptation of firms to their environment as well as its constraints in the form of a specific organization, to become a common collective. This refers to cooperation definition provided by Koenig (1996) as a concentrated behavior that aims to improve the relative position of its authors or to set the context for their action. It may concern the manufacture of common components, the sale of products between competitors, exchange of information, lobbying, etc. In addition, the clustering between companies can be translated into several forms with different specificities, such as those identified by Astley & Fomburn (1983) based on four basic adaptations: Commensalistic form (translates horizontal relationship); Symbiotic form (mobilizes vertical relations); Direct form (as contracts of rights, duties and benefits of each); Indirect form (mainly via formal or informal relations without specifying the economic benefits of the parties).

Given the scope of our article and the broadness of cooperation topic, we need to mobilize some theories in management sciences in order to summarize the essential and necessary points for our research. Game theory, within a selfish context, tends to explain cooperative behavior via scenarios where their probability of occurrence depends on several variables. Therefore, we talk about trust among stakeholders (Puthod, 1999), influence of probable encounters' number (Jacquemin, 1987) and the behavior of actors as presented in the "Tit for Tat" model (Axelrod, 1992). In fact, according to the predefined conditions, firms will tend to adopt a cooperative behavior when the latter represents an opportunity for each one of them compared to go it alone, allowing participants to win the game on a given market.

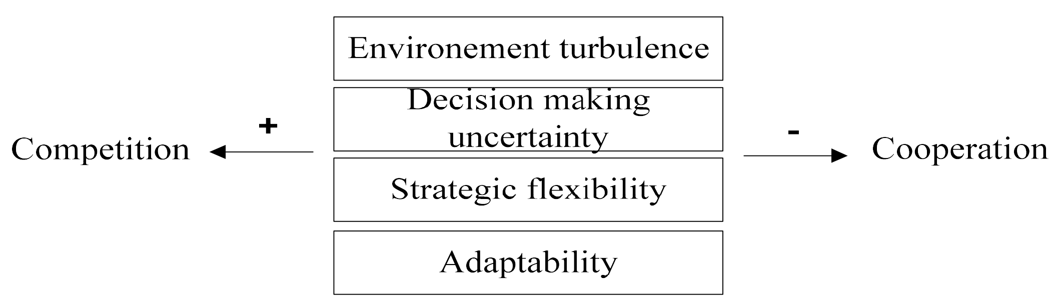
The Resource Based View "RBV", by considering the firm as a set of resources (Penrose, 1959), explains the cooperative behavior trough the need and necessity of resources to be successful (Wernerfelt, 1984). It is a combination of resource characteristics "VRIN" (Barney, 1991) which provides a sustainable advantage for a firm. Moreover, in a context of heterogeneity and inability to have all resources, the cooperative behavior between firms finds all its interest to fulfill their needs. In other hand, *the Organizational Learning Theory*, aims to explain cooperative behavior through the acquisition and development of a firm's knowledge following inter-firm interaction. Certainly, the knowledge capital of a firm remains a key element to be competitive and efficient, the exchange with external agents will allow acquisition of knowledge including those tacit, internal and non-communicable outside a specific organizational form (Garette & Dussauge, 1995). Thus, cooperative organizational forms represent a means of acquisition, transfer, assimilation and development of knowledge between the stakeholders of this cooperation.

The Transaction Cost Economics "TCE" Theory, through the questioning of firms' existence where the entire economy is regulated by the market, explains the cooperative behavior by the efficiency realized with costs reduction. Williamson (1981) advances the existence of interactions between economic actors, redefines the company as an agent that can satisfy a demand like a market and considers the company as an alternative to the latter. Following this logic, firms can choose between the three modes of governance (market, hierarchy, hybrid) in order to reduce their transactions costs, which explain some internalization and outsourcing behaviors of firms (Williamson, 1981). Thus, the TCE emphasizes that the cooperative behavior, to a firm, can be economically more interesting than the market or to focus only on its hierarchy.

The Networks Theory explains the cooperative behavior via the two major contributions, namely the Embeddedness phenomenon (Granovetter, 1985) and that of Structural Holes (Burt, 1992). Here, we no longer consider firms as isolated, but on the contrary, they maintain social relations at the heart of their economic activity (Powell, 1990), and are embedded in a network that they make up and mobilize to meet different needs. Thus possessing a rich and diverse network can increase business performance (Burt, 1992), because this impacts the probability of exchange and cooperation between network players, and allows them to meet their needs in better conditions.

We can say that, the orientation to a competitive behavior or a cooperative one, requires from firms to consider the complications that can be born and develop between participants. Therefore, firms, instead of managing their fate individually, employ cooperative orientations, because they can no longer cope with their environment and it's turbulence despite the flexibility and autonomy provided by a competitive behavior.

FIGURE 2
COMPETITION AND COOPERATION EFFECTS



adapted from(Yami & Le Roy, 2007)

COMPETITION & COOPERATION: TOWARDS A HYBRID STRATEGY

Contrary to the classical view where competition and cooperation are described as two poles of the same continuum, a new strategic thinking tends to prove the opposite. Due to the change in the economic environment of companies and the new challenges they face, many of them are opting for a so-called "hybrid" strategy, in order to take advantage of competition and cooperation.

What Is Coopetition?

The hybrid strategy that reflects the union between competition and cooperation, is known in the academic world as "Coopetition". This term that remains new in management sciences, is derived from cooperation"coop" and competition "tition", to define the meet-up between organizations involving both competition and cooperation. The first to use the term "Coopetition" was Ray Noorda; the founder of Novell, to describe the relationship he had with his competitors in the IT sector. Nevertheless, it is thanks to several contributions in the academic environment that the first foundations of this strategy were forged.

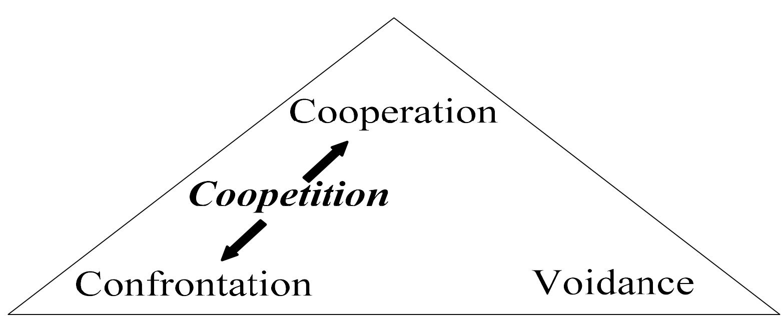
The first major contribution is based on the Value Network model from Game Theory (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996). According to this contribution, coopetition occurs when it brings together complementary agents' interests, where competition and cooperation interact simultaneously. In fact, firms are used to conceive the business world as a battlefield, while they can take advantage of the coexistence of competitive and cooperative orientations.

Based on the Resources Based View, Social Networks and Games Theories, an explanation of Coopetition has been introduced through a syncretic model (Lado et al., 1997). Indeed, Lado, Boyd & Hanlon (1997), consider competition and cooperation as interdependent on each other where firms may decide to limit or increase their competition and/or cooperation. This syncretic behavior "Coopetition", allows the achievement of a performance superior to that obtained with only competitive or cooperative behavior, taking advantage of the two strategies.

Based on the Industrial Networks Approach, Bengtsson & Kock (1999) suggests a model that aims the explanation of coopetition. This model shows that positioning within the sector and the need for external resources, influences the firm's strategy. In fact, the adoption of a competitive or cooperative strategy, depends on the degree of positioning and the need for resources (Bengtsson & Kock, 1999). Therefore, the adoption of a coopetition strategy for a business is conditioned by a strong positioning in its activity sector, with a very strong need for external resources.

These various researches on the subject, contributed to the construction of the first reflections on coopetition strategy. Nevertheless, all of these efforts converge on a common idea that can be summed up through the categorization of inter-firm strategies work (Koenig, 1996). Via this contribution, the author distinguishes three basic strategies for a firm namely: cooperation; confrontation and avoidance, where coopetition is positioned between cooperation and confrontation.

FIGURE 3
POSITIONING OF COOPETITIVE BEHAVIOR



adapted from(Koenig, 1996)

Coopetition Through Case Study

Our research stand on a number of short cases based on a qualitative approach trough case studies (Yin, 2003). This approach is the most appropriate for the purpose of our research, and allows us to understand the "how?" and the "why?" in order to work on a theory rather than test it. In the flowing pages we will present and analyze strategies chosen by a number of organizations where the coopetition phenomenon is observed, in order to draw conclusions that will be more faithful than allowed with a single case study. The multiplicity and diversity of studied cases, makes it possible to reach a greater variety of actors on several sectors, in order to reach the maximum of reliability for the phenomenon studied. Our sample is a combination of four cases from a variety of business context already covered by previous works and that can be mobilized for the purpose of our study.

The HECORE Project

In the cleaning products market, several companies still exist, but two of them have distinguished themselves by opting for a common strategy. Henkel and Reckitt-Benckiser, two separate companies, competed directly, and despite this, they shared the vision of cutting back on costs. Indeed, these two companies were looking for a way to reduce their costs in order to economize on their activity. Working on the logistics costs, was one of the ways which pushed both firms to band together for maximum achievement of their common goal. In 2006, the HECORE project was launched, with the objective of pooling logistical resources and operating through a single logistics process (Stratégies logistique, 2006).

This case illustrates the unification between two competitors due to a common problem or need. It is through TCE Theory that coopetition between Henkel and Reckitt-Benckiser can find justification, with almost 20% economies on their overall logistical cost. The shared vision between these two competitors, and the conviction to achieve a common goal (cutting back logistics cost), allowed them to go beyond the competition barrier and commit to a coopetition relationship.

The S-LCD Joint Venture

While "Sony Corporation" was the leader in the global TV market, its ambition to offer a more developed product to its customers, has pushed it to seek an ally who can help it in this quest. This shift towards other market players that seems necessary, gave no sign that this ally will be one of Sony's historical competitors. The Korean group "Samsung" was known for its innovation orientation, and the Flat-panel display technology it owned was coveted by Sony Corporation. Samsung, despite its potential, could not access the LCD TV market due to its inability to manufacture alone. In this context of needs, the two companies met in 2003 through the creation of the joint venture S-LCD in order to develop a new generation of LCD TV (Yami & Le Roy, 2010).

This union between historical competitors, allowed the development and commercialization of a new product on the market. Therefore, Sony was able to achieve its objectives and Samsung was able to access a market that was difficult before. This case illustrates that for both companies the need was not similar, but the solution was to cooperate with a competitor. For Sony, according to RBV and Organizational Learning Theory, its need for external knowledge was more important than the risk of collaboration with its competitor. For Samsung, and according to the Networks Theory, its goal of accessing a market and expanding its area of influence in the business world, has pushed it to share a unique resource (technology); a source of competitive advantage. This coopetition, in the end, allowed an actor to strengthen its positioning in a market, while for the second, it allowed to take a shortcut to a new market and further diversify its global offer.

The SME & VSE Collaboration in Tunisia

Companies in the Tunisian fashion sector (textiles, clothing, silk, shoes and leather), have been threatened by the economic liberation in an increasingly turbulent environment. These companies, of which the majority are small / medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)and very small enterprises (VSEs), that manufacture fabric, clothing, leather, etc... for generations, have faced common challenges. In fact, the arrival of competitive products manufactured industrially in China and India on the local market, the loss of suppliers' bargaining power facing wholesalers and traders, a sophistication of customer needs and lack of funding, led to the establishment of a network between these businesses (Habhab-Rave, 2009).

This companies clustering, brings a solution to multiple issues shared by a significant number of actors in a market. In fact, uniting around a network has allowed these Tunisian SMEs&VSEs to share various information, development, and certification costs; to improve their visibility and bargaining power; to respond collectively to calls for tenders and to manufacture more sophisticated products, by joining various expertise of each one. By mobilizing the Network Theory, we can say that the success of this companies' union is that they could conceive, from similar and complementary profiles, networks in form of collective and collaborative actions, concretized by a complete industrial system through which they can conceive; develop; manufacture and maintain facilities for fashion complexes where everyone benefits.

SBII & Zero-Gâchis

For these two companies that were direct competitors, a great difference of experience separated them. While Système Bureautique Information Image "SBII" operated on retail sector solutions and logistics management for over 25 Years, Zero-Gâchi "ZG" was created in 2012 with a team that has evolved from two to ten people. Even with SBII's experience in the market, it suffered from a lack of business development and commercialization of its products and was unable to exploit its potential to the fullest. On the other side, ZG was experiencing positive growth and developing its market, resulting in an off-the-shelf offer aimed at developing an application for several large retailers, allowing them to manage their products at the use by date. At the same time, and despite the fact that ZG had effective marketing capabilities for segmentation and efficient needs' detection, it did not have the necessary expertise (which SBII held) to support such a project. To this end, an agreement between the two companies is established, allowing ZG to train its engineer at SBII company, in exchange for benefiting from the marketing capabilities and information collected from retailers during the various phases of ZG's project(Fernandez & Merieau, 2018).

This example illustrates a mutation between competitors facing separate issues towards a strategy of coopetition. As a result, SBII was able to better segment its market and identify its customers' needs, allowing it to develop and propose a more fitting product. ZG has been able to offer a solution that is compatible with the large-scale retailers as concluded, qualifying its service as unique, with a niche positioning in the market of waste solutions. As the Organizational Learning Theory, the two companies proceeded to the transfer, acquisition, assimilation, and development of new knowledge, allowing them to finally offer an innovative solution and operate on two different market niches.

CONCLUSION

Through our paper, and the case analysis, it has been argued that competition and cooperation can no longer be considered as antonyms. Exceptions to this rule may exist and even become an increasingly common practice. This change in the strategic behavior of firms is intended to maximize the benefits that they cannot achieve through only competition or cooperation by adopting a coopetitive behavior. The turbulence of markets, the complexity of challenges but also the impossibility of facing all challenges at once, seem to lead firms to opt for hybrid behavior as a response to their problems.

The use of coopetition is not new, but has been recognized as such only in recent communications compared to those dealing with competition and cooperation. This strategy can be established between two or more actors; over a short, medium or long duration, on a part or on the entire activity. Coopetitive behavior can be a solution to several constraints for firms such as the need for physical, technical, financial resources; the seek of skills; to modify or develop an activity; to access, consolidate or improve its position in a market; to increase its reputation and bargaining power; to exceed or eliminate an actual or potential competitor; to create a business ecosystem allowing the development of an activity, an industry or a whole activity sector.

The existence of the coopetitive behavior as well as the reasons which motivate the choice and the adoption of this hybrid strategy are varied and multiple, as shown trough our communication. However, to resume, we suggests that coopétition manifests mainly when the opportunities and advantages detected, are more important for agents than the risks incurred. Therefore, it would be very interesting to complete our research with further works that will tackle coopetition determinants and its impact on business.

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