

Full Length Research Paper

Internationalization of Cameroonian small and middle enterprises (SMEs): Myth or reality?

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This article comes within the framework of the management challenges thematic associated with the internationalization of Small and Middle Enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries. The objective that we continue in this work is to identify - on the basis of an empirical study- the strategies developed by SMEs in Cameroon in order to ensure their success abroad and the factors explaining the choice of these strategies. The results of the empirical study show that Cameroonian SMEs have been undergoing important changes in their management practice. They offer their customers products tailored to their needs, practise competitive prices and use distribution networks involving local and communication facilities tailored to the requirements of the environment. They also make efforts to improve the quality of products, adapt products to customer requirements, modernize production tools, and use the persons responsible for carrying out specific tasks and improving business costs. This contrasts with the existing literature on Cameroonian SMEs. The results also show that these changes in the behaviour of Cameroonian SMEs are due to the perception of changes in the purchasing behaviour of consumers and sales, environmental constraints, the experiences of the company and its resources.

Key words: SME, internationalization, strategies, traditionalists, archaic.

INTRODUCTION

Work sessions on the internationalization of small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) are very numerous for people to keep being interested in this field. If we are proposing to write an article focused on the internationalization of Cameroonian SMEs today, it is because these SMEs present characteristics in the eyes of the existing literature. In fact, many authors (Kombou, 1998; Agro-PME, 1994; Agro-PME and CRETES, 1994) report that Cameroonian SMEs are characterized by: limited financial means, a low qualified labour, a low commercial power, an absence of research-development, a capacity of innovation almost non-existent, a low profitability, and a use of growing old and old-fashioned technologies compared to their competitors in other continents. In the same vein, Tchankam (2000) notes that the majority of Cameroonian SMEs' leaders fail to recognise modern technologies of management (accountancy, staff management, sales engineering, etc.), as well as – on a less formal and more pragmatic level – the multiple rational micro-procedures that allow a person in charge of an

economic unit to introduce in the SME or to improve rigour and effectiveness on a daily basis. Their management practices remain traditional, ignorant of the market constraints and of the company economy. They less call for the competences of counselling cabinets, except for chartered public accountant cabinets. The division of power, when it even exists, is always upset by badly controlled ambitions of the leader who does not understand that people resist the person who gave all their life to create their company. The “delegation of authority”, when done, is oriented towards the family members, without concern of the competences required for the execution of the work entrusted to them. On the level of financing, we notice that the businessperson's personal savings, the “tontine” resources and the loans/assistance of parents and/or friends are the main sources of financing. If we stick to the complexity of overseas markets, we would be tempted to conclude that Cameroonian SMEs are bound, if not to disappear in the context of globalisation, to play a local role. If they suddenly tried the adventure of internationalization, they would not hold out to it for a long time taking into account the requirements of this orientation

(internationalization). However, a survey by Djuatio (2004) shows that there are independent Cameroonian SMEs that entered the international scene and the companies of his sample had all at least ten years of activity at the international level. This situation, which seems paradoxical to our opinion, led us to seek what had determined their success at the international level.

In this perspective, it is yet proper to notice that several factors can explain the survival of a company on a given market. Overall, these factors can be gathered in two great groups: endogenous factors and exogenous factors. The endogenous factors are those developed by the company to ensure its competitiveness. It is the case with of good quality products supply competitive prices, the use of a distribution system and of a communication policy adapted to the environment requirements. All these elements result from the strategy developed by the company. Among the exogenous factors, we can make mention of the situation of monopoly, the insufficiency of the overall supply compared to the demand, the low level of competition, the environment way of life that pushes some purchasers to privilege the products of a given company to the detriment of the products of another because of the relation with the owner of the company. It is yet established that on overseas markets, competition between companies is much harder. This being, to be able to extricate itself, the company must be competitive. Thus, an SME can resist on overseas markets only if it develops suitable strategies of attack overseas markets. Cameroonian SMEs cannot be an exception to this rule. However, this work aims at identifying the strategies developed by Cameroonian SMEs to ensure their success abroad and the factors that explain the choice of these strategies. To achieve this goal, the hypothetical-deductive method will be used. Therefore, we shall start with the literature review that will analyze the different strategies that SMEs can take to achieve their international development and the factors that explain the choice of these strategies. This will lead to the statement of our research hypotheses. To verify these assumptions, data collection will be made from a sample of Cameroonian SMEs having foreign markets through a questionnaire. The data collected will be treated with flat sort of factor analysis and cross-tris and discussed to draw the appropriate conclusions. In this perspective, our work will be centred around four (4) points: (1) analysis of the strategies adopted by SMEs having foreign markets and their determinants, (2) the survey methodology adopted in our research, (3) the presentation of the main results of our investigation, and (4) discussion of these results.

Theoretical approach for SMEs' international development

We will analyze in turn the strategies developed by SMEs and the factors determining the choice of these strategies.

International SMEs' strategies

For a long time, the internationalization of SMEs was considered as a strategy of expansion of activities since the national market is no more able to ensure their development or to guarantee their survival. In this context, internationalization follows a strategic operation of specialization; SMEs are then seeking to find new markets on the basis of their current products (Saporta, 1986). However, recent researches tend to put this point of view into perspective (Etrillard, 2005; Bourcieu, 2005). Indeed, we find more and more SMEs that are international today since their creation and others which combine diversification with internationalization. This being, there are not any more strategies reserved for a category of enterprises. In this context, the strategies of a SME will depend on its aptitude to mobilize resources and to withdraw from the environmental constraint. This corroborates the idea of the strategy that we find at Desremaux (1993).

A critical reading of the literature indicates that SMEs develop their internationalization strategies in three (3) levels: strategic orientation (specialization, domination by costs, differentiation, diversification, vertical integration, chain strategy), the arrangements of international engagement (exporting, cooperative engagement, foreign direct investment) and the competitive advantage that is to say the positive attributes that differentiate a company or its product from its competitors in the eyes of its customers (product quality, prices levels, innovation, product adaptation, distribution arrangements, adapting the communication policy, listening quality, productivity). SMEs should effectively and efficiently combine these three (3) levels of the strategy to ensure their success abroad.

Differentiation versus competition and specialization are presented as the two main strategic orientation practised by SMEs (Paturel, 1997). These strategies appear most likely to create a potential for survival in a highly competitive environment. They allow the SMEs to have a sufficient ability to grow or remain on the market. According to Brechet (1996), this specialization of activity can be considered according to two methods: development by expansion on the basis of current trade, which applies ways based on commercial diversifications by a policy of customers or range, and focusing or strategy of niche – which consists in cutting off on an existing trade/mission couple – or a re-segmentation of the sector, which is creative of a new couple trade/mission within the framework of a development strategy. In this context of niche, SMEs stake on the differentiation of their products as a source of competitive advantage, and this, whatever their degree of international involvement may be. In this perspective, the nature of differentiation depends on the scope of commitment: firms rely on a reactive technical superiority of the product and high prices, in logic of profitability. SMEs with a more proactive in internationalization approach rely on a combination of factors focus

on quality, performance, innovation and competitive price (Joyal et al., 1997).

“Some authors (Ansoff, 1965; Thérin, 1995) consider the internationalization as a form of diversification. This geographical diversification is considered as a generic strategy as the business diversification. In contrast, Calori and Harvatopoulos (1988), Detrie et al. (1997) consider that diversification comes after the access to the market (based on a strategy of specialization and geographic expansion). In this perspective, the limited resources of SMEs explain the need for arbitration between international specialization and products diversification (Saporta, 1997), the simultaneous development of both strategies being difficult to withstand” (Bourcieu, 1995).

Recent works show that international SMEs also develop other generic strategies such as diversification, horizontal expansion, vertical integration and strategies of networks (Bourcieu, 2005). And much more, specialization is not incompatible with other strategic orientations, in particular the domination by costs and the differentiation of products as Patuere and Levet (1997) note. Moreover, differentiation rhymes with specialization and strategies of niches. In this context, SMEs use differentiation as a source of competitive advantage, whatever their degree of international commitment may be. From this point of view, the nature of differentiation varies according to the scope of involvement: reactive firms are based on a technical superiority of the product and high prices, in the logic of immediate profitability. SMEs that have a more proactive approach of internationalization stake on a combination of factors centred on quality, performance, innovation and a competitive price (Joyal et al., 1997).

All in all, specialization seems the privileged strategic orientation of international SMEs. Nevertheless, the other strategic orientations seem not very useful because of the difficulty to control the information and consequently, the knowledge of business opportunities on various markets and of the insufficiency of resources. They especially seem to relate to the entities having the sufficient resources not to be obliged to remain on one activity only. These strategic orientations then allow seeking synergies between activities, which must be concretized in terms of costs by savings in the field (Liouville and Nanopoulos, 1998), essential in a context of competition by costs. Thus, the environment is not seen as the only element permitting to retain a strategy since the company has the possibility of being efficient according to the fitting of its capacities and not according to a better strategic alignment. Besides, this is the point of view upheld by the defenders of environmental voluntarism. The perspective of environmental fatalism, considering the environment as a constraint, must be reconsidered for the benefit of the environmental emancipation, including a voluntarist approach for SME.

However, the authors who worked on the internationalization of SMEs report that these SMEs prefer the mar-

kets they perceive as culturally similar or close to their original markets, except perhaps for SMEs exerting in industry activities requiring little capital that can venture on psychologically or culturally distant markets (Hitt and Barkus, 1997). Zucchella (2000) notes that the strong presence of SMEs on overseas markets in the 90s was done notably in the form of export. Ramangalahy (2000) also considers that export constitutes the essential form of implication of SMEs in international market. It seems indeed that export, as a mode of entry, is appropriate for the capacities and resources of SMEs by giving them a great flexibility, a minimum incurring of resources and a limited exposure to risks. On this basis, the process of internationalization was often qualified as asymmetrical notably because of the strong commercial implication of SMEs on the international scale accompanying a strong local organization of other activities.

In this perspective, only when the SME gains experience abroad, it can afford to consider complex forms of internationalization (FDI). Since the 1990s, the academic literature and the Anglo-Saxon economic press have reported a new phenomenon observed in North America, Europe and Asia: more and more companies are becoming international early, from their inception or shortly thereafter. Classified as cases of “born global” (Rennie, 1993), “global start-ups” (Jolly et al., 1992; Oviatt and McDougall, 1995) or “international new ventures” (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994), these companies seek to competitively take advantage of the use of resources and the selling of their products in more countries. These companies create subsidiaries in production or marketing abroad in the early years of their existence, without acquiring experience abroad first. In this context, SMEs can overcome the lack of resources and experience by establishing partnerships with more experienced companies with sustained competitive advantages. They can also use the employees of the host country to facilitate their acceptance by the target.

In addition, Hitt and Barkus (1997) note that the SMEs which succeed better on overseas markets are those which adopt strategies of export based on geographical as well as activities concentration and which use organizational structures and managerial processes enabling them to obtain necessary pieces of information on markets in convenient time. This behaviour seems appropriate for SMEs given the weakness of their resources that prevent them from investing massively in research/development, as well as the weakness of their economies of scale. The works of Wolf and Pett (2000), however, tend to moderate these remarks. In fact, these authors think that it is indeed the smallest SMEs that adopt such behaviours through the exploitation of a specific basic skill. The largest have more diversified approaches of internationalization and in agreement with the extent of their skills. For Julien (1993) it is the most active SMEs on international market that diversify their markets gradually. In the same way, Fletcher and

Vyakarman (1999) stress that it is mostly the "size" of the image the leaders have concerning international business, or put in simpler words, it is these leaders' national or international orientation that influences their vision as for export and globalisation. In any case, the SME must see to it that it has a good quality /price ratio for a better protection against large enterprises' competitiveness. In addition, price plays a crucial role, though more or less determining, depending on the type of product and depending on the country. Price remains a considerable variable in Africa.

Overall, we can say that the choice of international strategies by an SME is no longer necessarily in sequence (as the acquisition of international experience). The most important for the SME is to choose the combination strategy, the mode of access to foreign sources and to develop competitive advantages, which will ensure its success abroad.

Determinants of choice of international strategies for SMEs

From the outset, the development of strategic management has included a deterministic view of the relationship between businesses and their environment. Chandler (1962) points out that "history shows that managers have never changed, unless exceptionally, their daily routine but under the influence of the most powerful pressures (...) both internal and external to the enterprise ". SMEs are particularly subject to the deterministic constraints of the competitive and structural environment. By nature, they have neither the resources nor the organization needed to address the constraints that the environment poses to their strategy. SMEs' sequential process for selecting strategic orientation (Saporta, 1997) is part of this deterministic modelling of strategies by the constraints external to the organization.

Advocates of the determinist approach think that the environment play a determining role in the strategies of SMEs. It reinforces the consideration of the environment in any type of strategic analysis. The role of the manager, who is sometimes regarded as the strategic main actor in the SME, finally occupies a secondary place vis -a-vis the requirements of environmental turbulence. The influence of environmental theory lies within three (3) schools of thought: the theory of contingency, the theory of population ecology and the configuration school of thought. In this perspective, the enterprise is primarily addressed in terms of constraints. It should adapt to the limits imposed by environment. It should therefore identify precisely the environment in which it operates in order to align its strategies and structures. Advocates of the theory of contingency consider that there is a constraint that the organization must match, particularly in terms of structural adjustment. Other wise, the company might not seize new opportunities; charges and survival would be threatened because it might not reach a sufficient level of

performance (Child, 1972). It therefore rejects the theory of "one best way" to a vision on which it identifies a specific context and a contingent solution. This relationship is widely developed by Configuration school of thought. Thus, Miller (1986) believes that the elements of strategy, structure and environment configure into malleable models useful in their predictability, which are characteristics of a large number of high-performance organizations. Relations are evaluated by three levels including the context, strategic and organizational options. In other words, for a given environment, there are a limited number of strategies and possible structures. If the company does not have the appropriate combination, it will experience a sharp decline in its performance. There are a couple of natural selection strategies - structure depending on the context. For proponents of population ecology, the environment is the central dimension of the selection population's process of organizations. The SMEs suffer the constraints of the environment in within where they evolve (Bourcieu, 2005). In that perspective, Hannan and Freeman (1977, 1984) consider the context of evolution as the fundamental element in the study of business, because managers formulate strategies to adapt to environmental contingencies.

To sum up, the determinists view that the strategy of SMEs must be consistent with its environment. Indeed, the SME is often seen as an organization unable to conduct a long-term planning to develop its strategic potential over a long period (Mathews and Scott, 1995; Marchesnay, 1993) . Therefore, this strategy is emerging strongly, subject to the environmental constraints.

In addition, many researchers report that SMEs seek their sources of competitiveness at the local level, whatever the level of expansion of their market may be (local, national, international). To that end, many original surveys show that the composition and the quality of the local economic environment are factors of success for the internationalization of SMEs (Fuguet et al., 1986). This environment can generate a particular strategic behaviour. In this respect, Leo (1993) notes that SMEs generally show a preference for their area of establishment for all the operations that constitute the hard core of the international activity, namely the transport-transit, the financing of export, the insurance of transport and the mobilization of the government aid. For Torres (2003), though competition has become global, competitiveness remains very often attached to local scale. This territorial attachment is particularly specific for SMEs: the composition and the quality of the local economic environment seem to be an advantage for low-size enterprises to open to the global environment. Competitive advantages can be conquered starting from a local dimension, not from a national dimension: the SME, whether being innovating, industrial or small-scale, managerial or family-run, can base its competitiveness on international markets based on a strong local integration. The territory would thus exert an active role in the insertion of SME on a total

level. The performances of SMEs at the international level would thus depend, at least partially, on the availability and the quality of local resources, because it is on this scale that they seek their resources first even when their activities extend beyond national borders.

Bolstered by the foregoing, we can formulate the following hypotheses:

H1- "the strategies of SMEs on overseas markets depend on the environment in which they evolve". This hypothesis gave place to two secondary hypotheses that is:

H.1.1- The quality local (national) environmental has an influence on the strategies of the SME having overseas markets.

H.1.2- The environmental constraints have an influence on the strategies of the SME having overseas markets.

Adopting to the determinist position, Saporta (1986) notes that SMEs that get involved in overseas markets are those that have chosen it as a specialization. Thus, as soon as the exploitation of the specialization strategy does not permit to ensure the SMEs's survival or development, internationalization and diversification can then be considered as possibilities of development. From this point of view, the international expansion of the SME follows the traditional diagram developed by the school of Uppsala (Johansson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975) . The SME starts initially with export before approaching more complex forms of internationalization (integrated methods of involvement).

Very often, the deterministic approach is privileged in the strategic analysis of the SME. However, with regard to either the conceptualization of environment or the strategic operations implemented, the SME can go beyond the simple passive observation and adopt an active position vis- à-vis its environment. It can adopt a voluntarism strategy positioning in strong adequacy or in opposition with the presumed needs of the environment, to highlight the quality of its resources and competences. In addition, the determinist approach, an essential element seems forgotten or too small: the role of manager. It implements the means to bring out the SME perspective purely determinist presented so far. It has specific purposes and can use the organization to achieve. His representation of the environment can change the relationships with the context and thus avoid the simple determinist vision (Guilhon, 1998). This is especially true that we can trace the origins of change in SMEs in the perception of environmental leadership and management style that will implement (Guilhon, 1994) . In addition, the aspirations of the manager of the SMEs are different from those of the managers of big businesses. For example, the profit can be relegated to a secondary role to emphasize the need for completion or continuation of the company. The interpretation of the SMEs can also take a highly proactive perception; the environment becomes less cumbersome

because the entrepreneur can bring its own action on the future of his company (Gueguen, 2001) . Therefore, Dollinger (1985) emphasizes the importance of the entrepreneur in environmental studies. The strategy of SMEs will be built according to its aspirations.

It is advisable all the same to note that in SMEs, leaders do not seem to proceed according to the traditional logic recommended by the professors of Harvard (Learned, Christensen and Guth) for the development of their companies' strategies. The strategies here are largely influenced by the contents of the leaders' representations of the contexts of their actions; contents related to their capacity to read the environment. Thus, the presuppositions of traditional approaches such as availability of information, predictability of the various scenarios of the environment and the company's evolution authorizing comparison and determination of the optimum, freedom to act in the phase of implementation, do not seem valid any more (Sylvestre, Goujet, 1996). The leaders of SMES, who are in the middle of the elaboration and the implementation of the strategy, do not consider the environment as a data but rather as a built-up area. The leader interprets the environment's constraints and requirements. "These are neither given, neither stable nor objective, they are thought under conditions of the action". He reacts to a problem perceived, recognized and understood through his past experience and his representations of his context of action (Sylvestre and Goujet, 1996). In this context, the concepts of strategic vision and intention of the leaders of SMES are particularly relevant to apprehend the specificity of these processes, because they permit to better consider the referential subjective system of decision of the owner -leader of SME. Taking into account the foregoing, we can formulate the following hypotheses:

H.2- The strategic vision of the manager of SMEs having overseas markets has an influence on the strategies used by this one to be maintained on the aforementioned markets.

Thus, when the manager perceives that the intensity of competition is strong, the variation on the behaviour of purchase and of sales is unfavourable for their company, and then do not allow it to be competitive any more, he develops strategies of survival. It is true that these strategies do not always allow the company to become or remain competitive. At least, the leader makes efforts towards the competitiveness of their enterprise. Therefore, there would not be any traditionalist enterprise. This being, when the performance of the SME worsens (turnover drops, profit drops, etc.), the manager starts wondering about the strategies they used and revise them consequently. From that moment, we can also say that the two phenomena are linked.

In addition, either in determinist approach or in the voluntarism perspective, the resources of SMEs and their skills should not be ignored on its internationalization

strategy. Indeed, in foreign markets, competition is tougher than national markets. However, the enterprise must make available to its customers with quality products obtained at a reasonable cost, if it wants to be competitive. However, improving product quality and cost control, whether on supply, production or distribution, requires; material, financial, human, and appropriate skills. The resources of the SMEs and their skills are its potentialities.

The potentialities of firms that considerably influence their strategic behaviour on overseas markets are the international experience of the company, the experience gained in the host country, the experience of the company in the activity concerned and its resources, among others.

Indeed, many authors notice that the internationalization of SMEs is accompanied by obstacles and constraints that have, at the same time, an objective aspect (limited resources, difficulties of access to information) and a psychological aspect (high perception of risk to export from the leader). A great number of SMEs disappointments to export are explained by this phenomenon. However, the happy counterpart of these negative aspects is that if the SME manages to overcome these obstacles, it will end up with an increased strength to face its domestic and external markets. These beneficial effects follow the following sequence: initially, the company improves its quality to adapt it to the requirements of international markets; generally, the international opening makes it to become aware of the importance of the problems of quality, this one being a fundamental weapon of defence against large enterprises. Secondly, this search for quality leads to an increased flexibility, both at the technological level (use of more varied manufacturing processes, resort to subcontracting) and at the commercial level (greater creativity in the markets strategies of attack, thorough knowledge of the distribution systems) (Saporta, 1986). It is thus understood that as an SME takes age on the international level, it becomes more skillful as regards the strategy of attack of international markets. We can thus say that internationalization is a true training school. Therefore, international experience cannot be neutral on the strategies of SMEs that have overseas markets.

In addition, each country is a particular experience taking into account the requirements specific to each environment that can be discovered only with time. This is particularly true for SMEs that generally use information of proximity, due to lack of means enabling them to constitute their own reliable database or to organize large-scale investigations. Thus, we understand that despite the company's experience on the international scene, the company must be careful when attacking a new market. In the same vein, the company's experience in a sector or line of business also has a role to play on the strategy of internationalization. In fact, as a task is repeated, the time necessary for its achievement decreases. Repeating

a task also permits to reduce waste and to improve the quality of products. Besides, it is in this sense that Torres (2000) notes that inscription in the duration as well as a strong accumulation of the production volume allow the company to profit from savings in training and to be up to competition on overseas markets.

At the level of the company resources, the capacity of production, the expertise, the financial standing and the human resources are fundamental in a strategy of internationalization. In fact, on overseas markets, competition is generally harder than on national markets. This being, the company must put at the disposal of its customers good quality products afforded at a reasonable cost, if it wants to be competitive. However, the qualitative improvement of products and the control of costs – even if they were for provisioning, production or distribution – require suitable material, financial and human means.

With regard to resources, their analysis can be done through the resources approach, the eclectic paradigm and approach of contingency. According to resources approach, the international development of enterprises depends on the resources and expertise they can mobilize (Hamel and Prahalad, 1990; Arrègle, 2000). The ownership of these resources is a source of sustainable competitive advantages for SMEs. That is why many authors conclude that the success and development of a business depends on effective management of its resources (Barney, 1991; Teece et al., 1997; Laghzaoui, 2006; Beamish and Dhanaraj, 2003). The eclectic paradigm developed by Dunning (1988, 2001, 2002) supports the resources approach. It states that the enterprise with competitive advantages in the ownership and management of resources or skills can compromise on foreign markets without passing through the linear process described by Bilkey and Tesar (1977) or Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975). These resources and skills are exploited in intentional and finalized actions where they are built and enriched by learning by doing in order to achieve better performance. For proponents of the contingency approach, human resources must align with other contingency factors of the enterprise and particularly with its development strategy to be effective. This alignment leads to better performance. This link between strategy and resources and skills of the enterprise leads us to formulate the following hypothesis.

H.3- The potentialities of SMEs having overseas markets have a positive influence on their strategic choices.

In all, the choice of the strategies by international SMEs depends on the quality of the national (local) environment, the environmental constraints, the strategic vision of their leaders, and their potentials.

For others, we understand that there are several explanations of the process of internationalization of SMEs. According to the strategic orientation chosen by the com-

pany, according to its potentialities, its environment, the strategic vision of its leader, the SME will be able to be internationalized by small steps or else move up the ladder very quickly to adopt complex forms of internationalization as soon as the first years of its existence. Moreover, to be competitive, SMEs will have to offer good quality products, adapted to the requirements of the environment, at competitive prices. Consequently, they must use distribution systems and communication policies adapted to the requirements of the target markets. It is in that way that they can be efficient.

METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION AND DATA PROCESSING

To analyze the strategies developed by Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets and identify factors explaining the choice of these strategies, we opted for a quantitative analysis. We therefore conducted a questionnaire survey. For the purpose of this investigation, we consider as a Cameroonian SME with foreign markets, any company with 10 to 250 employees, formally constituted (that is registered at the Commercial Registry) and financially independent, whatever its activity may be and whoever carries out, either directly or indirectly, production and/or marketing operations beyond the national borders. For the selection of companies in our sample, we have adopted the empirical method. Thus, the questionnaires were distributed to 83 Cameroonian SMEs with foreign markets.

For the data collection, we addressed the principal leaders of the companies (the general managers or equivalent). Hence, we combined indirect administration and direct administration of our questionnaires. Initially, we deposited the questionnaires in the companies involved and we arranged appointments to have back the aforementioned questionnaires duly filled out. At the time of the appointments, some leaders would not have filled out their questionnaires yet. Among these leaders, some would ask that we filled them together. Therefore, we made an indirect administration of the questionnaires to the leaders who chose this method. The administration of questionnaires was conducted from March to December 2006 in preparation for a doctorate. We carried it out to take note of comments from leaders who could complete their answers.

Out of eighty-three (83) questionnaires that we distributed, we recovered forty-seven (47). In these forty-seven (47), six were not exploitable because they were partially filled. Thus, at the end of the operation of collecting information, we found ourselves with forty-one (41) exploitable questionnaires, that is a 49.40% rate of answers.

For the treatment of data, we used the sorting flat, the factor analysis of variables of the study, the Correlation of Spearman and regression analysis to explain the link between explained variable and the explanatory variables. Sorting flat serves to present the results of the survey, in absolute values or percentages for each question. Factor analysis aims at reducing the number of items measuring a variable in order to retain only the most significant. The factors identified summarize all items used for factoring. The Correlation of Spearman analysis permits to identify the relation between two ordinales variables. It is used to identify the relation between the dependent variable and the components of explanatory variables. The technique of multiple regression helps to describe the connection between the dependent or explained variable (strategies of SMEs with foreign markets) and the set of explanatory variables (strategic vision of the leader, the quality of the local environment, environmental constraints, potential of the business). It is used when we want to describe the connection between the dependent variable and more one explanatory varia-

bles. According to Tenenhaus (1979), we can use it when the dependent variable and the explanatory variables are ordinales.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION TO THE LEADERS OF CAMEROONIAN SMES HAVING OVERSEAS MARKETS

These results are analyzed by variable.

Analysis of the strategies of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets

In this paragraph, we will highlight Table 3 gives the policy of products of the company, the Table 4 gives the price policy of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets, the table 5 gives the commercial relays used by the company, the table 6 gives the means of communication used by the company, the Table 7 gives the policy of improvement of the competitive advantage, and the Table 8 gives the results of the factorization of the strategies of the company.

For the assessment of strategic orientations of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets, each respondent was asked to choose between "strongly agree", "Disagree", "Neutral", "Agree", "Absolutely agree" according to what his enterprise does. Then, he should identify the main strategic orientations of his enterprise. Considering this last logic, it is clear from Table 1 that the main part of the SMEs of our sample develops strategies of niche. Indeed, 56% of the SMEs of our sample chose this orientation as an axis of priority development. These dominant strategic orientations do not exclude the implementation of other orientations. Thus, the SMEs that chose the strategies of niche also practise differentiation, but this one is secondary in their case. This result fits in with the traditional analyses (Saporta, 1986; Liouville and Nanopoulos, 1998) which associate very closely specialization with the international expansion of SMEs, though there is approximately 44% of SMEs that prioritize the other strategic orientations. So, 22% of the SMEs chose the Partnership (vertical partnership or alliance), 12,2% chose the Differentiation, 4,9% chose the Diversification, and 4,9% chose the Domination by costs.

As for the strategic orientation, to assess the form of activities that SMEs in our sample conduct beyond national borders, each respondent was asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the proposals of each table above. To obtain the results of Table 2, we considered enterprises whose managers have chosen "Agree" or "strongly agree". The results show that Cameroonian SMEs have a small degree of internationalization. Indeed, approximately 78% of the companies are limited to export (either direct or indirect) which is the first step in international expansion. Only 22% of these SMEs have production structures abroad.

These results confirm the work of Hitt and Barkus

Table 1. Dominant strategic orientations of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets

Items	Numbers	%
Partnership (vertical partnership or alliance)	9	22.0
Domination by costs	2	4.9
Differentiation	5	12.2
Strategies of niche	23	56.1
Diversification	2	4.9
Total	41	100.0

Table 2. Form of activity carried out by the company beyond the national borders

Items	Numbers	%
Direct exportation only	10	24.4
Indirect exportation only	6	14.6
Direct and indirect exportation depending on the country	16	39.0
Production in integrated structures and marketing	9	22.0

Table 3. Policy of products of the company.

Items	Numbers	%
The company sells the same products everywhere	25	61.0
The company sells the products adapted to the markets	41	100
The company slightly modifies its products	2	4.9
The company sells products different from those sold in Cameroon	0	0.0

(1997), Zucchelli (2000) and Ramangalahy (2000).

In assessing the policy of products of SMEs in our sample, each respondent was asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each of the proposals contained in Table 3. To obtain the results recorded in Table 3, we considered that a company conducting a policy whose manager choose "Agree" or "strongly agree". Following this logic, it appears that the main part of the companies of our sample does not modify their products to sell them abroad. They sell on each market the products adapted there. For some companies such a situation can be explained by the fact that their products are standardized and thus do not need adaptation to specific markets. For others, the explanation is in the fact that they attack especially markets geographically and psychologically close or in the absence of innovation.

Regarding the price policy, the results of Table 4 indicate that the majority of Cameroonian SMEs having over-

seas markets bring into line their selling prices with those of the competitors. In fact, 61% of the interviewed SMEs share this opinion against 37% undecided and 2% that disapprove this option. The prices therefore practised cover the costs and a variable margin depending on the markets and the categories of purchasers. This situation can be justified by the absence of a real differentiation.

We also notice that none of the companies of our sample practises the same selling price everywhere. This situation seems quite logical because even if the company brings into line its selling prices with those of competition, it is obvious that for a given product the selling price cannot be the same whatever the market on which it is sold. Elements such as transport costs can introduce differences between the prices

To assess the distribution policy of SMEs in our sample, each respondent was asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each of the proposals contained in Table 5. For the results reported in this Table 5, we considered that an enterprise has such commercial relay if its manager chooses "Agree" or "strongly agree". Following this logic, it appears that the same company can use several types of commercial relays. The results of this show that the great majority of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets mainly sell off their products on the aforementioned markets via the importers/distributors (54%), the commercial subsidiary companies using premises (49%) or local representatives employees (49%). It should be noted all the same that

the proportion of the companies using joint ventures is not insignificant because 24% of companies use this way. These four ways very often permit the companies to circumvent the resistance of the target markets to their products because they imply premises in distribution.

The various items used to assess the political communication of SMEs in our sample were assessed on a Likert scale to five (5) dimensions, namely: "Never", "Seldom", "Sometimes", "Often", "Always". To get the results recorded in the Table 6 above, we considered that a company uses a given means of communication when its manager chooses "often" or "Always". The results show that means of communication used by the interviewed companies are very varied. We gathered them in five (5) groups: booklet/posting/press, fairs/exhibitions, radio/television, word of mouth, Internet. These means are not exclusive. This is why we did not provide a line for total. In our Table 6, one notes a clear prevalence of the "word of mouth" which is used by all the companies. Indeed, 61% uses the booklet/posting/press, 49% uses the fairs/exhibitions, 59% uses the radio/television, 100% uses the word of mouth, and 49% uses the Internet. This diversity of means of communication used is an asset because it permits to reach people as much as possible.

In addition, the majority of the companies of our sample use the same means of communication everywhere because 76% of the interviewed companies share this opinion. This shows that Cameroonian SMEs practise little a

Table 4. Price policy of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets

Items	Methods						Total	
	Do not agree		Neutral		Agree		Numbers	%
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	Numbers	%		
Prices brought into line with those of the competitors	1	02.4	15	36.6	25	61.0	41	100.0
Prices Fixed from real costs to which a fixed margin is added	41	100.0	00	00.0	00	00.0	41	100.0
Prices fixed from real costs to which a variable margin is added	00	00.0	16	39.0	25	61.0	41	100.0
Prices variable depending on the categories of purchasers	02	04.9	14	34.1	25	61.0	41	100.0
Use of the same prices everywhere	41	100.0	00	00.0	00	00.0	41	100.0

Table 5. Commercial relays used by the company

Items	Numbers	%
Distribution ensured by commercial subsidiary companies using premises	20	48.8
Distribution ensured by commercial subsidiary companies worrying little about the use of premises	00	00.0
Distribution ensured by local representatives employees	20	48.8
Distribution ensured by representatives employees of other nationalities	00	00.0
Distribution ensured by importers/distributors	22	53.7
Distribution ensured by sales agents	7	17.1
Distribution ensured by companies created in joint-venture	10	24.4
Distribution ensured by Cameroonian companies within the framework of piggy-back agreement	04	09.8

Table 6. Means of communication used

Items	Numbers	%
Booklet/Posting/Press	25	61.0
Fairs/Exhibitions	20	48.8
Radio/Television	24	58.5
Word of mouth	41	100.0
Internet	20	48.8
Use of the same means of communication everywhere	31	75.6

little a differentiated policy of communication.

To grasp the efforts to improve the competitive advantages of the SMEs of our sample, we used questions for which the respondents were invited to choose between "Not at all", "Seldom", "Sometimes", "Often" and "Always" depending on what their company actually do. For the data processing, the first two propositions were replaced by "Seldom" and the last two by "Often".

The results of Table 7 show that Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets make efforts to improve their competitive position. More than 56% of the interviewed

SMEs think that they make efforts to improve their costs, 44% think that they make efforts to adapt their products to the needs of customers, 46% think that they make efforts to improve their selling prices to make them competitive, 46% think that they make efforts to adapt the distribution systems to the requirements of the environment, 44% think that they adapt to technology evolution, and 51% of the interviewed companies maintain that they make efforts to exchange information with partners. All these results go together and show that contrary to the idea that people have of Cameroonian SMEs in general,

Table 7. Policy of improvement of the competitive advantage

Items	Methods						Total	
	Seldom		Sometimes		often		Numbers	%
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%	Numbers	%		
Frequency of efforts of the company to improve the costs	02	04.9	16	39.00	23	56.1	41	100.0
Frequency of efforts to adapt the products to the customers' needs	05	12.2	18	43.9	18	43.9	41	100.0
Frequency of efforts to improve the prices to make them competitive	4	09.8	18	43.9	19	46.3	41	100.0
Frequency of efforts to adapt the distribution system to the environment requirements	10	24.4	12	29.3	19	46.3	41	100.0
Frequency of efforts to adapt the communication policy to the environment requirements	09	22.0	14	34.1	18	43.9	41	100.0
Frequency of efforts to adapt to technological evolution	08	19.5	15	36.6	18	43.9	41	100.0
Efforts to exchange information with partners	05	12.2	15	36.6	21	51.3	41	100.0

Table 8. Factorization of the strategies of the company

Items	Loadings	Communalities
Prices fixed from real costs to which a variable margin is added	0.796	0.633
Prices varying depending on the categories of purchasers	0.869	0.755
Distribution ensured by commercial subsidiary companies using premises	0.782	0.611
Distribution ensured by importers/distributors established in the host country	0.875	0.766
Frequency of efforts of the company to improve the costs	0.862	0.743
Frequency of efforts to adapt products to customers' needs	0.904	0.817
Frequency of efforts to improve prices to make them competitive	0.893	0.798
Frequency of efforts to adapt the distribution system to the requirements of the environment	0.934	0.872
Frequency of efforts to adapt communication policy to the requirements of the environment	0.943	0.890
Frequency of efforts to adapt to technological evolution	0.907	0.823
Efforts to exchange information with partners	0.907	0.823

those that have overseas markets became aware of the need for making themselves competitive. This tendency can be justified by the stressing of competition and the concern for remaining competitive. This corroborates the idea that some have (Sammot and Torres, 1997) that is internationalization is a true school of management.

In all, we notice through the results of our investigation that Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets give a major importance to the quality of products, the progressive adaptation of the products to the needs of customers, to the improvement of costs and prices, to the ratio quality/price. The means mobilized for this purpose are the political and social implication of the leader, the progressive adaptation to technological evolution, the use of varied means of communication (press/posting, radio/television, Internet, fairs/exhibitions), the improvement of the distribution system, the improvement of costs and

prices, the information exchange with partners. The mobilization of these strategies is due in particular to the development of an enterprise spirit with the meaning of "Bearing": product valuation, price policy, quality /price ratio, etc.

After this first analysis of the strategies of Cameroonian SMEs involved in overseas markets based on simple tabulation, we determined the index of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) (The index of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) is the ratio of the sum of squared correlations with the sum of squared partial correlations. It is between 0 and 1. A fairly high KMO (> 0.6) ensures that the partial correlations are not too significant compared with simple correlations. As a result, the items used in the analysis can be factored) and carried out the test of sphericity of Bartlett (Bartlett's test of sphericity is to compare the correlation matrix XoX with identity (no correlation between varia-

bles) using an X^2 test. A high value with a meaning close to 0 will not reject the overall correlation of variables, ie, it ensures that the variables are sufficiently correlated to allow a significant reduction in size. This is a prerequisite for factor analysis). The KMO Index obtained is 0.783. This is satisfying. The test of Bartlett (Chi-Square close to 1005.803; 300 for the degree of freedom and 0.000 for significance) is significant. These two tests show that the data can be submitted to a factorial analysis. To carry out the factorial analysis, we excluded the items that have a null variance. Henceforth, we retained only one factor to allow further analyses.

At the end of the analysis by principal components, we short-listed eleven items out of the thirty-eight used. Each of these items contributes well to the formation and interpretation of the single factor that we short-listed for the continuation of the analysis. This factor has a characteristic value of 12.670 and justifies 50.682% of the variance. Thus, we will use this factor as a representative variable of the strategy to carry on our analysis.

The Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach's (alpha) is a statistic. It has an important use as a measure of the reliability of a psychometric instrument. It was first named "alpha" by Cronbach (1951), as he had intended to continue with further instruments. It is the extension of an earlier version, the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (often shortened to KR-20), which is the equivalent for dichotomous items. Guttman (1945) developed the same quantity under the name lambda-2. Cronbach's is a coefficient of consistency and measures how well a set of variables or items measures a single, unidimensional latent construct). calculated on the constitutive items of this factor is 0.9694. This value is excellent. It shows that this factor has a good internal cohesion. It also shows that the respondents understood well the difference between the various items submitted to their appreciation.

Analyses of factors defining the strategies of Cameroonian SME having overseas markets

We noted earlier that the strategies of SMEs having overseas markets depend on several factors. It is the case of the environment, the strategic vision and intention of the leader, the efficiency and the potentialities of the company. These various variables will be analyzed in the following paragraphs.

Analysis of the environment of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets

Eleven (11) items were used to grasp the environment of Cameroonian SME having overseas markets. These are the problem of language or illiteracy of some customers, the out-of-customs administrative operations of the host countries, the customs administrative operations of the host country, the social constraints in the host country, the political constraints in the host country, the cultural

distance, the access of Cameroonian SMEs to the bank credits, the existence of Cameroonian companies willing to ensure the sale of products of Cameroonian SMEs abroad, the access to assistance from the Government or a Cameroonian public organisation, the access to assistance from Cameroonian private organisations, the access to assistance from foreign organisations, the nature of the assistance obtained by Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets. The first six (6) items were assessed on the Likert scale with five (5) dimensions namely: "Is not an obstacle", "Is a weak obstacle", "Is an average obstacle", "Is a high obstacle", "Is a very high obstacle". The seventh item is also assessed on the Likert scale with five (5) dimensions which are "Not at all easy", "Not very easy", "Fairly easy", "Rather easy", "Very easy". The eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh items were assessed by "Never," "Seldom", "sometimes", "Often", "Always".

We carried out the KMO test and the Bartlett's on these various items. The first test gives us a precise measurement of the sampling of 0.749. This value is considered to be moderate. As for the second test, it gives us a chi-two close to 364.708 for 55 degrees of freedom and a significance of 0.000. These two tests hence show that the various items that form the dimension "environment" can be used for a factorial analysis. The latter gives the following results.

At the beginning, we thought that the dimension "Environment" was one-dimensional. The analysis by main components that we have just carried out shows that it is a multidimensional dimension. After a "Varimax rotation" (Varimax rotation is a change of coordinates used in principal component analysis that maximizes the sum of the variance of the loading vectors. That is, it seeks a basis that most economically represents each individual such that each individual can be well described by a linear combination of only a few basis functions. Felix suggested by Henry Kaiser in 1958, it is a popular scheme for orthogonal rotation which cleans up the factors as follows: "for each factor, high loadings (correlations) will result for a few variables; the rest will be near zero") with a Kaiser standardization in 3 iterations we were left with two factors. In addition, we eliminated two items because their loading and their communality were weak. The factor analysis of the items used to capture the SME environment of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets has identified two factors. The first factor includes: "Problem of language or illiteracy of some customers", "Out-of-customs administrative operations", "Customs operations", "Social constraints in the host country", "Political constraints in the host country", "Cultural distance", and "Access of SMEs to credits". The second factor includes: "Public assistance to enterprises", and "Private assistance to enterprises". The two factors selected justify 73% of the total inertia. The first factor will be called "Environmental constraints" and the second will be called "Assistance to enterprises".

The two factors have a good cohesion taking into consideration their Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 9. Factorial analysis of the elements of the environment.

Variables	Factors		Communalities
	1	2	
Problem of language or illiteracy of some customers	0.900		0.824
Out-of-customs administrative operations	0.904		0.819
Customs operations	0.788		0.629
Social constraints in the host country	0.780		0.677
Political constraints in the host country	0.885		0.800
Cultural distance	0.916		0.841
Access of SMEs to credits	0.823		0.759
Public assistance to enterprises		0.953	0.914
Private assistance to enterprises		0.766	0.590
Specific value	5.446	2.556	-
% of justified variance	49.506	23.232	-
% of cumulative justified variance	49.506	72.739	-
Cronbach Alpha	0.9397	0.7698	-

Analysis of the potentialities of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets

Seven (7) items were used to grasp the potentialities of SMEs having overseas markets. They are the following items: "To have an excellent financial capacity to support the enterprise's activity vis-à-vis the competition", "To have good polyglot negotiators and trained to commercial techniques", "To have a legal council on international business", "To have human resources able to support the enterprise's development", "To have a sufficient technological capacity to face competition", "Experience in the domain of activity", "International experience". For the first five (5) items, each respondent had to give mark starting from 1 to 5. This mark must correspond to the position their company occupies. For the last two (2) items, the respondents had the choice between five age brackets. For the processing of the first five (5) items, we summarized the five marks in three positions: "Weakness" for the marks 1 and 2, "Average" for the mark 3, and "Strength" for the marks 4 and 5. For items six and seven, we have replaced the age less than 5 years by "Inferior", age "6 - 10", "11 - 15" and 16 - 20" by "Mode-rate" and "More than 20 years" with "Superior". We applied the tests of precision of the KMO sampling and that of sphericity of Bartlett to these various items. These tests gave a precision measurement of the KMO sampling of 0.649 and a khi-two close to 110.062 for 21 degrees of freedom and a precision of 0.000. This shows that our items can be factorized. The results of factorization are presented in Table 9. As this Table 9, the factorial analysis carried out on the seven (07) items that we short-listed to grasp the competences of the enterprises of our sample led us to highlight two factors. well represented at the level of two factors and each of them take part in the formation of the factor to which it is associated

taking into consideration their loading and their communality. The first includes the following items: "Quality of human resources of the enterprise", "Technological capacity of the enterprise", "Quality of the negotiators of the enterprise" and "Quality of the legal advisers of the company on international business". The second factor includes the following items: "Experience of the enterprise in the field" and "Experience of the enterprise in international business". The two factors highlighted contribute for more than 67% to the total inertia. Each of them has a good internal cohesion. The first factor is called "Resources of the enterprise". As for the second factor, it takes the name of "Experience of the enterprise". The two factors have each a good internal cohesion as their Cronbach's Alpha are high. One item was eliminated during this analysis. That is the "Financial capacity of the enterprise". The other items are well represented at the level of two factors and each of them take part in the formation of the factor to which it is associated taking into consideration their loading and their communality. The two factors highlighted contribute for more than 67% to the total inertia. Each of them has a good internal cohesion. The first factor is called "Resources of the enterprise". As for the second factor, it takes the name of "Experience of the enterprise".

Analysis of the strategic vision of the leaders of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets

Eight (8) items were used to grasp the vision of the leaders of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets. There are the perceived intensity of competition, the level of turbulence in the national environment of the enterprise, the level of turbulence in the international environment of the enterprise, the perception of the appearance rate of new competing products, the determining factors

Table 10. Factorization of the potentialities of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets

Items	Factors		Communalities
	1	2	
Quality of human resources of the enterprise	0.789		0.817
Technological capacity of the enterprise	0.765		0.717
Quality of the negotiators of the enterprise	0.716		0.598
Quality of the legal advisers of the enterprise on international business	0.712		0.612
Experience of the enterprise in the field		0.880	0.789
Experience of the enterprise in international business		0.870	0.756
Specific value	2.607	2.058	-
% of justified variance	37.238	29.394	-
% of cumulative justified variance	37.238	66.632	-
Cronbach Alpha	0.7288	0.8046	-

of the purchasers' choice, the perception of the variation of the customers' behaviour of purchase with regard to the products of the enterprise, the perception of the variation of the enterprise's sales on markets, the perception of new technologies appearance in the enterprise's sector of activity, and the priority axis of development considered. The first four items were assessed on the Likert scale with five dimensions: "Very weak", "Weak", "Average", "Rather high", and "Very high". Determinants of the choice of buyers have been evaluated through "The Price", "Product quality", "The robustness of the product" and "The value for money". Each of the respondents were asked to assess the importance of each element in the decision to purchase the client using "Not at all important", "No significance", "Averagely important", "Somewhat important" and "very important". The perception of changes in purchasing behavior of customers towards the SME's products and the perception of changes to SME sales market were assessed by "Not at all favorable", "No significance", "Averagely favorable", "moderate" and "very favorable". The eighth item was rated by "Not at all fast", "Slowly fast", "Fairly fast", "Fast Enough" and "very fast". We applied the tests of precision of the sampling of KMO and that of sphericity of Bartlett to these different items. These tests gave a precision measurement of the KMO sampling of 0.603, a khi-two close to 69.276 for a degree of freedom of 36 and a significance of 0.000. This shows that these items can be factorized. The factorization of these items gives the results contained in Table 10. These results show that the vision of the leaders is a multidimensional concept that can be broken up into three factors. The loadings obtained at the end of this factorial analysis (coefficients of correlation between the initial variables and the factor) are high. Thus, the variables that constitute a factor contribute perfectly to its formation and its interpretation. Moreover, they are well represented in the level of three factors because their communalities are high. Factor 1 is composed of the "Perception of the turbulence of natio-

nal environment", the "Perception of the turbulence of international environment", the "Perception of appearance of new technologies in the activity field" and the "Perception of appearance of new competing products". The Cronbach's Alpha associated with this factor is 0.6537. This is greater than the acceptable minimum and shows that the internal cohesion of the factor is good. We will call this factor "Turbulence of the environment".

Factor 2 is composed of the "Perception of the variation of the customers' behaviour of purchase towards the products of the enterprise", and the "Perception of the variation of the enterprise's sales on overseas markets". The Cronbach's Alpha of these two items is 0.6544. This shows that they measure the same. We will call this factor "Perception of the variation of purchase and sales behaviours".

Factor 3 gathers "the perceived intensity of competition", and the "Determining factors of the purchasers' choice". The Cronbach Alpha associated with this factor is 0.6613. It will be called "Intensity of competition and determinants of the purchasers' choice". We will use these three factors to carry on our work.

We thus have just finished off the first stage of our work. The Cronbach Alpha obtained is satisfactory. This shows that the various factors have a good internal cohesion and that the respondents have perfectly established a distinction between the different items that were submitted to them. Thus, we can consider that our measuring instruments are reliable. We can now test our hypotheses of research, interpret the principal results obtained, and present the implications of our research.

Test of the hypotheses related to the connections between the strategies of SMEs having overseas markets and their determinants

The aim of these tests of hypotheses is to check the existence of significant relation between the strategies used by SMEs having overseas markets and the various

Table 11. Matrix of the principal components of the leaders' vision

Items	Factors			Communalities
	F1	F2	F3	
Level of turbulence in the national environment of the enterprise	0.810			0.733
Perception of the appearance rate of new competing products	0.631			0.538
Perception of appearance of new technology in the field of activity	0.702			0.677
Level of turbulence in the international environment of the enterprise	0.608			0.579
Perception of the variation of the customers' behaviour of purchase towards the products of the enterprise		0.852		0.729
Perception of the variation of the enterprise's sales on overseas markets		0.803		0.677
Determining factors of the purchasers' choice : price			0.799	0.674
Determining factors of the purchasers' choice : Quality of product			0.832	0.712
Determining factors of the purchasers' choice : The value for money			0.719	0.759
Perceived intensity of competition			0.832	0.756
Determining factors of the purchasers' choice : Robustness of the product			0.780	0.639
Specific value	1.993	1.921	1.766	-
% of justified variance	22.154	21.346	19.629	-
% of cumulative justified variance	22.154	43.500	63.129	-
Cronbach Alpha	0.6537	0.6544	0.6613	-

variables we identified as having an influence on the aforementioned strategies. These variables are the strategic vision of the SME's leader, the potentialities of the SME and the environment of the SME. For this test of hypotheses, we used correlations analyses and multiple regressions. In all the cases, the null hypothesis here is the absence of correlation that is, the facets highlighted do not significantly justify the variance in the strategies of SMEs having overseas markets.

Tests of the hypotheses H1, H1.1, H1.2

According to hypothesis H1, "the strategies of SMEs on overseas markets depend on the environment in which they evolve". As we noticed earlier, this hypothesis gave place to two secondary hypotheses namely:

H.1.1- The quality of local (national) environment has an influence on the strategies of the SME having overseas markets.

H.1.2- Environmental constraints have an influence on the strategies of the SME having overseas markets.

The tests of these hypotheses provide the results contained in the Table 11.

We note at the end of this Table 11 that only one of the two facets of the environment is significantly associated with the variable "strategies of SMEs having overseas markets". That is the dimension "Environmental constraints" with a coefficient of Spearman correlation of -0.462, significant at the threshold of 0.01. The multiple regression with the two components of the environment provides a coefficient of regression R of 0.466 that is a

coefficient of determination R² of 0.217. The added value of the test F is 5.263. This test is significant at the threshold of 0.01. In conclusion, we can say that the hypothesis H1 is checked.

In conclusion, we can say that the hypothesis H1 is verified. This shows that the environment for SMEs with Cameroonian foreign markets influence their strategic choices. This result provided by Mathews and Scott (1995) and Marchesnay (1993).

Hypotheses relating to the connection between the variable "Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets" and the strategic vision of the leaders (Hypotheses H2)

Within the framework of the relation between the strategic vision of the leader and the strategies of SMEs having overseas markets, we formulated the following hypothesis: The strategic vision of the leader of the SME having overseas markets has an influence on the strategies used by the enterprise to maintain itself on the aforementioned markets. The related Spearman correlations provide the results contained in Table 12. These results of the Spearman correlations reveal that only the dimension "Perception of the variation of purchases and sales behaviours" is significantly related to the "Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets". The two other facets of the leader's vision do not have a significant bond with the "Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets". At this level of the analysis, we can conclude that our hypothesis H2 is partially confirmed. However, such a conclusion does not take into account the vision of the leader of the SME at the total level. It is thus advisable to take account of the simultaneous role of the three facets of the vision

Table 12. Spearman correlations between the strategies of SMEs having overseas markets and their environment

PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS OF THE ENTERPRISE'S ENVIRONMENT	STRATEGIES OF SMEs HAVING OVERSEAS MARKETS
Environmental constraints	-0.462**
Quality of local environment	-0.0593 (NS)

** = the correlation is significant on level 0.01 (bilateral). NS = Non significant.

of the leader of the SME in order to look at the total adjustment. Henceforth, it is necessary to use the multiple regressions.

The analysis of regression gives us a coefficient of multiple correlation of 0.343, that is to say an R^2 of 0.118. The value of the test F calculated is 1.644. This test is not significant. These results show that the total adjustment is not satisfactory. It happens thus that the perception of the variation of purchases and of sales behaviours has a significant influence on the "Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets". Hence, when the leader perceives that the customers' behaviours of purchase become unfavourable to the enterprise, or whereas the sales decrease or will decrease, they seek resources and develop actions allowing their company to improve and to ensure its survival. It is intentionally that the leaders of SMEs who perceived a variation of the customers' behaviour of purchase and of sales unfavourable for their companies, and who estimated that the companies will not be able to face the variation, taking into account the level of their resources, tied partnerships with other stronger companies. Other enterprises modernized their production equipment to improve the quality of their products and to reduce their production costs, and thus to manage practising competitive prices. Of course, it is understood that the products quality, the selling prices practised and the quality/price ratio are regarded as being the main determinants of the purchasers' choice. The results obtained hence suggest that the strategies developed by SMEs are justified at least partly by the threats perceived by the leaders. This is about a mental representation of reality, of a perception that can be different from reality.

Hypotheses related to the connection between the potentialities of SMEs having overseas markets and their strategies

The hypothesis H3 suggests that the potentialities of SMEs having overseas markets have a positive influence on their strategies. The tests results of this hypothesis are contained in the Table 13. These results show that one of the two facets of the enterprise's potentialities has a significant connection with the "Strategies of SMEs on overseas markets". That is the dimension "Experience of the enterprise". At this stage of the analysis, we can be tempted to conclude that the hypothesis H3 is partially confirmed especially as the correlation that is not signi-

ficant does not even go in the direction considered by our hypothesis.

The results of the multiple regression analysis show a coefficient of multiple correlation R of 0.398, that is a coefficient of determination R^2 of 0.158. This regression is satisfactory because the value of the test F calculated, which here is of 3.571, is significant, with a significance of 0.038. Thus, the total adjustment is good. We can then conclude that the hypothesis H3 is confirmed. Hence, we have just carried out the tests of the various hypotheses that we had formulated. At the end of this checking, we realize that some of our hypotheses are confirmed, others are partially confirmed, and others are finally invalid. Table 14 gives a summary of the results of the various tests of hypotheses.

With this Table 14, we understand that out of the five (5) hypotheses that we formulated, three (03) are confirmed, one (01) is partially confirmed and one (01) is invalidated. At the conclusion of this checking of hypotheses, we identified the various factors having a strong explanatory capacity of the strategies of SMEs having overseas markets. These factors are the following: potentialities of the SME, environment of the SME, perception of the variation of the customers' behaviour of purchase and of the sales, economic performance of the enterprise.

We carried out a new multiple regression on these various factors. According to the results of Table 15, this regression gave a coefficient of regression R of 0.677 that is a coefficient of R^2 determination of 0.459. The test F calculated gives a value of 4.799. It is significant at the threshold of 0.001 for 4 and 34 degrees of freedom. The total adjustment is thus satisfactory. Hence, the strategies of SMEs having overseas markets seem significantly influenced by these four variables. The variable "Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets" can then be represented by the following function:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{STSMEHOM} = & 0.281\text{PEVABPSA} - 0.368\text{ENVCON} \\ & + 0.290\text{EXENT} - 0.070\text{RESENT} \\ & + 0.222\text{PERENE} - 0.084\text{QUAENV} + \\ & 0.628 \end{aligned}$$

With:

- PEVABPSA = Perception of the variation of the consumers' behaviours of purchases and of the sales
- ENVCON = Environmental constraints
- QUAENV = Quality of local environment.

Table 14. Spearman correlations between the strategies of SMEs having overseas markets and the two components of their potentialities

PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS OF THE SME POTENTIALITIES	STRATEGIES OF SMEs HAVING OVERSEAS MARKETS
Resources of the SME	-0.127 (NS)
Experience of the enterprise	0.377*

* = the correlation is significant at the level 0.05 (bilateral). NS = Non significant

Table 15. Results of the tests of hypotheses

Hypotheses	Variables In Relation	Results
H.1.1	Quality of Local environment/Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets	Invalid
H.1.2	Environmental constraints/Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets	Confirmed
H1	Environment of the enterprise/Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets	Confirmed
H2	Potentialities of the enterprise/Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets	Confirmed
H3	Strategic vision of the leader of the SME having overseas markets/Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets	Partially confirmed

- EXENT = Experiences of the enterprise.
- RESENT = Resources of the enterprise.

The Student test shows however that in this relation between the variable “Strategies of SMEs having overseas markets” and its determinants, the perception of the variation of the consumers’ behaviours of purchases and of sales, the experiences of the enterprise, the economic performance of the enterprise have a high explanatory capacity.

Discussions of the results of the empirical analysis and conclusion

The analysis that we have just made gives very interesting results. They corroborate the idea of denaturing on the internationalization of SMEs defended by some authors specialised in SMEs’ issues. Cameroonian SMEs which were still regarded as traditional and traditionalist companies have completely changed after their internationalization to become viable companies on the international scene. Henceforth, it is understood that passive companies do not exist; that is, companies that merely undergo events neither without acting nor reacting. If a company seems traditionalist, it means that the environment in which it evolves is favourable to its practices. When the leader perceives that the survival of their company is threatened, they develop strategies of survival. The threat would so to speak constitute the main activator of strategic actions. Such a threat can be perceived (vision of the leader) or be observed through the performance of the company. What precede justifies enough the transformations of Cameroonian SMEs’ behaviour. These SMEs, which were presented as traditional companies using old-fashioned technologies and

marketing poor quality products, are able today to offer their customers products of equal value as those of their competitors, and to maintain on overseas markets (regarded as strongly competing). This satisfactory situation is ascribable to the efforts of improvement of the quality of products, efforts of modernization of production equipments, efforts of costs reduction, efforts of using distribution networks that take account of the environment requirements, and to practice of competitive prices. These efforts are themselves the consequence of the threat perceived by the leaders. From this point of view, even when the means specific to the company do not enable it to support its efforts, this one resorts to loans or teams up with other firms which are more advanced.

In addition, the results obtained show that the international expansion of Cameroonian SMEs is not only marked by determinism. Beside SMEs that can be described as traditional because they chose specialization and took their first step with international market through exportation, thus answering the logic of structural and environmental determinism, other SMEs are oriented towards diversification and took their first step with international market very early. That moves them away from the classical theory.

Moreover, it is important to note that the environmental questions represent today a major strategic issue for the competitiveness of enterprises. Indeed, the lawful and social pressures impose constraints out of which companies cannot back without compromising the legitimacy and the prosperity of their activities. Consequently, the opening to environmental values and the investments aiming at satisfying them seem a need to ensure the permanence of their activities. Besides, the response of the firm to external pressures and social dissents is a traditio-

nal topic of reflexion of the strategy and the economic analysis. The tests of the hypotheses that we carried out revealed that the environment has a strong explanatory capacity on the strategies developed by Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets. Thus, to conquer an overseas market, the enterprise must meet some environmental requirements. It is the case with customs and out-of-customs administrative operations, social and political constraints, and cultural distance. In this sense, the company must respect the standards in force in the host country, offer products that fulfil religious, cultural and quality requirements of the consumers. On another level, if in Western countries speaking French and English is an asset for the company, in Africa the local languages are used in the businesses. It is especially speaking them that is important. Hence, when the salesmen do not speak the purchasers' languages or – better – the potential purchasers' languages, the company has a great handicap to sell off its products. This can oblige the enterprise to disappear. Speaking the local language is a power of negotiation that facilitates the adoption of the company and its products by the target. It is initially because the communication between the parties is possible and easy, but more especially because the population think that the company belongs to one of their relatives, at least by alliance, because the salespersons speak the local language or languages. It is even one of the reasons why many companies come to practise indirect export. Moreover, when they practise direct export or make production/direct sales abroad, they use local sales representatives who know the languages used in business. This tendency corroborates the results obtained by Nkacleu (2002) and many other authors who attach a great importance to the language and the ethnic membership when attacking markets in Africa. The environmental constraints are so to speak very important elements for the survival and the success of an enter-prise in a given country.

It is finally understood that the current position of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets can be interpreted as the result of upheavals caused by internationalization. What pushes SMEs to seek the ways and means enabling them to ensure their survival: offering the customers products adapted to their needs at competitive prices. What supposes efforts of improvement of the quality of products, efforts of adaptation of products to the customers' requirements, efforts of modernization of production equipments, efforts of using qualified people for the achievement of specific tasks, efforts to improve equipments of cost prices and efforts to use distribution networks adapted to the environment requirements. For that purpose, the SME needs financial, material, technological and human resources, but also specific competences. It is these resources and competences that make it possible to support, or better, make possible the required efforts. Thus, Cameroonian SMEs that do not have sufficient resources to support their actions at international level chose to establish partnerships with other techni-

cally more advanced firms to profit from their technology or their technical assistance, and to contract loans. Consequently, it can be admitted that potentialities play two main roles in the strategies of SMEs having overseas markets: to orientate the choice of the axis of priority development (internal or external growth, partnership) and to allow the SME to carry out its strategic actions.

It hence appears that the success of Cameroonian SMEs having overseas markets is explained above all by the setting up of a professional process adapted to their resources and their external environments. Thus, the capacity of SMEs to adjust to the environment requirements and to offer products adapted to the customers' needs at competitive prices is an essential point for their success at the international level.

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