



The Role of Resources in improving the Competitive Position of the Company: Case of CEVITAL Spa agri-food.

دور الموارد في تحسين الوضع التنافسي للشركة: حالة شركة CEVITAL Spa للأغذية الزراعية

¹*HAMAZ Tahar, email : tahar.hamaz@ummto.dz

² KHENNICHE Youcef, email : y.khenniche@lagh-univ.dz

¹ Maître de Conférence (B), Mouloud MAMMERI University of Tizi Ouzou (Algeria)

² Professeur, University of Laghouat (Algérie).

Received: 02/10/2024

Accepted: 12/12/2024

Published: 15/12/2024

Abstract

The objective of our article is to highlight the role that company resources can play in creating competitive advantages. To do this, we conducted a study within the company CEVIATL by analyzing its Value Chain. The study shows that the firm's various activities play a main role in its competitive position in terms of costs and constitute a differentiating factor. Its strategic ability to deploy its resources internally and its organizational skills have promoted better control of cost evolution factors, which has allowed it to have the most competitive cost structure.

Keywords

Resources, skills, competitive environment, competitive advantage.

JEL Classification Codes : L1 ; L2.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الملخص

الهدف من مقالتنا هو تسليط الضوء على الدور الذي يمكن أن تلعبه موارد الشركة في خلق المزايا التنافسية. وللقيام بذلك، أجرينا دراسة داخل شركة CEVIATL من خلال تحليل سلسلة القيمة الخاصة بها. وتبين الدراسة أن الأنشطة المختلفة للشركة تلعب دوراً رئيسياً في موقعها التنافسي من حيث التكاليف وتشكل عاملاً فارقاً. لقد ساهمت قدرتها الإستراتيجية على نشر مواردها داخلياً ومهاراتها التنظيمية في تعزيز التحكم بشكل أفضل في عوامل تطور التكلفة، مما سمح لها بالحصول على هيكل التكلفة الأكثر تنافسية.

تصنيف JEL: L1 ؛ L2.

* corresponding author : HAMAZ Tahar, email : tahar.hamaz@ummto.dz

I.INTRODUCTION:

For several years, the firm's environment has been undergoing rapid change, resulting in much more complex competitive dynamics to manage. This change illustrates the uncertainty and rigidity of competition that characterizes certain industries, hence the emergence, in the early 1990s, of the hyper-competition concept developed by (R. D'Aveni, 1944). Alongside this change in the state of the firm's environment, a new approach to thinking has also developed, taking into account the problems posed by this acceleration of competitive dynamics, and has now become an important component of the strategic approach: the resource-based approach. "Classic" strategic thinking suffered from several problems. For example, it is very difficult and unproductive to analyze an industry such as multimedia by applying. (Porter, 1979)'s five forces analysis approach. There are so many players, they change regularly, they develop new alliances and the boundaries of this industry are so blurred that this approach proves to be inadequate and insufficient.

Indeed, the dominant paradigm that has been established since the sixties consisted of the adaptation of the company to the structural characteristics of its environment. Such a mode of analysis proved to be correct, in a relatively stable and favorable economic context.

However, as competitive intensity increased, as demand became fragmented and globalized at the same time, two theoretical changes took place during the eighties. On the one hand, considerable importance is given to internal and organizational factors of performance. Thus, the resource-based approach gradually reappears to precisely analyze the internal factors contributing to the creation of competitive advantages. On the other hand, some authors have proposed to modify the orientation of strategic decisions in the face of the regularities and contradictions of the environment.

Subsequently, from resources, it seems possible to shape the environment and determine the rules of the dominant competitive game. In this sense, the strategy is no longer that of general conditions, but a strategy of creativity and modification. This way of thinking implies the desire to free oneself from both an intrinsic condition and structural data. This movement actually took place in two stages: first, it attempted to focus the analysis on the company itself, through the study of its skills and resources. Then, in a second phase, the way of thinking underwent a complete transformation, seeking to determine to what extent a company could be authorized to act on the environment based on these resources. It is in this ambition of theoretical renewal of corporate strategy that our article is included, which seeks to illustrate the impact of a strategic vision focused on the valorization of resources on the creation of competitive advantages. We have chosen to focus on the CEVITAL Spa agri-food company. The interest of this article is to study the role that the firm's resources can play in the transformation of the competitive environment by creating competitive advantages.

Beyond that, the interest also focuses on the vision and mechanisms leading the company to maximize the strategic impact of its resources on its competitive position. Therefore, our article seeks to explore the challenges of the company's competitive environment from the perspective of the notion of resources. It involves interpreting the competitive position of a firm through its strategic ability to build a portfolio of resources. First, the construction of this portfolio will

constitute the essential challenge of its strategy based on the allocation of resources. Second, it involves identifying the strategic resources and the central organizational skills of the company allowing it to act on its competitive environment. From this analysis of the contributions of the concept of resources to corporate strategy, our first research hypothesis arises: A strategic vision based on the resource approach is dictated by the firm's ability to build a portfolio of strategic resources.

It is appropriate to assess the overall relevance of a resource-based strategy approach through a specific management of this portfolio. The idea is that the resource portfolio must have a specific management that must allow the company to improve its competitive position by valorizing its resources. From this relationship between the company's ability to improve its competitive positioning and a specific management of its resources, our second research hypothesis arises: Strengthening the firm's competitive position is associated with a specific management of its resources.

Hence, our study relates, through these research hypotheses, three fundamental entities: the resource portfolio, the management processes associated with this portfolio and finally the competitive positioning. Our research explores the links that could exist between these “concepts” by examining their possible interdependence and interaction in determining the competitive performance of the firm. Our methodological approach is descriptive, it is based on a strategic approach based on resources. It is a question of revealing the role of resources in the competitive position of the company. Our study starts from the identification of the strategic actions and competitive behaviors of the firm with a qualitative and quantitative approach in order to evaluate the contributions to the understanding of the competitive situation, in particular from a dynamic point of view.

To do this, we will proceed in two parts: the first is devoted to our theoretical framework of analysis, the strategic approach based on resources, integrating the relationship between deployment of resources and competitive advantage. The second will address our empirical part incorporating the presentation of the methodological approaches (Value chain), the results and their discussion. We will end with a conclusion where the results and limitations of this research will be presented.

II- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PREVIOUS STUDIES:

1.The resource-based strategic approach

A. The concept of resource: Theoretical foundation

In this first section, we will try to present a synthesis of the different definitions of the concept of company resources. Our objective is to clarify the analysis of the concept of resources based on several theoretical interpretations.

There are many authors dealing with resources and their link to strategy, the first being. (E.Penrose, 1959) who laid the foundations of a strategic vision based on resources by considering the company as ‘a set of productive resources. For this author, the company’s resources are ‘assets held by the company that allow it to develop strategies likely to improve its performance.

Based on this fundamental idea of the theory of company growth developed by E Penrose, (Rubin P-H, 1973) presents the resource as “a specific input that allows the company to accomplish a

particular task''. He tried to develop a model to understand the development of the company by introducing a hypothesis according to which "resources can be used either to produce results or to form new resources''. This hypothesis is integrated into a model of programming the growth of the company. According to him, resources allow the company to carry its activities out.

(Wernerfeld B., 1984) defines resources as "anything that can be considered a strength or weakness of a given firm. More formally, the resources of a company at a given time can be defined as those assets (tangible and intangible) that are semi-permanently linked to the firm''. Among the examples of resources formulated by Wenerfelt, we distinguish brand names, internal knowledge and technologies, the employment of qualified personnel, commercial contacts, machines, efficient procedures and capital. Thus, the author explores the interest of analyzing the company from the point of view of its resources rather than its products. Also, he suggests introducing an analysis in terms of competitive positioning by resources by analogy to the barriers to entry in the industry, and to portfolio matrices. (Barney, 1991) identifies three types of resources: physical, human and organizational resources.

According to this author, four conditions must be met for resources to enable the creation of a competitive advantage: 'They present a real value for companies; they are unique to the company or just present among a few competitors; they are of imperfect inimitability. Finally, they are not or only slightly substitutable. (Grant.RM, 1991) addresses the difference between the notion of resource and the notion of capacity since "resources are inputs in the production process. They are the basic units of analysis. The individual resources of the firm include equipment, individual skills, patents, brand names, finance, etc.'" For this author, resources refer to the different inputs used in the production process and constitute the main sources of skills of firms. He identifies six groups of resources: financial, physical, human, technological, reputation and organizational resources.

Capabilities, for Grant, refer to the ability of a combination of resources to carry certain tasks or activities out. He considers that skills are the main sources of competitive advantages of the firm while resources are the main sources of skills of the firm. This notion of capacity also joins the notion of "pole of competence" developed by (C. Prahalad; G. Hamel, 1990). (Grant.RM, 1991) then discusses the interest of defining a strategic analysis process, based on the resource-based approach in five phases: Analysis of the firm's resource base; Evaluation of the firm's capabilities; Analysis of the profitability potential of resources and capabilities (generation of rent); Selection of a strategy; Development and improvement of the firm's pool of resources and capabilities.

Thus, (Grant.RM, 1991) suggests a strategy formulation model based on resources and capabilities. Resources constitute the basic elements of the production process, including equipment, personnel, patents, brands, etc. In order for an activity to be productive, sets of resources must be coordinated. Ultimately, it is all of the company's activities that are redefined with regard to the concept of resources.

From an operational point of view, this approach suggests that the concept of competence can be defined from a functional perspective (Research & Development, production, distribution, finance, etc.) (Grant.RM, 1991). The most important thing at this level is the company's ability to integrate individual skills and also its ability to effectively integrate these distinctive skills.

(Harvey M; Lusch R., 1997) have looked at the issue of classifying company resources, they propose a classification based on their tangible or intangible nature. According to these two authors, tangible resources include: materials, equipment, personnel, technology, distribution channels, the management committee and the management information system. As for intangible resources, they cover “goodwill “, strategic plans, the company’s image, relations with stakeholders, In general, the notion of resource, as it is approached by the resource theory, is a basic entity or a fixed production factor that is specific to the company. It consists of all the elementary assets that a firm has in order to carry its activity out.

This approach believes that the company must be considered as a portfolio of tangible resources that enable the development of skills which is necessary for its competitive advantage, profitability and performance. Analyzing the company in terms of resources, therefore requires establishing an exhaustive inventory of all the assets of whatever order, that it has at its disposal in order to carry out its activities.

B. Resource Classifications

The company’s resources can be tangible or intangible. Tangible resources refer to the physical assets it has (Andriessen.D, 2004). Intangible resources correspond to intangible assets, namely the various human and organizational processes, internal (developed by the organization alone) or marginal (products of relationships with stakeholders) (Baruch, 2001). These resources can be internal, that is to say held by the company, or “external, intangible” but potentially at its disposal. Other authors broaden the classification of resources, by adding financial, organizational, technological and intangible resources such as the reputation of the firm (Grant.RM, 1991)

Two types of resources must be distinguished: resources such as production goods that can be touched, seen, counted (tangible resources) and those that are based on potentialities resulting from the combination of non-material factors (intangible resources). Resources are therefore assets that can be divided into several categories according to the theory of resource management and they can be classified as follows:

TANGIBLE RESOURCES	INTANGIBLE RESOURCES	
Facilities	Organizational	Marginals
People	Knowledge	Customers: reputation,
Financial and accounting capital	Organizational	image
Patents, licenses, contracts.	Technological	Suppliers
	Managerial	Networks
	Information system	Customers: reputation,
	Process	image

Source: Taken from literature on the classification of enterprise resources.

Furthermore, despite the interest of these classifications, they are not exhaustive, they are only a detailed form of the value chain. A functional classification of resources requires listing all the

assets potentially available to a company, regardless of their nature. From there, resources can be classified as follows:

- Financial Resources: the amount of self-financing, the debt ratio, the volume of cash.
- Human resources: the number of employees, the level of qualification, intelligence, etc.
- Physical resources: production sites and their geographical organization, land, machines, stocks.
- Organizational resources: information systems, ISO standards, procedures, coordination mechanisms, etc.
- Technological resources: know-how, patents, etc.
- Reputational resources: brands, reputation, etc.

The classification of resources is a central issue in the resource-based strategic approach, and is addressed by several authors of this school of strategic thought. The classification of resources, by nature or by type, facilitates their identification and comparisons between firms (Arrègle-L, 1995) It also allows us to understand the development of companies in ways other than by resorting to simplifying economic hypotheses on technological development (Barney, 1991). The way in which usable physical resources are exploited by company managers is a primary cause of the heterogeneity of organizations (Wernerfeld B., 1984) (Barney, 1991).

This interest in the classification of company resources consists of understanding how these resources contribute to the company's strategic process. In fact, authors belonging to the resource stream have considerably enriched the methods of internal analysis. However, the vocabulary used is not always homogeneous and it is still difficult to speak of conceptual standardization. In addition to resources, these authors speak of skills, competencies, organizational skills, etc. These concepts constitute the intermediaries allowing us to understand how the company manages to value the set of resources to end up creating competitive advantages.

C. The Concept of competence

Abilities are considered as potentialities for action such as know-how that is likely to activate resources, integrate them and combine them (Ramit.; P.Schoemaker., 1993) As for skills, they correspond to organizational routines, that is to say to a certain combined and coordinated use of resources (Teece, 1992) « The skills of the organization are the underlying routines that allow to combine skills, systems, assets and values, to reach a higher level of performance in the execution of specific tasks, which leads to an advantage over competitors and provides superior functionalities for customers ». For (Hamel. G & Prahalad. C-K, 1994), the skills of a company have the following characteristics: They provide potential access to a wide variety of markets. They contribute significantly to the customer-perceived value of the final product. They are difficult for competing companies to imitate.

Therefore, we find the classic characteristics concerning skills, namely that they are based on the combination of specific resources and determine the competitive advantage of the company. It now remains to explain this relationship between resources and skills, in order to establish the link between the possession of specific resources and the competitive position of the company.

D.The link between Resources and competence

In the early 1980s, many authors in strategy were questioning the relationship between resources and competence in order to establish the link between the possession of specific resources and a strategic competitive positioning. Thus, (Hofer. C.W; Schendel. D, 1978) consider a competence as a “specific deployment of resources in the form of a combination that should allow the company to achieve its objectives”. This combination is based on specific resources and determines the competitive advantage. It is about achieving a unique competitive position through the coordination and combination of resources.

(Collis. D.J, 1991)), key skills represent all of the company’s fundamental assets that define a unique advantage. Similarly, (Dosi G and al, 1992) define these skills as a “differentiated set of technological knowledge, complementary assets and organizational routines and capabilities”. A skill held is only of strategic interest if it is “distinctive”, that is to say if it brings superior value compared to competitors.

Broadly speaking, skills refer to the organizational capacity to deploy resources (Hofer. C.W; Schendel. D, 1978). They enable the creation of new resources for the company. Therefore, they are not a substitute for resources; they simply facilitate their development and accumulation.

2.The Resource-based and Competitive Advantage Approach

The foundations of competitive advantage are one of the main concerns of research in resource-based theory. Proponents of this approach question the conditions that are necessary for the firm’s resources to be the source of a sustainable competitive advantage. Competitive advantage is the fact that a firm holds an advantage that other potential competitors do not have. Competitive advantage is sustainable when competitors are unable to duplicate the same advantage. For proponents of this approach, a resource is considered to have great strategic value if it constitutes a source of sustainable competitive advantage for the firm. In this section of our article, we will try to present how the current resource explains the approach that the firm must follow to improve its competitive position by deploying its resources.

A. Resources: a Performance Factor and a Strategic Positioning Criterion

The resource-based approach focuses on the resources that enable the creation of sustainable competitive advantage; this is the relationship between the company’s “resource” and “performance”. It highlights the importance of the rare resources available to a company in strategic thinking. The company develops advantageous competitive positions by having an offer that is distinct from those of its competitors or identical but at a lower price. For the resource-based approach, this competitive distinction comes directly from a difference in the resources deployed by the company. If these resources depreciate, become obsolete, or are imitated, then the competitive position and the rents generated will disappear. According to the resource-based strategic approach, the company’s strategy must focus on the company’s resources that enable it to maintain and acquire a competitive advantage. It proposes a four-step strategic approach:

-Identification of rare resources: This involves identifying the company’s resources that currently enable competitive advantages to be developed and that have certain characteristics.

-Protection of rare resources: Once the resources have been identified, they must be defended against the maneuvers of competitors. Depending on their characteristics, resources will be more or less imitable by certain competitors. However, through its actions, the company will be able to delay this imitation, in particular through defensive behaviors that aim to dissuade competitors from acting or to increase the cost of their actions. In this analysis, the company does not modify its strategic assets but tries to fight against the actions of competitors aimed at imitating them.

-Exploitation of rare resources: since the company has resources, it must extract the maximum result from them to minimize the difference between the potential of a resource and the income actually generated. It is, therefore, up to the company to transform its strategic assets into financial results.

-Creation of rare resources: The environment is changing, so the company must develop its current resources. It must transform, adapt its resources and create new ones.

The resource-based strategic approach is a break with traditional approaches to strategy. “The firm is no longer considered as a portfolio of products/markets, but a portfolio of resources, it is no longer the needs of customers that determine the strategy but the opposite”. The interest in considering the company as a set of resources makes it possible to circumvent the inadequacies of the structuralist approach, the competitive advantage is based on the firm’s ability to enhance its resources. Then, it is necessary to seek the sources of competitive advantage within the firm. These recent developments in strategic thinking underline the importance of the firm’s internal resources and skills as a lever for competitive advantage.

B. The Approach by Resources and the Conditions of Competitive Advantage

The classical approach to strategic management considers the firm as a series of “product-market” pairs (Ansoff, 1965), so strategic analysis and competitive advantage are focused around the position of the firm in these “product-market” pairs. The adoption by resource-based theory of a definition of the firm as a set of resources and skills modifies the conditions for establishing a competitive advantage. Competitive advantage no longer lies in the exploitation of a dominant and protected position on a market (or a niche), but in the superior valuation of its resources. From a purely economic point of view, the resource theory proposes that it is more attractive for the firm to benefit from “Ricardian rents” while industrial economics emphasizes the exploitation of “monopolistic rents”.

The problematic which is adopted by the proponents of the resource theory leads them to a less dynamic conception than that which prevails elsewhere. They pay particular attention to “Ricardian rents”, to the surpluses that the control of rare factors and in fixed quantities allows to monopolize sustainably in a situation of constant equilibrium. Obtaining abnormally high returns can only be achieved with the following conditions:

-The heterogeneity of resources creates Ricardian or monopoly rents: competing firms do not have the same endowment of factors to ensure their activity (heterogeneity) and are capable either of valuing superior production factors (Ricardian rents) or an advantageous market position (local monopoly, differentiation: monopolistic rents).

-Limits to ex-post competition prevent a dissipation of rent: there are isolating mechanisms that prevent competitors from reproducing the winning strategy or eliminating its gains (ex-post limits).

-Imperfect mobility of factors: production factors cannot always be transacted on a market (imperfect mobility). Imperfect mobility of factors maintains strategic resources within the firm and ensures the appropriation of rent

-Ex-ante limits: resource configurations that allow a competitive advantage to be established are not knowable a priori (ex-ante limits). Ex-ante limits to competition prevent soaring costs from causing the rent to disappear.

Whatever the interest of the “Ricardian rent” for understanding competitive advantage, it cannot make us forget the importance of advantages that only resist the competition’s efforts to imitate for a while. Getting a sustainable competitive advantage is a fundamental strategic objective, but certain changes in the environment can destroy competitive sustainability. This is why Jay (Barney, 1991) chose to reflect on the conditions of a “sustainable” competitive advantage, which is capable of resisting competitors’ attempts at imitation. He identifies five conditions that a resource or skill must meet to provide a competitive advantage to a firm:

-The resource or skill must have value for the firm: The resource must have value that allows the company to take advantage of opportunities which is offered by the market or to neutralize a threat from the environment (Barney, 1991). In other words, for this author, the essential attribute of a resource consists in its ability to exploit an opportunity or ward a threat off. It facilitates market penetration and represents a contribution to the value of the final product for the customer (Hamel.G & Prahalad.C-K, 1994). This resource presents a superiority over those of competitors and allows the exploitation of an advantage (Collis.DJ & Montgomery. C. A). Finally, the simultaneous presence of two resources or skills can be the source of a competitive advantage. In this case, the value of a resource is increased by another resource.

-The scarcity of the resource: A resource held by many competitors cannot be the source of an advantage. To be the source of a competitive advantage, it must be possessed by a limited number of firms. A resource can be an advantage even if the firm is not the only one to have it (Barney, 1991). The scarcity of a resource is reinforced in the case where it is not unique but its transferability is uncertain (imperfect/incomplete markets) (Grant.RM, 1991).

-Imitability of the Resource: the resource or skill must be difficult to imitate by competing firms to prevent strategic replications. In Barney’s analysis, we find the imperfect imitability of resources, that is to say, difficult to understand from the outside, this is the case of tacit skills, or those that require a complex interaction between resources. In the same sense as Barney, (Lippman.S & Rumelt. R, 1982) look at tacit skills, more precisely the production system of a firm, which are imperfectly imitable by its competitors when the mobility of production factors is imperfect and when the factors allowing superior performance to be obtained are not clearly identifiable.

-Low Substitution of the Resource: to be able to contribute to creating a competitive advantage, the resource must have low substitution. Barney in his analysis explains that the resource must not have easily accessible substitutes to maintain its value.

-Organization: The principle of organization consists of the implementation of policies and procedures allowing the firm to support the exploitation of the value, scarcity, and cost of imitation

of its resources. According to Barney, the firm must organize its processes and structure to realize the potential value of its resources and skills, which would allow it to obtain a competitive advantage.

It is only when these conditions are met that a resource or skill can allow it to obtain a competitive advantage. In Barney's problem, each resource is assessed in isolation, each competitor being able to exploit it in the same way, a given resource has the same value for all competitors. For this Author, it is the imperfection of resources that explains the heterogeneity of firms and the existence of sustainable competitive advantages. The model proposed by Jay Barney calls for more attention to the firm's factor endowment, to identify those that are likely to lead to a competitive advantage. Analyzing the firm in terms of resources involves establishing an exhaustive inventory of all the assets, of whatever order, that it has in order to maintain a competitive advantage.

The strategic approach based on resources suggests that companies consider mainly these internal levers, rather than focusing their approach on industry structures and the competitive positioning of products.

III- METHOD AND PROCEDURES:

1.Presentation of the Studied Company

Cevital is a group that has experienced significant development in several activities (food industry and mass distribution, electronics and household appliances, steel industry, flat glass industry, industrial construction, automobile, services to reach its current size and notoriety. Supported by 18,000 employees spread over 3 continents, it represents the flagship of the Algerian economy, and continually works in the creation of jobs and wealth.

Since the creation of Cevital SPA food industries in April 1998, the agro-industrial activity has been the group's most important activity. Agro-food production represents 80% of the activities of the Agro-Industry and Distribution division, set up in 2015. Thus, Cevital SPA food industries is positioned as a leader in Algeria. The agro-food complex is located in the far east of Bejaia, and consists of several production units equipped with new technologies.

Table 1 : Main agro-industrial units of Cevital SPA agro-food industries.

Unit	Capacity
A sugar refinery	02 Million tons / year
A liquid sugar unit	210,000 tons (dry matter/year)
An oil refinery	570,000 tons/year.
A margarine factory	180,000 tons /year
A mineral water packaging unit	3,000,000 bottles/day
A non-alcoholic soft drink production	600,000 Bottles / day

unit.	
A tomato and fruit jam cannery	80 Tons /day

Source : *www.cevital.com*

The table above shows us that the activity of Cevital SPA agro-industry is dominated by the sugar refining activity (2M tons per year) which started in 2002. Today, it represents about a third of the turnover of this company. The refining of oil comes in second place with 570,000 tons/year. The refining capacities of the two products have experienced significant growth in recent years, which has allowed the group to direct part of its production to export.

2. Methodology

A. Justification for the Choice of Strategic Analysis Models

To conduct our investigation, we adopted a methodology based on the internal strategic analysis model, Michael Porter's value chain. Indeed, the model helps to identify the company's competitive advantages in each of its activities and determines those that create the most value for the customer. Taking into account the fact that the overall performance of the company depends on the performance of each activity, Porter's model made it possible to identify the strategic resources on which the company's competitive advantage is based.

B. Method of Investigation and Data Processing

Our empirical work will focus on an exploratory survey based on semi-directive interviews with managers of the Cevital company. These interviews will be used to precisely identify the main activities and support activities that will be analyzed with the value chain model. This analysis will be used to highlight strategic resources, i.e. those that have a real impact on the creation of competitive advantages for the company.

IV- STUDY RESULTS (ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION):

1.Results of the Study

According to the classic diagram presented by Mr. Porter, the analysis of CEVITAL agri-food value chain has identified five main activities: packaging, production, marketing, distribution, logistics (internal and external). As for the support activities, they are identical to those of M. Porter's typical chain. According to our analysis, they are indeed support activities on which the company's main activities are based. However, we also add the marketing function, which is certainly an important activity because it can be considered an interface between the customer and the company, but not adequately to provide a competitive advantage. By analyzing its value chain, we were able to conclude that the Cevital company occupies the most advantageous competitive position in the agri-food market thanks to the superior valuation of its internal resources which is manifested by the good control of cost evolution factors and the differentiation of its products. Cevital's good control of cost evolution factors give it a competitive advantage through costs.

The analysis of the degree of control of cost evolution factors revealed that Cevital has significant synergies in its business activities, by exploiting complementary activities in the production and distribution chain of basic food products. For example, the integration of on-site production of packaging (caps, plastic handles, etc). Besides, CEVITAL SPA food-industry benefits from the synergy effect; and this by exploiting common facilities to diversify its product range. It involves the creation of the margarine business by exploiting the same facilities of the oil refinery. These elements demonstrate that the overall strategy, adopted by Cevital, focused on cost control.

However, this does not prevent it, particularly in areas with strong competition (vegetable oil), from paying particular attention to activities where it can have competitive advantages through differentiation, such as marketing and quality control. In order to guarantee good quality of its products, the CEVITAL company has integrated the latest innovations in automation of its production system. In addition to this, a quality management is composed of totally independent laboratories whose managers, by carrying out samples every twenty minutes, can interrupt the production line whenever they notice poor quality related to the product.

The role of this function is decisive for the competitive position of the company, because by ensuring constant and continuous control, it guarantees the maintenance of a high-quality threshold. The challenges of differentiation require the creation of a brand image focused on communication because competition is very intense in the agri-food sector where customer purchasing criteria are more oriented towards signage than use.

This explains the particular attention paid to commercial communication actions in the company's strategic approach. In fact, CEVITAL has set up a system (This system consists of a set of means that constitutes its portfolio of commercial resources which is an important element in its competitive positioning) of communication which allows it to highlight the quality of its products and the certification measures have contributed to improving its brand image among its customers.

2.Discussion of Results

Michael Porter's value chain that we used as a strategic analysis model allowed us to clearly distinguish the main activities from the support activities. As it is obvious that each activity produces added value (the sum of which with the values generated by the other activities constitutes the value perceived by the customer), it will be relevant to compare the value it produces and the cost it requires for each function. From there, it was noted during the analysis of the value chain of CEVITAL Spa agro-alimentary, the consideration of the support activities upstream and downstream in order to increase the added value of the company. :

The integration of the support activities upstream and downstream of the value chain has allowed the company to better control the factors of cost evolution, which makes its cost structure more competitive. This integration strategy confirms that the value of a resource is increased by the presence of another resource, which means that the two resources or skills can simultaneously lead to a competitive advantage (Cf. Dierickx & Cool 1989). By adopting a policy of continuous integration upstream and downstream of activities, it is possible to benefit from synergies in the supply of raw materials, logistics organization and distribution.

In this way, it promotes better control of factors which allows a sustainable competitive advantage to be gained through costs, which constitutes a sure contribution to the value of the final product for the customer (Hamel. G & Prahalad.C-K, 1994).

Moreover, it offers the possibility of benefiting from size advantages such as economies of scale, experience effects, as well as diversifying into businesses that also contribute to synergies with the main activity. As a result, the CEVITAL firm has successfully identified its strategic resources on which its competitive advantage is based. These are resources that are based on potentialities resulting from the combination of non-material factors (intangible resources).

However, other sources of competitive advantages have been detected through marketing operations and quality control. The results of this study confirm the new paradigm of strategic management based on resources. Indeed, the resource-based approach stipulates that it is no longer the exploitation of a dominant and protected position on a market (or a niche) that constitutes the competitive advantage, but the valorization of its resources internally. Internal analysis was dominant compared to external analysis, which gave priority to the analysis of the company's resources and skills by this model.

V- CONCLUSION:

Our research focused on the impact of the company's resources on changing the competitive environment through the creation of competitive advantages. Our study also focused on the perspective and means by which the company seeks to optimize the strategic impact of its resources on its competitive positioning. Thus, our article aimed to examine the challenges of the company's competitive environment through the concept of resources. The objective was to analyze the competitive position of a company based on its strategic ability to create competitive advantages through its portfolio of resources.

The resource-based approach was developed in response to several deficiencies in the classic strategic analysis approach, which is strongly influenced by industrial economics. It clearly describes the processes by which a set of resources leads to advantageous competitive positions. The main merit of the resource-based approach is to restore the importance of the company in the strategic decision-making process. It primarily directs the analysis towards organizational resources and skills, their structuring and coordination. It also explains the link between resources, skills and the products which are offered by the company.

Furthermore, it clearly describes the processes by which a set of resources leads to advantageous competitive positions. Now, and even if it still suffers from many shortcomings, the resource-based approach must be seen as a complement to the industrial approach and its great wealth can only be appreciated by synthesizing the two diagnostic approaches.

The link between the classic approach and the resource-based approach can be made through the concept of value chain. Indeed, the analysis of the value chain of the company's activities makes it possible to identify the company's resources which can then be analyzed according to the approach we have described.

The study we conducted on the CEVITAL SPA agro-food company confirmed the new approach to Strategic Management based on resources and skills. According to the supporters of this approach, the company's competitive advantage no longer lies in exploiting a dominant and protected position on a market (or a niche), but in the valorization of its internal resources. We carried out an analysis of the value chain of Cevital SPA agro-food in order to identify the sources of its competitive advantage on the market and to determine the places of value creation for the customer.

This analysis revealed that CEVITAL company has succeeded in building a strategic resource portfolio composed mainly of its intangible resources (physical and organizational), which confirms our first research hypothesis, namely a strategic vision based on the resource approach is dictated by the firm's ability to build a strategic resource portfolio. CEVITAL SPA agro-food has also succeeded in identifying its strategic resources allowing it to act on its competitive environment. These are resources that are based on potentialities resulting from the combination of non-material factors (intangible resources). This identification is the result of a particular management of its resource portfolio, which is an important element for the company to improve its competitive positioning.

As a result, our second hypothesis is affirmed, namely the strengthening of the firm's competitive position is associated with a particular management of its resources. The strategic choices made by the CEVITAL SPA agri-food firm are guided exclusively by its portfolio of resources and skills. The construction of a resource portfolio, associated with its particular management, has facilitated the identification of its strategic resources on which its competitive advantage is based. The company's various activities play a role in its competitive position in terms of costs and constitute a differentiating factor.

Thanks to its internal strategic capabilities and its organizational know-how, Cevital has better control over cost evolution factors, which has allowed it to have the most competitive cost structure. Through this result, we have found an answer to our research problem by confirming that a strategic vision, focused on the valorization of internal resources, allows the creation of competitive advantages for the company.

Finally, it is important to point out the limitations of this study which consist in the difficulty of carrying out a global analysis of the value chain to identify the competitive advantage in a more precise manner. Therefore, it would be relevant in a future perspective to examine the expenses related to each value-generating activity, by exclusively attributing operating costs and assets to the activity in question.

VI- REFERENCES:

1. Andriessen.D. (2004). « IC valuation and measurement: classifying the state of the art », *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 5(2), pp. 230-242.
- Ansoff. (1965). *Corporate Strategy* ». McGraw-Hill.
- Arrègle.J-L. (1995, septembre-octobre). Le savoir et l'approche resource-based : une ressource et une compétence. *Revue française de gestion*, pp. 84-94.
- Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustainable competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99-120.
- Baruch, L. (2001). *Intangibles: Management, Measurement, and Reporting*.. Brookings Institution Press.
- C. Prahalad ; G. Hamel. (1990, may-june). The Core Competence of the Corporation. *Harvard Business Review*.,.
- CEVITAL. (s.d.). Récupéré sur www.cevital.com (Consulter le 13/06/2024)
- Collis.D.J. (1991). A resource-based analysis of global competition: the case of bearings industry,. *Strategie Management Journal*, 12(1), pp. 49-68.
- Collis.DJ, & Montgomery.C.A. (s.d.). Competing on Resources: Strategy in the 1990s. *Harvard Business Review* 73,(4), pp. 118-128.
- Dosi G and al . (1992). Les microfondements de la compétitivité et leur conséquence macro-économique. in Foray et Freeman, *Technologies et Richesse des nations*, Paris:, pp. 121-162.
- E.Penrose. (1959). *The Theory of the Growth of the Firm*". Oxford University Press.
- Grant.RM. (1991). The resource-based theory of competitive advantage. *California Management Review*, 33(3), pp. 114-135.
- Hamel.G, & Prahalad.C-K. (1994). Engagez la course pour le futur. *L'expansion Management Review*,(75), pp. 44-52.
- Harvey M ; Lusch R. (1997). Protecting the core competencies of a company *Intangible Asset Security*. », *European Management Journal*, 15(4), pp. 370-380.
- Hofer. C.W; Schendel. D. (1978). *Strategy formulation: analytical concepts*. St Paul, MN: West Publishing Company.
- Lippman.S, & Rumelt.R. (1982). Uncertain imitability : ana analysis of interfirm differences inefficiency under competition,. *Bell Journal of Economies*, 13(2), pp. 418-443.
- Porter, M. (1979). *How Competitive Forces Shape Strategy* . *Harvard Business Review*., pp. 137-145.
- R. D'Aveni, R. G. (1994). "Hypercompetition: Managing The Dynamics Of Strategic Maneuvering", . The Free Press.

R.Amit.; P.Schoemaker. (1993). Strategie Assets and organizational rent. Strategie Management journal, 14(1), pp. 33-46.

Rubin P-H. (1973). The expansion of firm. Journal of Political Economy, 81(4).

Teece, D. J. (1992, June). Competition, cooperation, and innovation: Organizational arrangements for regimes of rapid technological progress. Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 18(1), pp. 1-25.

Wernerfeld B., “. (1984). A resource-based view of the firm. Strategic Management Journal,, (5), pp 171-180.