

HARNESSING COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE: THE DYNAMICS OF ROMANIA'S ENERGY SECTOR

VALORIFICAREA INTELIGENȚEI COMPETITIVE: DINAMICA SECTORULUI ENERGETIC DIN ROMÂNIA

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Abstract: *Competitive intelligence (CI) gathering, analysis, and application are crucial to organizational effectiveness in today's dynamic and competitive corporate world. CI's energy industry position in Romania's economy is examined in this article. Interview case studies examined how CI approaches affected major Romanian energy companies' operations. Academic debate has stressed the importance of adapting CI approaches to industrial circumstances, especially complex energy. This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with management stakeholders to examine energy solid CI programs' goals, techniques, challenges, and effects. This research shows that energy businesses use CI to make tactical decisions, especially when managing complex regulations, assessing competition strategies, and spotting market trends.*

Keywords: Competitive Intelligence, Energy, Management, Strategy, CI, Romania

Rezumat: *Analiza, colectarea și aplicarea informațiilor competitive (CI) sunt esențiale pentru eficiența organizațională în contextul dinamic și competitiv al lumii corporative contemporane. Acest articol examinează poziția CI în industria energetică din România. Studiile de caz bazate pe interviuri au analizat modul în care abordările CI au influențat operațiunile principalelor companii energetice românești. Dezbaterile academice a subliniat importanța adaptării abordărilor CI la condițiile industriale, în special în sectorul*

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energetic complex. Acest studiu calitativ a utilizat interviuri semi-structurate cu factorii de decizie din management pentru a examina obiectivele, tehnicile, provocările și efectele programelor CI solide din domeniul energiei. Cercetarea arată că firmele energetice folosesc CI pentru a lua decizii tactice, în special în gestionarea reglementărilor complexe, evaluarea strategiilor concurenței și identificarea tendințelor de piață.

Cuvinte cheie: Competitive Intelligence, Energie, Management, Strategie, CI, Romania

1. Introduction

Even though there is no actual consensus for a definition of Competitive intelligence (CI), after a thorough literature review, Pellisier and Nenhelele defined it as a systematic and ethical process that involves legally collecting, processing, and analyzing information from both internal and external sources. The purpose of this process is to provide decision-makers with valuable insights and a competitive edge [1].

While there is a broad consensus among various sources on the critical need for competitive intelligence to be systematically structured to maximize its effectiveness, a significant discrepancy exists in practice. Many companies fail to adequately implement these structured approaches. This gap between theory and practice indicates a widespread challenge in the corporate world, where the principles of effective competitive intelligence, such as planning, communication, analysis, and procedures, are not fully realized [2].

The business environment has experienced a significant surge in demand for CI skills, evident through the presence of individuals holding roles such as competitive intelligence manager, competitive intelligence expert, competitive intelligence analyst. These professionals undoubtedly play a crucial role in enhancing business optimisation [3].

The business intelligence manager plays a crucial role in the competitive intelligence (CI) function by overseeing the gathering, evaluation, and utilisation of competitive intelligence to achieve a competitive edge. Business intelligence managers are responsible for efficiently disseminating competitive intelligence to important decision makers and relevant departments in their organisation. They collaborate with different departments to ensure the effective utilisation of intelligence in strategic decision-making processes. Additionally, they continuously monitor industry developments and modify their competitive intelligence processes accordingly [4]. The primary responsibility of a business's data expert and analyst is to fully appreciate the potential of vital information for the advancement and sustainability of a

business. This entails the capacity to discern the genuine information requirements of the company and employ a fundamental array of techniques to handle (assess, retain, scrutinise, and integrate) information [5].

Collecting information is another crucial stage in our effort to establish dominance over our rivals. Thorough examination of publications, financial data, and the market is necessary. Mastering the skill of capitalising on every opportunity to enhance the efficiency of the business is vital. Thoroughly examine the collected data to find significant trends, patterns, and potential possibilities. In order to evaluate our standing relative to competitors, it is imperative that we employ analytical tools and methodologies, such as SWOT analysis (assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), competitive analysis, and benchmarking [6].

It is crucial to also guarantee the distribution of the analysed information and conclusions to relevant parties inside the organisation. This may involve generating reports, developing presentations, or creating interactive technologies to enhance the comprehension and utilisation of competitive information. Access to information is essential for its seamless integration into the decision-making process [7].

In order to stay current and efficient, CI capabilities can be enhanced by consistently monitoring and updating information about competitors. This involves assessing and adapting collection and analytic methods and methodologies in response to industry shifts and organisational requirements. Enhancing an organization's competitive intelligence capabilities is crucial for gaining a deeper comprehension of the business landscape, accurately predicting and adapting to industry shifts, making well-informed strategic choices, and maintaining a competitive edge in the market.

An extensive comprehension of the business environment offers vital discernment into how organisations might adapt their tactics to maintain competitiveness.

Identifying chances for innovation is beneficial for identifying and developing products. The organisation enhances its product and service offerings and reinforces its market position by collecting and examining data on emerging technologies, market demands, customer input, and other pertinent sources of information, leading to the development of new ideas [8]. The competitive evaluation process can offer a substantial competitive edge by necessitating well-informed decisions grounded in reliable facts and information on competitors. CI capabilities can furnish vital information for strategic decision-making, encompassing areas such as market expansion,

product launches, significant investments, and organisational restructuring. It can enhance risk mitigation and bolster adaptability by discerning and overseeing potential hazards and advantageous circumstances in the external milieu. By comprehending the dangers and alterations in the corporate landscape, entities can proactively undertake measures to mitigate their consequences and sustain enduring efficacy [9].

Developing an CI competence for the organisation can yield numerous advantages, including gaining insights into the business landscape, recognising potential opportunities, evaluating competition, making well-informed decisions, and managing risks. Implementing this strategic strategy helps enhance competitiveness and drive business success in a progressively intricate and ever-changing commercial landscape.

Evaluation of the business climate and its requirements

In a progressively competitive, merciless, and swiftly evolving economic context, competitive intelligence is indispensable for the triumph of any organisation. Business intelligence is based on the activities of collecting, analysing, and sharing information about the business environment, competitors, consumers, and emerging technologies. Its main objective is to enhance the competitiveness and adaptability of organisations in the fast-paced global economy.

In today's economy, competitive intelligence is vital for any organisation. Competitive intelligence instruments and methods are vital for businesses of all sizes, ranging from established corporations to newly established ventures, in order to effectively address market difficulties. The necessity for organisations to swiftly embrace emerging technological trends and establish dynamic competitive data collection and analysis strategies has been expedited, as indicated by a recent study published in the Journal of Business Research [10].

The importance of competitive intelligence

Competitive intelligence is an essential aspect of organisational operations, enabling organisations to comprehend, negotiate, and gain an edge in the swiftly evolving and competitive economic landscape. Nevertheless, as per a survey conducted by Harvard Business Review, barely 25% of organisations have implemented a structured competitive intelligence programme [11].

Current constraints

The absence of timely information is a substantial constraint in the development of efficient competitive intelligence. Prompt and well-informed choices are crucial in the current fast-paced and fiercely competitive economic landscape. Nevertheless, if an organization's data is not regularly updated instantaneously, its ability to react to market developments may be hindered, thus providing competitors with an opportunity to establish a competitive edge. Traditional end-of-month reports are inadequate in a rapidly evolving society.

Hence, it is evident that numerous constraints impede the efficient advancement of competitive intelligence in the contemporary economic landscape. Organizations must be cognizant of these constraints and actively seek strategies to surmount them in order to optimise the advantages that competitive intelligence provides.

Although competitive intelligence can provide substantial advantages, it is subject to some constraints that can impede its efficacy in the current economic climate. An organization's capacity to fully realise competitive intelligence may be hindered by limitations such as the absence of real-time data, e-commerce data, or loyalty card data.

In the last three decades, enterprises have formulated rigorous strategic plans to acquire a competitive edge, enabling them to effectively adapt to a dynamic environment. Competitive advantage is a key factor in strategic planning, as it is essential for achieving goals and effectively utilising a company's resources to take advantage of current opportunities. Competitive advantage is not limited to a tactical aspect, but rather becomes a crucial feature in the current global competitive environment. This achievement not only benefits individual enterprises, but also signifies a notable shift in competitive mindset and a progression in the understanding of corporate strategy, emphasising the importance of organisational strengths and the ability to react to change[12].

Market expansion is a strategy method employed by businesses to enhance and broaden their impact in a certain, pre-existing market sector. This strategy encompasses various methods, including modifying prices to enhance competitiveness, implementing assertive marketing efforts, introducing novel products or services, and broadening distribution channels. Establishing and sustaining consumer relationships, including

loyalty programmes or tailored promotions, is a crucial element of the market penetration tactic [13].

Best practices worldwide

Europe

France, along with other European countries, has implemented a comprehensive and well-established plan for implementing best practices in Competitive Intelligence across several sectors. Examining the following businesses that have built a reputation for exemplifying ethical business practices will provide a more thorough understanding:

- Adecco, a well-known recruitment agency in France, has efficiently used Competitive Intelligence (CI) to assess labour market trends and customer demands [14].
- BNP Paribas, a major European bank, utilises computational intelligence (CI) to effectively manage financial market opportunities and analyse risks [15].
- Orange, a major telecom operator in Europe, utilises Competitive Intelligence (CI) to monitor technical advancements and detect potential business prospects in the telecommunications industry [16].

Asia

Japan's culture provides a high importance on knowledge and thorough study, which has contributed to the speedy and efficient creation of a set of best practices for integrated circuits (IC). Business partnerships and partner relationships hold significant significance in Japanese culture, hence IC aids in cultivating these connections while also overseeing the actions of competitors. Hence, the examination of international marketplaces using technology is crucial [17].

China is renowned for its ability to handle and manipulate vast amounts of data, effectively utilising the power of public opinion. The Chinese government enforces stringent laws around the gathering and utilisation of data [18]. CI must consider these regulations and adhere to data privacy legislation. China, as a dynamic and rapidly developing nation, recognises the importance of closely monitoring its competitors and

safeguarding its position in the commercial landscape, given its status as one of the largest economic powers. This vigilance is crucial for fostering innovation and sustaining growth.

United States of America

Competitive Intelligence is a well developed concept in the US, with its specific aspects varying depending on the industry in which an organisation operates.

In the United States, there exist specialised departments that exclusively focus on this field and are accountable for the tasks of gathering, examining, and disseminating data. If a company lacks a specialised department, it may engage in collaboration with consultancy firms as an alternate means of sustaining the enterprise.

The advancement of technology has greatly facilitated the adaptation of processes to current developments and the ability to respond innovatively to market demands. The field of Big Data analytics is gaining prominence and significance in the corporate landscape, as it guarantees a comprehensive and expert examination of the company's data.

Furthermore, the training and professional development offered is one of the most advanced in the United States. Procter & Gamble (P&G) is a prominent firm that has achieved success in the business world by implementing effective strategies in competitive intelligence. P&G is a global leader in the consumer products industry, known for its diverse portfolio of brands such as Tide, Pampers, and Gillette. The company has received recognition for its advanced and refined approach to Competitive Intelligence (CI), which has solidified its position as a frontrunner in the consumer goods market [19]. The company has sustained its position through investments in a robust department specialising in business competition, cutting-edge technologies, ongoing global monitoring, comprehensive consumer analysis, trend forecasting, collaboration with partners and internal members, customer relations, and continuous innovation.

2. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to acquire a full grasp of the research issue by using both an extensive literature analysis and unstructured interviews. This was done to ensure that our investigation was both broad

and deep. We were able to map the current knowledge landscape, identify major patterns, and reveal gaps within the discourse of academia courtesy of the literature analysis, which served as a critical foundation. This allowed us to place our investigation within the framework of prior studies. While this was going on, two semi-structured interviews were being carried out with personnel who had management positions at significant Romanian companies that operated in the energy sector. These offered a deep and in-depth perspective that could not be obtained through literature alone. They supplied nuanced and experiential insights straight from those who were closely associated with on a daily basis business procedures. With the help of this dual-method approach, a multifaceted investigation of the subject matter was made possible. This investigation incorporated the broad, contextual insights obtained from published studies with the specific, personal experiences.

3. Results and discussions

Interview no. 1

Based on the interviewee's answers, it is clear that their organization lacks a specialized Competitive Intelligence (CI) team, both internally and through an external firm. Furthermore, there are no immediate plans to build such a team in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, they recognize the exchange of confidential information by colleagues who have links in the market. The industry in which they operate is characterized as fiercely competitive, even inside a regulated market. The organization conducts competitor surveillance by analyzing market activity, and Competitive Intelligence (CI) studies have been valuable in comprehending their own and their rivals' market positioning, as well as identifying market trends. The organization lacks a systematic implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in decision-making or analysis, and there is no defined procedure for how AI contributes to the company's activities. However, it is recognized that there is a need for extra capabilities in competitive intelligence (CI) and artificial intelligence (AI) in order to analyze competitors more effectively. Confirmation is received regarding the collaboration with other departments or teams within the organization to successfully utilize competitive information. The organization conducts monthly evaluations of its performance relative to competitors and remains informed about industry developments and new competitors through regular updates.

Interview no.2

The interviewee indicates a progressive approach towards Competitive Intelligence (CI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) within their company. While there is currently no dedicated CI team, the organization is not excluding the establishment of such a team in the future, recognizing the value of structured competitive analysis. This forward-thinking stance is further demonstrated by their inclination to integrate AI into their analytical processes. The domain in which they operate is acknowledged as highly competitive, prompting a proactive stance in monitoring competitors' market behavior. The utility of CI reports in understanding market positioning and trends is underscored, with a particular emphasis on how AI could enhance this process by providing deeper insights and facilitating more informed decision-making. The organization currently engages in some form of competitive monitoring that benefits from informal intelligence sharing among colleagues with market insights, similar to the first company. The potential for AI is recognized not just in optimizing processes but in significantly contributing to the strategic analysis of competitors. Acknowledging the need for additional competencies in both CI and AI, the company is poised to harness these tools more effectively. Collaboration across departments for leveraging competitive information is already happening, suggesting a cohesive effort towards a more intelligence-driven culture. The company's commitment to staying competitive is evident in their performance evaluations against competitors and their efforts to keep abreast of industry trends and emerging competitors, with a keen interest in enhancing these activities through AI and a dedicated CI team in the future.

Narrative Analysis

Following an analysis of the interviews, important new perspectives on the artificial intelligence (AI) and competitive intelligence (CI) processes at two companies operating in very competitive, regulated sectors of energy in Romania come out. The first company has no specific CI team and no imminent plans to build one. On the other hand, the second company is open to the idea in the future even though it does not now have a CI team as it understands the possible benefits of using a methodical approach to competitiveness analysis. This difference highlights how differently the two companies show strategic forethought.

Both companies rely on unofficial channels of information exchange among employees with notable market knowledge. Although this strategy has

not been institutionalized through specialist teams or consistent procedures, it highlights the importance they give CI. Every company uses competition monitoring and routinely analyses market behaviors to gain understanding of both their own and their rivals' market orientation. Customary practices are regular monthly assessments and ongoing updates on industry developments, which helps these companies to keep updated about market trends and new competitors.

These businesses approach artificial intelligence rather differently. The first company has not yet decided how artificial intelligence (AI) improves analytical processes or decision-making. Conversely, the second company shows forward thinking by realizing how much artificial intelligence may help CI operations to be much improved. This proactive strategy shows a readiness to use artificial intelligence to obtain deeper industry insights and guide decisions.

To further examine their competitiveness, both companies agree that their artificial intelligence (AI) and competitive intelligence (CI) skills must be improved. The second company seems ready to welcome these innovations, which might provide a big strategic advantage as well as a market positioning edge. Both companies work across departments, suggesting a shared goal to effectively apply competitive knowledge. This cooperation gives hope for a developing intelligence-driven culture among these businesses.

4. Conclusions

The perceptive analysis conducted through a thorough examination of literature and Semi-structured interviews has shown the complex relationship between Competitive Intelligence (CI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in modern business strategies. Although there is no agreement on the exact definition of CI, the methodical and morally sound procedure of gathering, managing, and evaluating data has been adopted to different extents within the corporate domain. Both questioned entities acknowledge the intense competition in their respective industries and the value of competitive intelligence (CI) for strategic positioning. However, their levels of CI and artificial intelligence (AI) implementation vary in terms of maturity. One company recognizes the informal interchange of competitive intelligence among coworkers, but currently has no intentions to establish a dedicated competitive intelligence team or implement organized artificial intelligence. On the other hand, the second exhibit takes a forward-thinking approach, envisioning a future CI team and actively

investigating the use of AI into their analytical tools. These contrasting methods emphasize a mutual recognition of the advantages that CI and AI provide, indicating a shared goal of improving analytical abilities to strengthen market competitiveness. This endeavor is in line with internationally recognized standards, as demonstrated by the success of European and Asian companies in implementing ethical competitive intelligence techniques, and the use of specialized competitive intelligence departments and big data analytics by American businesses. Both interviews ultimately convey a crucial corporate sentiment: the unwavering pursuit to utilize CI and AI not only as practical tools, but as essential strategies that stimulate innovation, guide decision-making, and strengthen market leadership in an ever-changing economic environment.

Limitations

This analysis is based on insights from just two interviews, which may not fully represent each organization's comprehensive practices and perspectives on CI and AI. Additionally, these findings are specific to companies in highly competitive, regulated markets and may not apply universally. As CI and AI fields rapidly evolve, the recommendations provided here should be adaptable to new technologies and methodologies. Finally, the responses from the interviewees could reflect personal biases or limited knowledge of their organizations' complete CI and AI initiatives.

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Appendix

Interview questions:

1. What is your role/level in the organization?
2. At what level within the organization do you report?
3. What is the field of activity of your company?
4. Does your company have a dedicated Competitive Intelligence (CI) team, either from your own department or through a specialized firm?
5. Do you plan to form such a team?
6. How competitive do you consider the field in which you operate?
7. How does your company monitor the activity of competitors?
8. Can you provide an example of a scenario where market/competitor activity (CI) reports were useful to you? What is their impact?
9. Do you use elements of AI for information/analysis in decision-making?
10. How does AI contribute to the activities in the organization?
11. Do you need additional skills in CI and AI for competitor analysis?

Authors' biographies



Miruna PROȘCANU is currently pursuing a PhD at the PhD School of Cybernetics and Economic Statistics at Bucharest University of Economic Studies. The subject of her thesis is modelling financial electricity markets, including subtopics such as energy transition, sustainability, and the effectiveness of electricity consumption forecasts. She is an energy market enthusiast with a short experience of working in the public sector and a proven track record of working in the management of electricity procurement and trading in markets of national and international interest. Academically, her doctoral studies are preceded by a bachelor's degree in economic statistics and a master's degree in biostatistics. Her free time is dedicated to advocacy and education projects in the field of energy, sustainability, and psychology.

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