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**COMPETITIVE INTEGRATIVE BENCHMARKING IN ENSURING THE
COMPETITIVENESS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES**

The research is grounded on a market-based institutional paradigm of building and developing a competitive integrative benchmarking for small and medium-sized enterprises which incorporates a range of iteration phases, marketing technology, tools and software, such as enterprise audit; comparative and critical SWOT analysis and reference comparison interface; functional decomposition techniques; and quality function deployment. The application of the methodological principles of the effective strategic management theory as well as competitive advantages and marketing management concepts has underpinned the author's research perspective which argues that individual benchmarking, developed within its in-depth internal domain, in modern realia does not contribute to shaping sustainable markets since it assumes largely intensified competition whereas competitive integrative benchmarking ensures gaining mutual benefits from benchmarking partner interactions, helps to enhance the competitiveness of market participants along with boosting a potential marketing impact on the target audience, thus providing a synergistic effect. The implementation of this competitive integrative benchmarking model, adapted for use in the marketing practice of Ukrainian small and medium-sized enterprises, is an effective framework to rank alternative strategic decisions on selecting patterns, forms and methods of partnership and collaboration, and take timely tactical approaches to harmonize and coordinate actions aimed at ensuring the enterprise competitiveness. The proposed conceptual model greatly complements the theoretical description of the current marketing toolkit and being implemented in the local settings as a methodological background for building a system of market actors interaction will translate into enhanced performance and competitiveness of individual companies and their products.

Keywords: *competitive integrative benchmarking; small and medium-sized enterprises; reference; small and medium-sized businesses.*

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**КОНКУРЕНТНО-ІНТЕГРАЦІЙНИЙ БЕНЧМАРКІНГ У ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННІ
КОНКУРЕНТОСПРОМОЖНОСТІ МАЛОГО ТА СЕРЕДНЬОГО БІЗНЕСУ**

Проведені дослідження базуються на ринково-інституціональній парадигмі формування і розвитку конкурентно-інтеграційного бенчмаркінгу малих та середніх підприємств, що включає такі етапи-ітерації, маркетингові технології, інструменти та програми, як аудит діяльності підприємства; інтерфейс порівняльно-критичного SWOT-аналізу й еталонного порівняння; прийоми функціональної декомпозиції; структурування функції якості. Застосування методологічних принципів теорії ефективного стратегічного управління, конкурентних переваг, маркетинг-менеджменту дозволило запропонувати авторську наукову позицію, згідно з якою індивідуальний бенчмаркінг, що розвивається в межах глибинної сутності бенчмаркінгу, в сучасних умовах не сприяє формуванню стійких ринків, оскільки передбачає насамперед посилення суперництва, в той час як конкурентно-інтеграційний бенчмаркінг дозволяє «втягувати» взаємні вигоди від взаємодії партнерів по бенчмаркінгу, сприяти підвищенню конкурентоспроможності учасників ринку, багаторазово посилювати потенціал маркетингового впливу на цільові аудиторії, забезпечуючи синергетичний ефект. Реалізація такої концептуальної моделі конкурентно-

інтеграційного бенчмаркінгу, адаптованого до застосування в маркетинговій практиці українських малих та середніх підприємств, дозволяє ранжувати альтернативні стратегічні рішення щодо способів, форм і методів партнерства та взаємодії, своєчасно виробляти тактичні підходи до узгодження і координації дій, спрямованих на забезпечення конкурентоспроможності підприємств. Запропонована концептуальна модель істотно доповнює теоретичний опис існуючого маркетингового інструментарію і, будучи реалізованою на практиці як методологічна основа створення системи взаємодії суб'єктів ринку, підвищує результативність діяльності й конкурентоспроможність окремих підприємств та їх продуктів.

Ключові слова: конкурентно-інтеграційний бенчмаркінг; малі та середні підприємства; еталон; малий та середній бізнес.

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**КОНКУРЕНТНО-ИНТЕГРАЦИОННЫЙ БЕНЧМАРКИНГ В ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИИ
КОНКУРЕНТОСПОСОБНОСТИ МАЛОГО И СРЕДНЕГО БИЗНЕСА**

Проведённые исследования базируются на рыночно-институциональной парадигме формирования и развития конкурентно-интеграционного бенчмаркинга малых и средних предприятий, включая такие этапы-итерации, маркетинговые технологии, инструменты и программы, как аудит деятельности предприятия; интерфейс сравнительно-критического SWOT-анализа и эталонного сравнения; приёмы функциональной декомпозиции; структурирование функции качества. Применение методологических принципов теории эффективного стратегического управления, конкурентных преимуществ, маркетинг-менеджмента позволило предложить авторскую научную позицию, согласно которой индивидуальный бенчмаркинг, развивающийся за счёт глубинной сущности бенчмаркинга, в современных условиях не способствует формированию устойчивых рынков, поскольку предусматривает в основном усиление соперничества, в то время как конкурентно-интеграционный бенчмаркинг позволяет извлекать взаимные выгоды от взаимодействия партнёров по бенчмаркингу, способствовать повышению конкурентоспособности участников рынка, многократно усиливать потенциал маркетингового воздействия на целевые аудитории, обеспечивая синергетический эффект. Реализация данной концептуальной модели конкурентно-интеграционного бенчмаркинга, адаптированного к применению в маркетинговой практике украинских малых и средних предприятий, позволяет ранжировать альтернативные стратегические решения относительно способов, форм и методов партнерства и взаимодействия, своевременно производить тактические подходы к согласованию и координации действий, направленных на обеспечение конкурентоспособности предприятий. Предложенная концептуальная модель существенно дополняет теоретическое описание существующего маркетингового инструментария и, будучи реализованной на практике в качестве методологической основы создания системы взаимодействия субъектов рынка, повышает результативность деятельности и конкурентоспособность отдельных предприятий и их продуктов.

Ключевые слова: конкурентно-интеграционный бенчмаркинг; малые и средние предприятия; эталон; малый и средний бизнес.

Formulation of the problem. The practice of world business shows that in order to achieve a competitive advantage it is necessary to study, know and use the experience of your competitors who have already achieved success in various areas of activity. In this situation it is necessary not only to use the methodology of comparative analysis or benchmarking, but more and more relevant

is the use of competitive and integration benchmarking (CIB), which eliminates competition in favor of cooperation, which may later become a driving force in changing the philosophy of modern business.

Due to the increased role of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in the Ukrainian economy in market conditions, the state of which serves as a reliable indicator of the effectiveness of the economy as a whole, the problem of using a management paradigm based on competitive relations becomes relevant. Today, competition for small and medium-sized enterprises is global in nature and, not by chance, the main goal of most of them is to achieve world quality standards. Under such conditions, competitive and integration benchmarking can serve as one of the best methods to ensure that business objectives are in line with the requirements of the global market. This modern management technology, based on the experience of the best companies, can be applied by small and medium-sized enterprises in order to ensure their competitiveness and increase the sustainability of development in this area as a whole.

In addition, the relevance of the study is predetermined by the lack of a clear understanding of the socio-economic content of competitive and integration benchmarking and its weak use in management. In this regard, the study of theoretical and methodological approaches to the effective organization of competitive and integration benchmarking and the creation of applied developments that facilitate its implementation in the activities of domestic small and medium-sized enterprises, seems timely and relevant. Thus, the study of the theory, methodology and tools of competitive integration benchmarking is aimed at improving the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as focused on improving the understanding of the mechanisms for selecting reference strategies in the field of SMEs, which is a priority scientific and practical problem of importance to the economy.

Analysis of recent research and unresolved part of the problem. In foreign and domestic economic literature, there are few special works on the question of finding standards of market activity, learning from other people's experience, which is called benchmarking. There is also a lack of materials on benchmarking as a separate marketing strategy and a separate business process, as well as on competitive and integration benchmarking. The formation of a system of views on modern enterprise management is based on a large number of works by scientists and specialists in various fields of management and marketing, primarily such as M. Albert, I. Anosoff, G. Armstrong, P. Drucker, M. Meskon, F. Taylor, A. Thompson, F. Hedouri. In publicly available form, the theoretical foundations of benchmarking as an integral system were laid in the works of leading quality management specialists E. Deming, F. Crosby, K. Ishikawa. The scientific features of benchmarking methodology are acquired in the late 1980s in the works of the founders of this direction R. Camp, G. Watson, M. Zairi, H.J. Harrington, Jr. Schotmiller.

Among modern Ukrainian benchmarking research, the following stand out the work of Z. Varnaliy [1], P. Hajducky [3], L. Hanuschak-Efimenko [6], O. Deacon [2], O. Nifatova [8], I. Shevchuk [13], W. Shcherbak [8]. All the authors listed were mostly limited to sketchy, and often conflicting, definitions of these problems. None of them set a specific objective of comprehensive analysis of competitive integration benchmarking, including in SMEs, but considered this issue in relation to their research topic. However, the problems of systematization and dissemination of advanced principles of business excellence in SMEs are so diverse and complex that further research in this area is needed, including systematic analysis and theoretical generalization of the management approach based on competitive and integration benchmarking.

The aim of the study is to provide a theoretical basis for the use of competitive and integration benchmarking in ensuring the competitiveness of SMEs and its adaptation to the market-institutional realities of the domestic economy, in the development of marketing technologies and tools to achieve strong market positions.

Research results. The market, with a tendency of continuous strengthening of its competitive field, dictates the necessity of analysis and monitoring of activity of competitors and the companies occupying leading positions in the market. In order to optimize their own activities and form a competitive advantage, it is necessary to study the experience of others, select in the process of research techniques from the practice of competitors, firms-partners, that is, to compare your company with the leaders and learn methods to improve the level of competitive potential based on the experience gained. The essence of this approach in global business practice is reflected in benchmarking.

In conditions of globalization of the Ukrainian economy benchmarking is a philosophy and the marketing tool of maintenance of the competitive advantages, aimed at harmonization of relations with external environment and increase of competitiveness at the expense of external sources, by search, studying and adaptation to own conditions of the best methods of realization of business processes irrespective of sphere of their application by means of what the exalted requirements of the market are satisfied. Thus, the basic content of benchmarking consists in revealing the reference enterprises which have reached considerable successes in any functional areas, careful studying of their business processes and adaptation of the received data to conditions of own enterprise. At the same time, benchmarking implies active interaction of partners exchanging information about business processes. Successful benchmarking projects promote social ties between specialists of different enterprises and create the basis for commercial projects, product promotion and development of new products.

Differentiation of forms and types of benchmarking as a marketing tool to ensure competitive advantages in the market and increase competitiveness through the harmonization of relations with the external environment involves the following classification criteria: the direction of the study, the duration of the research cycle, potential partners, objects of research, sectoral affiliation of partners, independence in the study. Successful benchmarking projects promote social ties between specialists of different enterprises and create the basis for commercial projects, product promotion and development of new products. The concept of competitive and integration benchmarking as a marketing and management tool to ensure the competitiveness of the enterprise, synthesizing the mechanisms of competitive analysis and marketing interaction in order to adapt best practices to the conditions of their own business by identifying reference organizations on the basis of partnership and cooperation. The objective essence of these processes and their mutual realization within the framework of one marketing instrument provides market participants with the opposition to negative manifestations of globalization processes due to inversion of the mechanism of interaction of competitors into stable mutually beneficial partnership relations.

Institutionalization of the concept of competitive and integration benchmarking as a direction of development of traditional benchmarking is carried out by means of its allocation in a new business strategy of the enterprise, based on cooperation and interaction with other subjects of the market for the purpose of mutually advantageous partner information exchange for improvement of separate business processes and increase of competitiveness of business as a whole.

In order for the Ukrainian business environment to form a competitive and integration benchmarking in a civilized way to determine its market position in the industry market, it is necessary to reveal its essence. For this purpose, a model of the process of competitive and integration benchmarking based on the "benchmarking wheel" model is presented, which includes a sequence of stages of audit, planning, observation, analysis, adaptation and coordination, as illustrated in Figure 1.

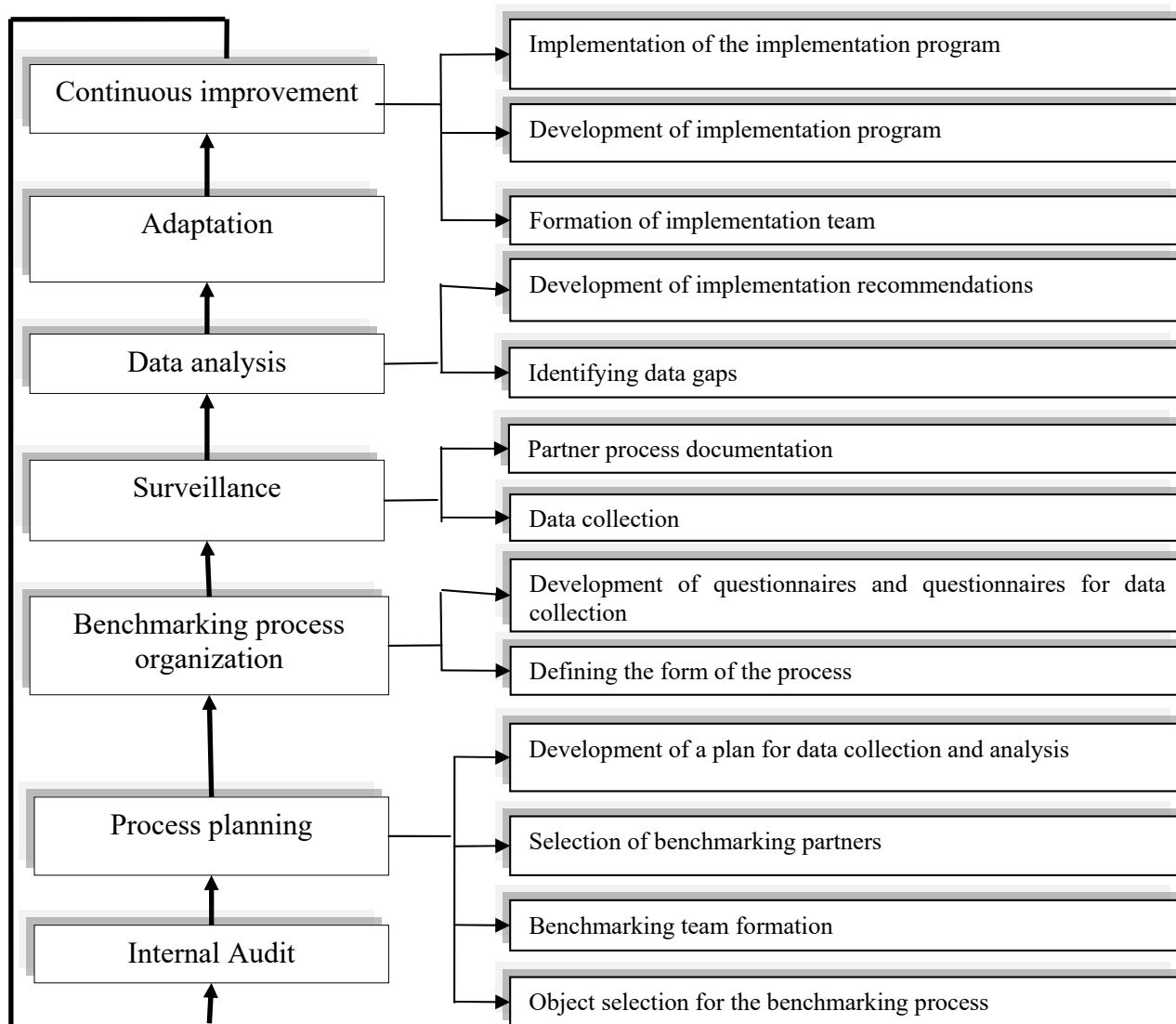


Figure 1. Competitive integration benchmarking process model

By competitive and integration benchmarking should be understood the analysis of competitors' activities based on interaction and cooperation, in order to unite and form qualitatively new business processes based on the experience of advanced international organizations of this industry to improve the competitive advantages of the enterprise at the national and international levels. Thus, the notion of competitive and integration benchmarking includes a new constituent element - interaction, which allows to increase the effectiveness of the enterprise, relying on the already achieved results of competitors and determines the essence of competitive and integration benchmarking.

Partnership relations reflect the natural course of development of intercompany relations and represent social relations that involve joint actions and efforts of the parties united by common interests. It is advisable to start the process of competitive and integration benchmarking with the internal audit of the company's activity, because without mastering the basics of auditing one's own activity one cannot learn to analyze the elements of superiority of others. At the same time, internal audit involves diagnosis of the enterprise, assessment of its industrial and economic potential and identification of key performance indicators. The information obtained in the course of the

evaluation provides a basis for comparison with competitors or a benchmark and helps to identify strengths and weaknesses of the organization.

Institutionalization of the concept of competitive and integration benchmarking as a direction of development of traditional benchmarking is carried out by means of its allocation in a new business strategy of the enterprise, based on cooperation and interaction with other subjects of the market for the purpose of mutually advantageous partner information exchange for improvement of separate business processes and increase of competitiveness of business as a whole. The process of competitive and integration benchmarking involves stages of planning, search, analysis, adaptation and coordination, ensuring the formalization of relationships with partners in benchmarking, procedures for collecting and analyzing information, as well as the formation of new strategies for competitive behavior based on the data obtained.

The organizational and economic form of competitive and integration benchmarking is a mechanism for cooperation and exchange of information on reference processes through comparison with partner enterprises. Competitive integrative benchmarking is carried out by means of a cooperation agreement using formal mechanisms of interaction in the process of benchmarking (partnership agreements, alliances, alliances), or using informal approaches to its implementation (voluntary exchange).

The cyclical nature of competitive and integration benchmarking as a process leading to changes in the content of the company's activities is manifested in the fact that, starting with the audit of the enterprise and ending with the control and correction of the results of benchmarking, the mechanism of continuous construction of the process of benchmarking is launched, which ends with a transition to a new cycle of improvement ("wheel of competitive and integration benchmarking") in order to continuously ensure the competitiveness of the enterprise.

The toolkit of competitive and integration benchmarking is based on a combination of competitive analysis of partner companies, as well as tools for their marketing interaction. The combination of tools of partner interaction and the competitive analysis allows to spend a dynamic estimation not only a current condition of the enterprise, but also to predict qualitative changes taking into account an active position of the enterprise in relation to the strategic competitiveness.

The research of competition practice at Ukrainian small and medium enterprises allowed to reveal the high potential of implementation of the concept of competitive-integrated benchmarking: a significant part of enterprises is already unknowingly engaged in benchmarking. In addition, in certain cases, enterprises have resorted to cooperation during the search and collection of information, carry out informal partnerships and realize the need for cooperation in the process of collecting information and obtaining new knowledge. However, such interaction has no formalized methodological basis, which significantly reduces its effectiveness and serves as an argument in favor of developing methodological recommendations in the field of competitive and integration benchmarking that are in demand in the market.

The current financial and economic crisis has created specific conditions for the development of Ukrainian small and medium-sized businesses: reducing production and retail turnover, smoothing imbalances between food and non-food segments, strengthening government policy in the regulation of SMEs and ensuring fair competition. At the same time, the positive growth of the market turnover in monetary terms is preserved. The complex of these conditions forms the specific content of competitive and integration benchmarking in the field of SMEs.

The most important tool of competitive advantage analysis within the framework of competitive and integration benchmarking is the comparative critical SWOT-analysis by means of revealing the degree of efficiency of using the key factors of enterprise success in the competitive struggle. In the process of the comparative critical SWOT-analysis not only the weaknesses and strengths of the enterprise are determined, but also the comparison of key success factors of the

enterprise with similar parameters of competitors is made. Comparative critical SWOT-analysis is aimed at improving the internal environment of the enterprise and disclosure of its competitive potential.

It is reasonable to present the conceptual model of the process of competitive and integrative benchmarking in the sphere of SME in the form of FD-model of functional decomposition of the process of competitive and integrative benchmarking. At the same time, the functional decomposition diagram is a tree type diagram showing the division of functions and high-level control processes into constituent parts, which allows to identify elements of the benchmarking process and increase its efficiency in the area under consideration.

The implementation of the benchmarking project involves evaluating the competitive advantages of a small enterprise based on a methodological approach based on the axiomatics of the hierarchy analysis method. The research conducted as part of the implementation of the main blocks of the conceptual model of the process of competitive and integration benchmarking through expert assessments and analysis, allows to identify areas of weak competitive positions and form strategic measures for their improvement.

It is proposed to evaluate the efficiency of implementation and use of competitive and integration benchmarking using the method of structuring the quality function, which allows to identify consumer preferences and improve the activities of the enterprise in order to ensure maximum customer orientation. For the enterprises of small and average business the effective tool within the limits of application of the given approach is the method of construction of "quality houses".

Conclusions and suggestions. In the article the conceptual-methodological substantiation and practical verification of formation of competitive-integrated benchmarking model adapted to market-institutional conditions of functioning of domestic small and medium enterprises are offered. Technologies, tools, theoretical approach and programs have been developed, the implementation of which will help to increase the marketing potential of small and medium-sized enterprises, achieve sustainable market positioning and increase their competitiveness. The main marketing methodological tools for competitive and integration benchmarking are established: comparatively-critical SWOT-analysis, competitive analysis, construction of "houses of quality", analysis of hierarchies, structuring of quality function, expert assessment, in the aggregate allowing to estimate branch positions of the investigated enterprise and to adapt the reference approaches to competitiveness provision on the basis of branch partnership taking into account the active position of the enterprise in relation to the change of its strategic position.

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