

A PRIMARY STUDY ON INTER-COMPANY COLLABORATION IN THE WINE BUSINESS SECTOR: THE COOPETITION PERSPECTIVE

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1. Introduction and Research Question

The purpose of the paper is to investigate the rules of coopetition (Brandenburger, Nalebuff, 2011; Bengtsson and Kock, 2000; Cherubini and Pattuglia, 2009; Porter, 1998) within the wine business (Dana and Winstone, 2008; Hayward and Lewis, 2008; Rossi *et al.*, 2014; Vrontis *et al.*, 2011), by identifying its principles (Lado *et al.*, 1997) through a case study analysis.

In other words, the aim of our study is to determine the main characteristics of coopetition (Harfield, 1999) taking place between contemporary companies (Trequattrini, 2008) operating in the wine business, based on an international case study known as the “Barolo Boys”.

Adam Brandenburger and Barry Nalebuff (1996) introduced the term “coopetition” as a way to emphasise the role of co-operation when studying how players behave when acting as complementors or competitors and they argue that a management mindset needs to acknowledge this duality.

In this context, the literature review is the basis for the introduction of the coopetition framework and its principles (Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996), together with a short explanation of the wine business from the perspective of creating value (Wilson and Goddard, 1993) for the long-term.

The approach of the research is based upon a qualitative method (Hair *et al.*, 2003; Patton, 2002) with the objective of presenting the main studies on coopetition between companies (Padula and Dagnino, 2007) and of defining a related model to verify that these principles are present in the case study analysis. The correlation between coopetition in the wine business and the product lifecycle will be investigated in support of this discussion. Moreover, the discussion of the case study shows corporate strategy (Ansoff 1970; Collis, 1997; Fombrun, Shanley 1990; Mintzberg, 1994) used by the Barolo Boys during the life cycle phases.

The paper was developed using a single-method approach (Myers, 2013; Yin, 2003), following a review of international literature. Secondary sources for the research include papers, books, open databases, documents and

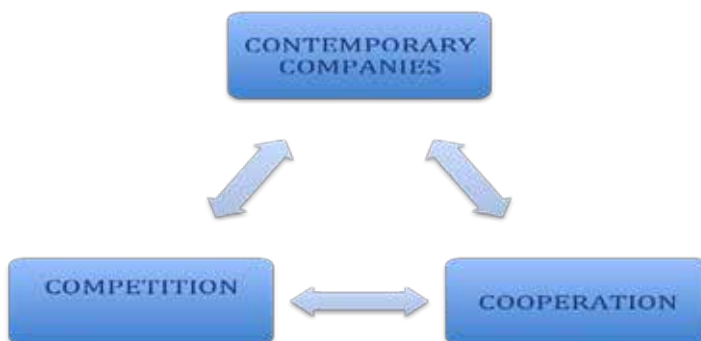
the Barolo Boys website. The structure of the research was the following. After the Introduction, Section two provides an analysis of the literature on coopetition and a general overview of the wine business sector. Section three describes the approach used in the research. Section four proposes the research case study. Section five presents the discussion, and includes the implications of the research. Section six illustrates the limitations of the study and suggests future research. The research question to be addressed is the following: What are the principles of coopetition in the wine business and what is the correlation between the latter and the product lifecycle?

2. Background

2.1 A General Introduction to the Coopetition Framework

Every company in today's world (Ackoff, 1961; Zanda, 1974) is a coordinated system of tangible and intangible assets (Comuzzi et al., 2009; Marchi, Marasca, 2010, Roos et al., 1997; Sveiby, 1997) interacting with the external environment and exchanging with it energy, information and knowledge (Zanda, 2012). These exchanges make the company's survival possible, allowing its ongoing and repetitive relationships to grow (Cassia and Meoli, 2009). Starting from this assumption, the coopetition framework (Loebecke et al., 1999) is based upon the co-operation and competition between competitor companies (Figure 1) and implies the involvement of at least two companies with collaborative strategies (Rossi, 2013).

Figure 1 – The Coopetition Principles



Gnyawali et al. (2008) argued that a coopetition strategy could lead companies to co-operate after having been in competition.

Whilst we found, in the literature, a number of papers that examined coopetition in the wine business (Dana and Winstone, 2008; Dana *et al.*,

2011), competitive strategies implemented by small family-run companies, aggressive new competitors and a high degree of industry-wide institutionalisation further supported local co-operation. Bresser and Harl (1986) have studied the two aspects of co-operation and competition in order to identify the companies involved in co-operative strategies, with the aim of reducing complexity. In reality, coopetition among present day companies (Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996) is based on collaborative relationships (Levy *et al.*, 2003; Gnyawali and Madhavan, 2001; Mariani, 2007; M'Chirgui, 2005; Chaudri and Samson, 2000) in the market, although this collaboration is particularly complex (Fontana and Ballati, 1999, Keene, 2000; Lewin, 1999; Padula and Dagnino, 2007; Stacey, 1996; Waldrop, 1993).

2.2 The European Scenario and the Wine Business Sector

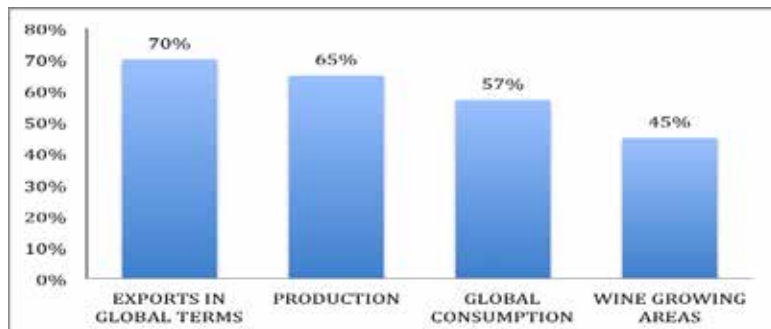
The coopetition framework needs to be applied to the wine business. The Comité Européen des Entreprises Vins stated on their website that “Wine is a natural, agricultural product recognised by the EU Treaties and basically defined in the EU legislation as a “product obtained exclusively from the total or partial alcoholic fermentation of fresh grapes, whether or not crushed, or of grape must” (available at <http://ceev.eu/about-the-eu-wine-sector>)

In Europe, the wine business is an important sector involving different aspects, among which the following have been recognised:

- socio-economic factors;
- environmental issues;
- ethical and societal aspects (Ciasullo and Festa, 2014), including corporate governance and corporate social responsibility;
- network collaborations.

After conducting its study, the Comité Européen des Entreprises Vins provided the data in Figure 2, which can be useful in the European Union wine sector.

Figure 2 – The wine business in the EU (source: <http://ceev.eu/index.php>)



In its report for the exports of top wine producers in Europe, the Organization Internationale de la Vigne et du Vin (OIV) published “The wine market: evolution and trends” (May 2014) published the following data, listing five countries involved in the wine market value classification in terms of exportations (Table 1).

Table 1 – Exports of top wine producers in Europe (source: OIV, May 2014)

Country	Year 2012 (million €)	Year 2013 (million €)
France	7.840.1	7.812.1
Germany	978.5	998.9
Italy	4.660.0	5.005.0
Portugal	703.8	724.4
Spain	2.424.2	2.466.9

With reference to the top wine importers in Europe the OIV report published the following data (table 2).

Table 2 – Top wine importers in Europe (source: OIV, May 2014)

Country	Year 2013 (million €)
Belgium	975.8
Germany	2.514.5
Denmark	545.5
France	648.3
Netherlands	881.7
Sweden	590.4
Switzerland	949.2
United Kingdom	3.731.9

In 2012, it was estimated that the Italian wine business provided for 17% of world production and 29.6% of production in the European Union (Ufficio Studi Mediobanca, 2014). For the same year, the value of Italian wine production was 9.1 billion Euros.

3. Research Approach

The research approach was based on the analysis of a single case study relating to the wine business, following the principles of coepetition and using a qualitative method (Hair *et al.*, 2003; Patton, 2002).

The “Barolo Boys” case study is introduced through a deductive-inductive approach, contributing towards improving existing literature and with the view of providing greater understanding the principles of coepetition and the relationship between life cycle of the firm and corporate strategies.

Information was collected through a research protocol based upon defining the case study objectives and collecting data from the analysis and study of “Barolo Boys” website (www.baroloboysthemovie.com) through its specific sections.

Our next, forthcoming, research steps will be based on direct observations of the process. We then intend to establish direct contact with a sample of wine companies, by proposing multiple (open and structured) interviews and direct observation in order to compare and test results coming from the present case study analysis.

Data was acquired using a single-method approach (Myers, 2013; Yin, 2003) with the use of secondary sources: papers, books, open databases, specialized websites, news and documents.

The case study introduces and verifies the principles of coepetition and the connection between the wine business and product lifecycle as well as the relationship between life cycle of the firm and corporate strategies.

4. The Case Study

The case study involved a group of winemakers from the Langhe area in Italy. The analysis focused, in particular, on the critical factors leading to their success, investigating the lifecycle phases of Barolo in terms of the issue of coepetition. Research carried shows that the process started following the disastrous grape harvest of 1981, the producers were forced to sell their grapes to the winemakers at very low prices, which put pressure on the farmers financially and adding to their economic instability.

One of the resulting effects was that farmers became more aware of their vulnerability and some of them decided not to sell their grapes to the merchants any longer, but to make wine themselves.

This was not an easy challenge, the young winemakers had to learn the wine-making process, while, at the same time, create their own space in a market where French Burgundy wine was extremely successful.

In trying to establish the phases that led to the success of Barolo, we must go back to 1986, the year marking a sea-change and the watershed

between tradition and innovation.

Two types of action were implemented, using the knowledge acquired by studying the French wine-making process:

- thinning bunches during the summer, leaving more room for the remaining grapes to ripen on the plants;
- the introduction of small French oak barrels or barriques, replacing the large oak barrels.

These changes deeply affected the original Barolo winemakers with their traditional mindset, causing, in some cases, clashes between old and new generations.

The new choices made by the Barolo Boys were, however, endorsed by the excellent results achieved in the 1990s and the appreciation of Barolo on an international level.

The huge success achieved by the group through their collaboration soon left room for competition between the individual producers.

This, in turn, led to the need, for the underlying objectives of this paper, to carry out an analysis of the lifecycle phases of Barolo, regarding the issue of coopetition.

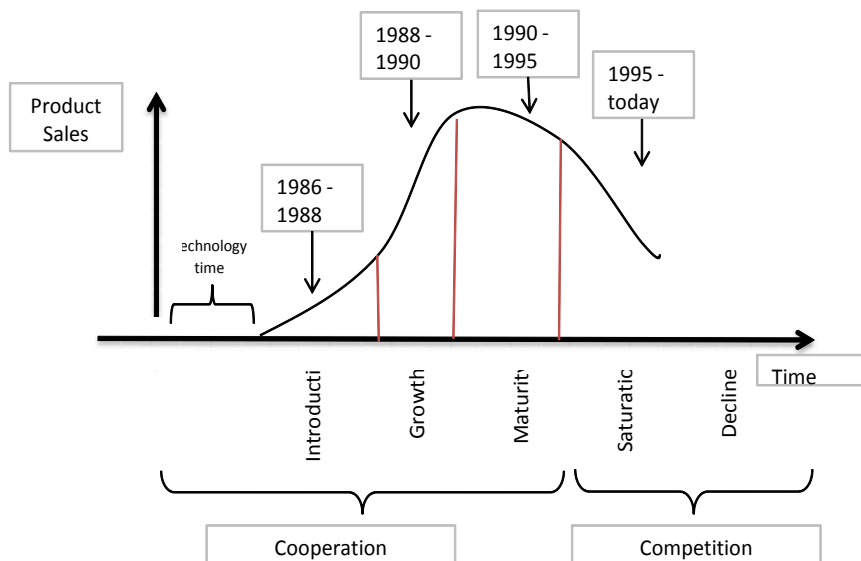
The most important phases that led to a change in the individual farmers' operating methods can be attributed to:

- **phase 1** - (1981) – awareness on the part of the farmers of their lack of contractual power over the price of grapes;
- **phase 2** - (1981 – 1986) – a period of study and research in which relationships were established with Burgundy winemakers;
- **phase 3** - (1986) – introduction of innovations – the summer thinning of bunches and barriques (introduction);
- **phase 4** - (1986 – 1990) – improvement in the quality of wine (growth);
- **phase 5** - (1990 – 1995) – international success (maturity);
- **phase 6** - (1995 – onwards) – individualism (saturation).

Based on the theoretical capacity of the lifecycle of a product, it is possible to attribute a tendency to co-operation or competition to each of the phases identified above.

The following figure 1 highlights the above operations:

Figure 1 - source our elaboration



The interval ranging from 0 to 1 coincides with the years from 1981 to 1986, that is, the period during which the Burgundy wine-making techniques were studied.

The subsequent phase goes from the introduction of innovation to the first positive results, mainly connected to the quality of the product. From a time perspective, this phase relates to the years from 1986 to 1988.

Subsequently, between 1988 and 1990, there was a significant increase in high value sales, with the strategic factor being publicity.

From 1995 onwards, co-operation left space for competition among the individual winemakers, where each tried to excel over the others.

Ultimately, the case included in the study underlines that, for each phase of the life cycle of the product, it is possible to find a correspondence between the product lifecycle itself and cooperation, based on the principles of co-operation and competition.

We will discuss that co-operation took place in the research phase of knowledge, that is, from 0 – when knowledge is beginning to be acquired - to the end of the maturity phase of the product.

Subsequently, from the saturation phase onwards and, in particular, with the publication of the first specialised magazines and the appearance of first recognitions of the quality of the wine, co-operation gave way to competition. In the following table 3 we have illustrated some of the principles that have been derived from our analysis of the case study:

Table 3 - source our elaboration

Coepetition	Competition
Research and study (technology time)	Personal award (saturation)
Production Innovation (introduction)	Personal success (decline)
Product quality (growth)	
High consideration in international Market (maturity)	

In this sense, the principles of coepetition found throughout the case study need to be compared and validated using the existing technical *framework* and should be recognised through the lifecycle phases of the product.

5. Discussion

In light of the analyses carried out on the development stages of the Barolo business, some of the strategic approaches used by the Barolo Boys during the life cycle phases of the product can be identified.

In particular, identification of the objectives pursued by winemakers can be specifically found in the theoretical framework of the following corporate strategies (Andrews, 1971; Ansoff 1970; Chandler 1962; Grant, 1991; Mintzberg, 1994):

1. *Competitive strategy;*
2. *interactive strategy;*
3. *resources based view strategy.*

In this regard, during the first phase of the life cycle of the product, what the doctrine calls “technology”, modern winemakers start to have doubts on the reasons for the preferences of consumers with regards to the wine of the nearby French region of Burgundy. These questions lead them to study French production techniques.

In this period competitive behaviour has been seen, divided by moments of on-site experience sharing.

This strategic approach can be classified within the theoretical framework of the competitive strategy (Porter, 1985).

In the following phases, introduction, development and maturity, the behaviour adopted denotes a clear interaction between the various winemakers finalized at the coproduction of value.

The advanced logics followed by the Barolo Boys can be easily classified within the conceptual framework of interactive strategies (Normann, Ramirez, 1995). In fact, in a historical period characterized by important cultural transformations, as in the case of the Eighties and Nineties, the

choice of supporting corporate development through relations on various levels of the chain of value has allowed for the efficient management of the environmental dynamism of the period.

Cooperation has, in this regard, favoured the exchange of ideas on the techniques of cultivation and on necessary innovation so that the product may satisfy the requirements of consumers.

In this regard, through the interaction of knowledge and skills of each single participant, a coproduction of values is created.

Finally, the last two phases include the passage from cooperative to competitive behaviour, the winemakers are in conflict between one another. National and international recognition is at stake.

In the wake of this, winemakers have decided to enhance the distinctive features of their product by using a strategic “resource based” approach (Penrose, 1959; Rubin, 1973; Barney 1991).

According to indications provided above, a summary has been created of the relations that exist between the various life cycle phases of the product and the corporate strategies adopted by the Barolo Boys, as illustrated below in the table 4.

Table 4 - source our elaboration

Coopetition	Product life cycle stages	Strong Elements of the product cycle	Weak Elements of the product cycle	Corporate strategy	strategy goal
competition	technology	study/research	time for knowledge	Competitive strategy (Porter, 1985)	become competitive through the study of a Borgogne's winery production methods
cooperation	introduction	product quality	small market for the product - low's sales - high costs for research and development, consumer testing	interactive strategy (Normann, Ramirez, 1995)	co-production value
	growth	product distribution	high investments in promotional activity		
	maturity	price	attention in the improvements of the production process		
competition	saturation	packeging	customer have already purchased the product-	RBV - Resources based view (Penrose, 1959; Rubin, 1973; Hamel, 1990; Barney, 1991)	improve the firm process efficiency through the use of a human and intangible resources
	decline	advertisement			

Finally, we can state that in the case of the Barolo Boys, cooperation has favoured an improvement in the product, an extension to the distribution chain and conquering of market shares.

At the same time some external factors have led to the break-up of the group, therefore losing the competitive factor represented by the sharing of skills and experience.

6. Conclusions and Future Research

Coopetition has become the subject of intensive research over recent years, and the concept of coopetition is itself used to explain the economic and social consequences of networking in various sectors and countries.

In this case study, we have divided the success of Barolo winemakers according to their co-operative or competitive behaviour.

The case analysis highlights that it is possible to associate, to each product life cycle phase, a tendency to co-operate or compete on the part of the individuals involved.

It is, however, true to say that the data and information used are limited to the study of a single case and also derives from a website interview and from the story of these wine makers.

It is well known that the use of a single case study can represent the major limits of this research, but this case it is very singular and a comparison with the others story doesn't improves the results of this research stage.

Nevertheless, this does represent the first step for new research based on a similar evolution in another sector.

Therefore, the study under examination and the relative hypotheses should be validated through the analysis of similar cases and their comparison.

This paper, therefore, represents the first step of a greater structured process that will include the following phases:

- investigations into the literature on this topic;
- research into similar events;
- analysis of existing connections between the product lifecycles and coopetition;
- validation of results;
- the construction of a modern theoretical *framework* to be known as "coopetition – lifecycle of the product in the wine business".

Riassunto

Il presente articolo ha l'obiettivo di analizzare le regole che governano la coopetition nel settore del vino e di definire i suoi principi, presentando un'indagine fondata su un caso di studio internazionale.

L'approccio di ricerca è basato sul metodo qualitativo con l'obiettivo di illustrare i principi della competizione tra imprese, definendo un modello utile a verificarne l'esistenza nel caso di studio indagato.

Pertanto, l'articolo è stato sviluppato usando un approccio di tipo single method, seguendo la letteratura nazionale e internazionale: quest'ultima è utilizzata per supportare la rappresentazione del caso di studio.

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the rules governing coopetition in the wine business and define its principles by presenting the analysis of a case study. The approach used in the research is based on a qualitative method having the objective of illustrating the main studies on inter-company coopetition, defining a related model to be used to verify that these principles are present in the case study. The paper has been developed using a single-method approach, following the international literature that can be used to support the case study.

Classificazione Jel: M1 – Business Administration; L2 – Firm Objectives, Organization, and Behavior; L66 – Food; Beverages; Cosmetics; Tobacco; Wine and Spirits

Parole chiave (Keywords): coopetition, sistema azienda, wine business, creazione di valore, ciclo di vita del settore (coopetition, company system, wine business, value creation, sector lifecycle).

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