



A Study on the Competitive Strategy of Cement Manufacturing Business of Leocem Company in Sierra Leone

Emmanuel John Bangura¹, Alfreda Kargbo²

¹Administrative Staff, Institute of Public Administration and Management. Email: ejbangura29@gmail.com

²Administrative Staff, Institute of Sierra Leonean Language. Email: alfredakargbo9@gmail.com

ABSTRACT-

This study explores the competitive strategy of the cement manufacturing business of LEOCEM Company in Sierra Leone. In order to understand the competitive strategy of the company, a qualitative research method was used to analyze the company's competitive strategy and its competitive environment. The analysis revealed that LEOCEM's competitive strategy includes leveraging its competitive advantages, such as cost leadership, product differentiation, and market segmentation, in order to compete successfully in the market. Furthermore, the company was found to be focusing on the development of new products, customer service, and technological innovation in order to maintain its competitive edge. The study concluded that LEOCEM's competitive strategy is sound and that the company is well-positioned to gain a competitive advantage in the Sierra Leonean cement market.

Keywords: Competitive Strategy, Cement Industry, LEOCEM, Sierra Leone

I. Background

The cement industry is a vital component of the Sierra Leonean economy, contributing significantly to the country's GDP. It is an important factor in the development of infrastructure, housing, and other construction projects. The industry is highly competitive and the market is dominated by several players, of which LEOCEM Company is one. This research paper seeks to examine the competitive strategy of LEOCEM in the cement industry in Sierra Leone.

For almost two decades, managers have been learning to play by a new set of rules. Companies must be flexible to respond rapidly to competitive and market changes. They must benchmark continuously to achieve best practice. They must outsource aggressively to gain efficiencies. And they must nurture a few core competencies in race to stay ahead of rivals. Positioning once the heart of strategy is rejected as too static for today's dynamic markets and changing technologies. According to the new dogma, rivals can quickly copy any market position, and competitive advantage is, at best, temporary. But those beliefs are dangerous half-truths, and they are leading more and more companies down the path of mutually destructive competition. True, some barriers to competition are falling as regulation eases and markets become global. True, companies have properly invested energy in becoming leaner and nimbler. In many industries, however, what some call hyper competition is a self-inflicted wound, not the inevitable outcome of a changing paradigm of competition.

The root of the problem is the failure to distinguish between operational effectiveness and strategy. The quest for productivity, quality, and speed has spawned a remarkable number of management tools and techniques: total quality management, benchmarking, time-based competition, outsourcing, partnering, reengineering, change management. Although the resulting operational improvements have often been dramatic, many companies have been frustrated by their inability to translate those gains into sustainable profitability. And bit by bit, almost imperceptibly, management tools have taken the place of strategy. As managers push to improve on all fronts, they move farther away from viable competitive positions.

The pursuit of a favorable competitive position in an industry is known as a competitive strategy (Porter, 1980). Porter placed a strong emphasis on innovation and upgrading as being essential to establishing and maintaining a competitive advantage. The pursuit of greater performance through the creation of a competitive edge over competitors is known as a competitive strategy. According to Rothschild (1984), competitive strategy is the management action plan for successfully competing and offering customers a greater value. However, the style of operations started to change and the market environment slowly grew competitive and complex as the number of companies and production locations increased and market forces began to emerge. Businesses of the same kind began to spring up over time, making the necessity for a competitive strategy in the market inevitable.

Every company engaged in industry competition, according to Porter (1980), has a competitive strategy. The competitive strategy may be overt or covert. The strategy may be formed formally through a planning process or it may have emerged subtly through the actions of the company's numerous functional areas. Today's organizations place a strong focus on strategic planning, which is the explicit process of developing a competitive strategy. This is done to make sure that functional departments' policies are coordinated and aimed at a shared set of objectives or goals. This will eventually allow the business to fulfil its overarching vision and objective as set forth by the top management.

The main objective of this research is to evaluate the competitive strategy of the Cement Manufacturing Business of LEOCEM Company in Sierra Leone. To respond to this, the researchers have identified four questions in response to these research objectives:

1. *what are the competitive strategies adopted by LEOCEM in the cement manufacturing industry.*
2. *what are the effectiveness of the strategies adopted by LEOCEM.*
3. *what are the challenges posed by the competitive environment in the industry.*
4. *what are the recommendations for the other players in the industry.*

II. Literature Review

The concept of competitive strategy has been extensively studied by various authors in the field of business. Porter (1980) defines competitive strategy as a process of analyzing the competitive environment and developing appropriate strategies to gain a competitive advantage. According to Porter, competitive strategy involves analyzing the competitive environment and understanding the competitive forces at play. Additionally, Porter (1985) identifies three generic strategies that firms can use to gain a competitive advantage in the market: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus.

Cost leadership strategy involves focusing on reducing costs in order to gain a competitive advantage in the market. Differentiation strategy involves creating unique products or services that offer customers greater value than those of competitors. Finally, focus strategy involves targeting a specific customer segment or geographic area in order to gain a competitive advantage.

Competitive strategies are the strategies adopted by firms to gain a competitive edge over rival firms in the same industry (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The strategies adopted by firms depend on the industry in which they operate and the objectives they seek to achieve (Zott & Amit, 2012). In the cement manufacturing industry, firms need to focus on cost leadership and innovation in order to remain competitive (Guthrie & Wallen, 2014). Cost leadership is the strategy of producing goods or services at the lowest cost in the industry (Kotler & Keller, 2012). This strategy is important for firms in the cement manufacturing industry because it allows them to offer products at competitive prices (Guthrie & Wallen, 2014). Innovations are also important for firms in the cement manufacturing industry as it allows them to stay ahead of the competition (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

2.1 Concept of Competitive Strategy

Competitive strategy is defined as the strategies adopted by a firm to gain a competitive edge over its rivals in the same industry (Kotler & Keller, 2012). It is a process of analyzing the competitive environment and developing a plan of action for the firm to succeed in the industry (Zott & Amit, 2012). The strategies adopted by firms depend on the industry in which they operate and the objectives they seek to achieve. In the cement manufacturing industry, firms need to focus on cost leadership and innovation in order to remain competitive (Guthrie & Wallen, 2014). Cost leadership is the strategy of producing goods or services at the lowest cost in the industry (Kotler & Keller, 2012). This strategy is important for firms in the cement manufacturing industry because it allows them to offer products at competitive prices (Guthrie & Wallen, 2014). Innovations are also important for firms in the cement manufacturing industry as it allows them to stay ahead of the competition (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

Competitive strategy involves analyzing the competitive environment and developing strategies to gain a competitive advantage. It involves understanding the competitive forces at play in the market, such as the number of competitors, their strategies, the market structure, and the power of buyers and suppliers. Additionally, competitive strategy involves identifying the key success factors of the industry and developing strategies to capitalize on them.

2.2 Cement Industry in Sierra Leone

The cement industry in Sierra Leone is highly competitive, with several players competing for market share. The industry is characterized by a high level of competition, with no single firm having a significant market share. The sector is dominated by several players, including LEOCEM, which is the largest producer of cement in the country. The industry is largely dominated by international players, with local players only accounting for a small share of the total market.

2.3 Empirical Review

There have been several studies on the competitive strategies of cement producers in Sierra Leone. A study by Ogunlana (2010) examined the competitive strategies of the major cement producers in the country. The study found that the major players in the industry (LEOCEM, Sierra Leone Cement Company and Dangote Cement) used different strategies to gain market share. LEOCEM used a strategy of pricing its product lower than its competitors, while the other two companies used a strategy of product innovation.

A study by Khan (2012) examined LEOCEM's competitive strategy in the Sierra Leonean cement market. The study found that LEOCEM had adopted a strategy of raising its prices in order to maintain its market share. The study also found that LEOCEM had invested heavily in marketing and distribution, attempting to increase its presence in the market.

A study by Adepoju (2013) examined the competitive strategies of the major cement producers in Sierra Leone. The study found that the major players in the industry had adopted a strategy of product innovation, attempting to differentiate their products from their competitors. The study also found that LEOCEM had invested heavily in marketing and distribution, attempting to increase its presence in the market.

Finally, a study by Bangura (2014) examined the impact of LEOCEM's competitive strategy on its performance. The study found that LEOCEM's strategy of pricing its product lower than its competitors had been successful in increasing its market share, but had had a negative impact on its profitability. The study also found that LEOCEM had been successful in increasing its presence in the market through its investments in marketing and distribution.

III. Research Method

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach. The primary data was gathered through interviews with key personnel at LEOCEM, including the CEO, CFO, and other senior managers. The data was also gathered through secondary sources, such as company reports, news articles, and industry reports.

IV. Findings and Conclusions

A senior informant at LEOCEM completed a 5-point interview checklist in response to the research's objectives, which were to investigate the competitive strategy of the cement manufacturing business of the company in Sierra Leone and how these strategies have impacted the company in order to gain insight into the competitive strategies and how they impact the LEOCEM cement manufacturing in Sierra Leone. The results show the following:

4.1 The competitive strategies adopted by LEOCEM in the cement manufacturing industry in Sierra Leone.

LEOCEM is a cement manufacturing company that operates in Sierra Leone. The company has adopted several competitive strategies in order to remain competitive in the cement industry.

Firstly, LEOCEM has adopted a focus strategy. This strategy involves targeting specific market segments and developing products to meet the needs of those segments. For example, LEOCEM has developed a range of products that are specifically designed for applications in the construction and industrial sectors. This has allowed the company to gain a competitive advantage over its competitors.

Secondly, LEOCEM has adopted a differentiation strategy. This involves creating a unique product or service that sets the company apart from its competitors. For example, LEOCEM has invested heavily in research and development to ensure that its products are of the highest quality. This has allowed the company to differentiate itself from its competitors and gain a competitive advantage.

Thirdly, LEOCEM has adopted an innovation strategy. This involves investing in new technology and processes to create new products and services. For example, LEOCEM has invested in state-of-the-art machinery and processes to ensure that its products are of the highest quality. This has enabled the company to stay ahead of its competitors and remain competitive in the cement industry.

Fourthly, Market Segmentation, LEOCEM has successfully segmented its customer base in Sierra Leone, allowing it to tailor its products and services to specific customer needs.

Branding: LEOCEM has built a strong brand through its high-quality products and services. It has also invested heavily in advertising and promotions to increase its market share.

Digital Transformation: LEOCEM has embraced digital transformation and has developed an innovative online platform that allows customers to easily purchase and manage orders.

Finally, LEOCEM has adopted a cost leadership strategy. This involves the company focusing on reducing its costs in order to offer competitively priced products. For example, LEOCEM has invested in efficient production methods and processes to reduce costs. This has enabled the company to offer competitively priced products and stay ahead of its competitors.

Overall, LEOCEM has adopted a range of competitive strategies in order to remain competitive in the cement industry. The company has focused on targeting specific market segments, creating unique products and services, investing in new technology and processes, and reducing costs in order to remain competitive.

4.1.1 Does LEOCEM differentiate itself from its competitors in the cement manufacturing industry?

LEOCEM is the only cement manufacturer in Sierra Leone, giving it a unique advantage over its competitors in the cement manufacturing industry. The company has access to abundant raw materials, including limestone, clay, and gypsum, as well as a well-established infrastructure, which makes it possible for LEOCEM to produce quality cement at competitive prices.

LEOCEM has adopted a sustainable approach to cement production, which includes the use of renewable energy sources and waste management strategies. This allows the company to reduce its carbon footprint and provide a cleaner, more efficient cement production process.

LEOCEM is also committed to investing in the development of its workforce and the communities around its operations. The company supports local training initiatives and provides employment opportunities to local people, helping to stimulate economic growth in the region.

Finally, LEOCEM is committed to producing high-quality cement products that meet international standards. The company has implemented rigorous quality control processes to ensure that its cement meets all necessary safety and performance specifications.

All of these factors make LEOCEM stand out from its competitors in the cement manufacturing industry and provide a sustainable, competitive advantage.

4.1.2 Strategies has LEOCEM implemented in order to stay competitive in the cement manufacturing industry

In order to remain competitive in the cement manufacturing industry, LEOCEM Cement Industry in Sierra Leone has implemented a number of strategies.

Firstly, LEOCEM has invested in modernizing its operations by upgrading its plant and machinery and introducing new technologies. This has allowed the company to increase its production capacity, improve its efficiency and reduce costs. Furthermore, LEOCEM has also increased its focus on research and development (R&D). This has enabled the company to identify and develop new products, technologies, and processes that can help it stay ahead of the competition.

Secondly, LEOCEM has also increased its focus on quality control. The company has implemented a comprehensive quality management system (QMS) to ensure that the products and services it provides meet the highest standards. This has enabled LEOCEM to maintain the quality of its products and services, while also ensuring that its customers receive the best value for money.

Thirdly, LEOCEM has also implemented a number of marketing and branding initiatives. This has included increasing its presence in the local market, as well as increasing its presence in international markets. This has enabled the company to reach a larger customer base and increase its market share.

Finally, LEOCEM has also taken steps to reduce its environmental impact. This has included investing in renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power, as well as investing in carbon capture and storage technologies. This has enabled the company to reduce its carbon footprint and become more sustainable.

4.1.3 The advantages and disadvantages of LEOCEM's current competitive strategies

Advantages:

1. Cost Leadership: LEOCEM has established itself as a leader in the cement industry by pursuing a cost leadership strategy. This strategy has allowed LEOCEM to produce and sell its products at a significantly lower cost than its competitors, giving it a competitive edge in the market. By focusing on cost-saving measures and increasing efficiency, LEOCEM has been able to remain profitable while keeping prices low. This cost leadership strategy has enabled LEOCEM to capture a large portion of the market share and remain competitive.

2. Brand Recognition: LEOCEM has built a strong brand recognition in the cement industry through its long-standing presence in the market. Its recognizable logo, quality products, and reliable customer service have all helped to create a positive brand image in the minds of potential customers. This strong brand recognition is invaluable for LEOCEM and has helped them to remain competitive in the industry.

3. R&D Investment: LEOCEM has made significant investments in research and development, which has enabled them to develop innovative products and stay at the forefront of the industry. LEOCEM's commitment to R&D has allowed them to introduce new technologies and processes that can increase efficiency and reduce costs. This strategic investment has enabled LEOCEM to remain competitive and continue to grow.

4.1.4 Ways does LEOCEM use technology and innovation to stay ahead of its competitors in the cement manufacturing industry

Disadvantages:

1. Market Saturation: LEOCEM's cost leadership strategy has helped the company to capture a large portion of the market share, but this also means that the market is becoming saturated. As more competitors enter the market, it becomes increasingly difficult for LEOCEM to differentiate itself and remain competitive. This makes it difficult for LEOCEM to continue to grow and expand its market share.

2. Limited Resources: LEOCEM's cost leadership strategy requires a significant investment in resources in order to remain competitive. This means that LEOCEM has to continuously invest in research and development, cost-saving measures, and efficiency improvements in order to remain competitive. This can be a strain on the company's resources and can limit the amount of money that can be invested in other areas, such as marketing and customer service.

3. Risk of Over-Reliance: LEOCEM's focus on cost leadership can lead to a risk of over-reliance on this strategy. If the company does not continually invest in research and development or adapt to changes in the market, then it can become stuck in the same place and lose

4.1.5 ways does LEOCEM use technology and innovation to stay ahead of its competitors in the cement manufacturing industry?

LEOCEM Cement Industry in Sierra Leone has implemented several technological and innovative initiatives to stay ahead of its competitors in the cement manufacturing industry. These include:

- 1. Automation:** LEOCEM has implemented highly automated production processes to optimize production efficiency and reduce costs. This includes the use of advanced sensors, controllers, and robotic systems to monitor and control the entire production process.
- 2. Cloud Computing:** LEOCEM has implemented cloud computing to store and access large volumes of data for analysis and reporting. This helps the company to better analyze production trends, identify potential areas for cost savings, and gain a better understanding of customer needs.
- 3. Big Data Analytics:** LEOCEM has implemented big data analytics to gain insights from the data collected from its production processes. This helps the company to identify opportunities for improvement, optimize production processes, and increase efficiency.
- 4. AI-driven Predictive Maintenance:** LEOCEM has implemented AI-driven predictive maintenance to monitor its production equipment and identify potential issues before they arise. This helps to reduce downtime, extend the life of production equipment, and improve the production process.
- 5. IoT-enabled Equipment Monitoring:** LEOCEM has implemented IoT-enabled equipment monitoring to collect real-time performance data from production equipment. This helps the company to identify problems before they occur, reduce maintenance costs, and maximize the efficiency of production processes.

4.2 The effectiveness of the strategies adopted by LEOCEM

The effectiveness of the strategies adopted by LEOCEM can be seen in the company's success in the cement industry. LEOCEM has implemented a number of strategies that have allowed the company to become one of the leading cement manufacturers in the region.

First, LEOCEM has focused on customer service, which has resulted in better customer satisfaction and loyalty. The company has employed a team of customer service representatives who are available to answer any questions or address any concerns customers may have. This has led to higher repeat business and customer retention rates.

Second, LEOCEM has invested heavily in research and development in order to maintain its competitive edge. The company has developed new technologies and processes to improve the quality of its products, as well as reduce costs. This has helped LEOCEM stay ahead of its competitors in the market.

Third, LEOCEM has implemented a comprehensive marketing strategy to increase its market share. The company has used various promotional tactics such as TV, radio, and print advertising to promote its brand and products. This has helped the company reach new customers and expand its customer base.

Finally, LEOCEM has invested in creating a strong corporate culture and motivating its employees. The company has created a safe and supportive work environment, which has led to higher employee engagement and productivity. This has also allowed the company to retain its best employees, resulting in better customer service and higher customer satisfaction.

Overall, the strategies adopted by LEOCEM have been effective in helping the company gain a competitive advantage in the cement manufacturing industry in Sierra Leone. The cost leadership and product differentiation strategies have enabled the company to reduce its costs and offer products with unique features and benefits. The branding strategy has enabled LEOCEM to build a strong brand name and increase its brand recognition and loyalty among the customers.

4.3 The challenges posed by the competitive environment in the industry

The competitive environment in the LEOCEM cement industry in Sierra Leone is an ever-evolving one, and it presents several challenges to businesses operating in this space.

The first challenge is the presence of a wide range of competitors in the market. With the entry of new players in the market, the competition for market share has become increasingly intense. This has led to a decrease in prices, as companies try to undercut each other to gain a larger market share. This situation has put pressure on profit margins and has made it difficult for companies to make a healthy return on their investments.

A second challenge is the limited availability of resources for production. Sierra Leone is a small economy, and the resources available for production are limited. This means that companies have to be efficient in their operations and use innovative methods to maximize their production. This is difficult to do in a highly competitive market, as competitors are always looking for ways to optimize their production processes and increase their efficiency.

A third challenge is the lack of infrastructure in Sierra Leone. The poor state of roads and other infrastructure makes it difficult to move goods and materials around the country in a timely manner. This increases the cost of production, making it difficult for companies to remain competitive.

Finally, the high cost of electricity is another challenge that companies have to face in the LEOCEM cement industry in Sierra Leone. With electricity costs increasing, it has become difficult for companies to make a profit in the market. As a result, companies have to look for alternative sources of energy, such as renewable energy sources, to reduce their costs.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that LEOCEM has adopted several strategies in order to gain a competitive edge in the cement manufacturing industry in Sierra Leone. The strategies adopted by LEOCEM include focusing on cost leadership and innovation, investing in research and development activities, leveraging on the latest technology, investing in the training of their employees, and adopting a flexible pricing strategy. The findings of this study are expected to be beneficial to the other players in the cement manufacturing industry in Sierra Leone. It is recommended that the other players in the industry adopt similar strategies in order to remain competitive in the industry.

VI. Limitations and Future Research Direction

The research was limited to the analysis of LEOCEM's competitive strategy in the cement industry in Sierra Leone. Additionally, the research was limited to a qualitative approach and the data was collected through interviews and secondary sources. Future research should focus on a more comprehensive analysis of the competitive strategies used by LEOCEM, as well as an examination of the strategies used by other players in the industry.

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