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## THE IMPACT OF AI-BASED TOOLS ON COMPETITIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY IN NICHE SECTORS: A CASE STUDY OF LOCAL DRYING ENTERPRISES

### Summary

**Purpose** | The aim is to explore the potential applications of AI in both competitive analysis and sustainability improvement within a selected local construction industry sector, with a particular focus on niche markets such as drying services. The theoretical contribution of this study is to demonstrate novel applications of AI in strategic management, thereby extending the existing approaches by incorporating the utilisation of analytical tools to support decision-making processes, based on a selected type of software (Local SEO Software).

**Research method** | This research employs a case study methodology to examine the utilisation of AI for competitive analysis and sustainability among enterprises, with a particular focus on small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the drying services

sector. The study combines quantitative data with qualitative insights to assess how AI-driven tools can enhance competitiveness and sustainability.

**Results** | The findings of this study ascertain whether AI tools (Localo) facilitate a more precise comprehension of the competitive dynamics within the selected companies. It was feasible to discern local competitors and their conduct in terms of competing for visibility on the Google. The research indicates that the utilisation of AI-enabled insights enables local companies to optimise their market visibility, which is a crucial factor in sectors that rely heavily on high-energy processes, such as drying.

**Originality/value/implications/recommendations** | This article contributes to the growing body of literature on strategic management by examining the dual role of AI in fostering competitive advantage and sustainability, particularly in niche markets that have been relatively underexplored. The study provides insights into the ways in which AI-based tools can be harnessed to not only enhance competitive analysis processes but also to buttress sustainable practices, thereby ensuring long-term viability and a reduction in environmental impact.

**Keywords:** strategic management, artificial intelligence, competitive analysis, sustainability, drying companies

**JEL classification:** M13, M30, O32

## 1. Introduction

This paper addresses the evolution of strategic practice, with a particular emphasis on the potential applications of tools based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in strategic decision-making to gain a competitive advantage and enhance sustainability. In the contemporary business environment, characterised by intense competition and increasing environmental challenges, it is imperative for organisations to possess a comprehensive understanding of the strategies, strengths and weaknesses of their competitors, but also to align their competitive practices with sustainable development goals while taking into account new opportunities emerging from AI [Wodecki et al., 2019; Suklun, 2021; Adesoga et al., 2024; Kaggwa et al., 2024]. It is evident that, as early as several years ago, Strategic Management (SM) experts highlighted the impact of intelligent solutions on the role of data in creating value for the company

and its competitive position and enhancing resource efficiency [Porter, Heppelmann, 2014]. This is particularly important today in the context of Industry 4.0 [Wolak-Tuzimek, Luft, 2021; Sajdak et al., 2022], in which AI and digitisation offer new opportunities to not only boost competitiveness but also to reduce environmental impacts through better resource management (Resource-Based View, RBV) [Helfat et al., 2023]. The article adopts the Strategy-as-Practice (SaP) perspective, which offers a contemporary theoretical lens for examining how AI influences strategic decision-making. Rooted in Whittington's [1996] foundational work, this paradigm emphasises the micro-level activities, actors, and tools involved in strategising, making it particularly relevant for exploring of AI-based tools in strategic management.

The objective of this study is to address the existing knowledge gap by exploring the practical application of AI-based tools for competitive analysis and examining their potential to indicate levels of sustainability. Firstly, the study aims to evaluate the relevance of the Localo analytical instrument within the framework of competitive analysis (1). Secondly, it seeks to investigate the effectiveness of Localo in identifying a company's competitive position within its geographical market and to determine the extent to which such solutions can enable data-driven strategic decision-making (2). Lastly, the study involves the application of the selected tool to analyse competitive positioning and to examine its usefulness in supporting sustainable development practices, using the drying industry as a case study (3).

The distinctive feature of this research is its integrated methodology, which integrates empirical data analysis with qualitative insights within the context of the utilisation of an AI tool in the selected industry of local enterprises. The study aims to explore how AI-based tools can not only improve competitive positioning, but also promote resource efficiency and environmental sustainability. This study seeks to integrate AI-based quantitative analysis with observational data to gain deeper insights into the challenges, opportunities and best practices associated with the use of AI in competitive intelligence. It also aims to provide recommendations and local market intelligence that can be acted upon, enabling businesses to fully exploit the potential of AI within a sample tool to gain competitive advantage and to improve overall performance. In addition to the theoretical contributions, the anticipated impact of

this research extends beyond the theoretical to the tangible, with the aim of promoting advances in management practices and environmental responsibility in local enterprises, the industry, and beyond.

The study employed Porter's Five Forces model for industry and business strategy analysis, in conjunction with a selected tool, to examine the competitive landscape of the drying industry at the local level, where competitive pressures and environmental considerations are becoming increasingly prominent. Despite the growing use of AI in a range of industries, its potential for SM in specific areas such as drying, in which resource-intensive processes like dehumidification are common, remains largely untapped. This article investigates whether the ready-made solutions based on AI-powered software are already assisting us in this regard. The Porter model was adopted as the analytical approach and it was used by the authors in the context of the study using the selected AI-based tool.

## 2. A literature review: artificial intelligence in strategic management

The distinction between human and computer roles in decision-making is becoming increasingly blurred in SM, as well as in other disciplines, both among scientists and practitioners [Suklun, 2021; Kaggwa et al., 2024]. Many companies are now using AI in their products, services, and business models to identify the most effective ways of generating value [Wodecki et al., 2019]. Despite the growing interest in the application of AI in SM, there is still a lack of comprehensive studies that explore its complex effects across different organisational functions. The existing research has primarily focused on specific AI implementations or theoretical models, without providing a holistic perspective on AI's contribution to optimising the overall competitive analysis and organisational performance [Judijanto et al., 2022; Helfat et al., 2023]. The rapid evolution of markets and products is prompting managers and executives to make decisions much faster than before [Weinert, Banaś, 2024]. Moreover, one of the key roles of AI is to provide innovative and supplementary support for decision-making [Suklun, 2021, p.89]. This can be seen in the AI-based tools that are already increasingly available on the market today.

The existing scholarly literature in SM places significant emphasis on the analytical and decision-making tools that are used in strategic contexts, alongside case studies that illustrate instances of successful strategic implementation [Helfat et al., 2023]. In short, AI can be defined as “intelligent agents that receive percepts from the environment and take actions that affect that environment” [Russell, Norvig, 2020]. Others posit that AI can be conceptualised as a novel strategic technological asset, capable of autonomous learning and action, independent of human input [Krakowski et al., 2023]. With regard to SM, this article aligns with the definition proposed by R. Nag, D.C. Hambrick, and M.J. Chen [2007], who define SM as a field of study that “deals with the major intended and emergent initiatives taken by general managers on behalf of owners, involving utilisation of resources, to enhance the performance of firms in their external environments”. This is one of the most commonly used definitions in the field of information support for strategic management and, at the same time, SM itself [Weinert, 2018].

The conventional approach in SM, which relies on planning processes and fixed models, is often constrained by historical data and unable to effectively adapt to real-time shifts or utilise predictive analytics in a meaningful way [Stone et al., 2020]. Historically, the collection of competitive intelligence was dependent on manual research and analysis, which was both time-consuming and frequently incomplete. However, the advent of AI has transformed the landscape of competitive analysis, offering businesses unprecedented automation capabilities [Allioui, Mourdi, 2023]. The issue of Big Data itself also plays a key role in this transformation [Weinert, 2016]. AI-driven competitive analysis tools are equipped with the ability to automate the collection and evaluation of vast quantities of data from a multitude of online sources. These tools are capable of observing competitors’ websites and social media activities, following industry publications and news reports, and even assessing customer reviews and online sentiment [Mehmood et al., 2022]. It is hypothesised by scholars specialising in the field of SM that the advent of AI will result in a shift in the sources of competitive advantage [Krakowski et al, 2023]. In all probability, we can say that this is already happening [Kim, Mauborgne, 2025].

AI systems have reached a point where they can perform a number of tasks autonomously. These include chatbots, independent planning and

scheduling, gaming, translation, medical diagnosis and even spam fighting [Suklun, 2021]. To fully harness these capabilities, it is essential to comprehensively use IT systems and tools [Weinert, 2019]. The application of AI solutions across business functions, including sales and marketing, product and service development, operations management, supply-chain management, manufacturing, finance, and human resource management, represents a key aspect of SM [Adesoga et al., 2024]. The new context of SM and new theoretical concepts hold great promise for research on RBV [Helfat et al., 2023]. Moreover, numerous drivers of AI adoption in organisational strategy have been identified, including sustainability, productivity, accuracy, speed, customer satisfaction, well-being, decision-making, and cost reduction. These factors have been extensively documented in the literature on SM [Kar et al., 2021].

A review of four decades of research on the intersection of AI and SM provides a comprehensive examination of the ways in which AI has gradually shaped and transformed the strategic decision-making landscape [Sauter, 2010; Chmielarz, 2013; Peppard, Ward, 2016]. This extensive body of work charts the evolution of AI from its nascent conceptual stages to its current application in real-world business strategies. By analysing key advancements, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks, the review illuminates the profound impact AI has had on traditional models of SM. It offers a nuanced understanding of how AI tools and AI-driven tools are redefining competitive dynamics, resource allocation, and organisational agility. Furthermore, the review examines the challenges and limitations associated with integrating AI into SM and also SM with AI. These include issues related to data dependency, ethical considerations, and the complexities of aligning AI capabilities with strategic and business objectives [Keding, 2021]. It also identifies emerging trends and future directions, establishing AI as a central component in the evolution of corporate strategy, rather than merely as a supportive tool [Helfat et al., 2023].

The research serves as a critical resource for both academics and practitioners, offering insights for those seeking to leverage AI to enhance decision-making and maintain competitive advantage in the increasingly complex market environments, including the Polish economy [Młody, Weinert, 2020; Adesoga et

al., 2024]. How AI affects the perception of strategy today is beginning to be described by the creators of the most famous concepts in strategic management, e.g. Blue Ocean Strategy [Kim, Mauborgne, 2025].

### 3. The utilisation of AI as a strategic advantage

AI has become a pivotal tool in the realms of strategic management and competitive analysis, profoundly transforming the manner in which organisations formulate strategies and maintain competitive advantages. The integration of AI into strategic business decision-making represents a significant transformation in corporate strategy, challenging traditional frameworks and enhancing both organisational agility and strategic adaptability [Sajdak et al., 2022; Kaggwa et al., 2024]. In response to the increasing complexities of modern markets, organisations are increasingly adopting AI as a transformative tool to enhance strategic decision-making, customer and employee engagement, automation and overall business performance [Judijanto et al., 2022]. AI applications are in use within organisations across a diverse range of sectors [Suklun, 2021] and they are also commonly integrated as components of larger ERP systems [Luft, 2021]. The implementation of AI and AI-based tools in project management systems (Project Management Information Systems, PMIS) is also being seen [Weinert, Banaś 2024]. Practice shows that this is also the case in CRM (Customer Relationship Management) and DMS (Document Management System).

The research highlights the potential of AI in addressing complex business challenges, while also acknowledging the challenges associated with its practical implementation [Kitsios, Kamariotou, 2021]. The integration of AI with SM presents a valuable opportunity to enhance organisational performance and maintain a competitive advantage [Belderbos et al., 2020]. C. Keding [2021] introduces a framework for categorising existing research into two primary scopes:

- Condition-oriented research (type A), focusing on the antecedents of AI adoption in SM, such as data-driven workflows and organisational willingness.
- Outcome-oriented research (type B), investigating the effects of AI implementation at both the individual and organisational levels, such as its impact on decision-making, cognition, and organisational agility.

A. Kemp [2024] examines the ways in which firms can leverage AI to gain a competitive edge. He introduces the concept of “situated AI”, which entails embedding AI into a firm’s unique experiential, structural, and relational systems to achieve cost-effective capabilities tailored to the firm’s specific needs. Kemp’s work presents a comprehensive theory on how firms can utilise AI not merely as a general technology, but as a strategic asset that is deeply integrated into their operations. This deep integration makes it challenging for competitors to replicate or emulate the success of these firms. In addition to other anticipated capabilities, AI solutions are expected to be more cost-effective, time-efficient, and less prone to errors than human operators. It is imperative that all organisations possess an understanding of machine learning and the applications of AI in order to capitalise on its potential and maintain market competitiveness and undergo digital transformation [Adesoga et al., 2024]. The implementation of AI may necessitate organisational restructuring, predominantly in terms of technological adaptations. AI can be effectively integrated through a structured approach to change management. However, like all pioneering technologies, AI presents unique challenges [Suklun, 2021]. These challenges are seen, among other things, in the enormous use of resources and, therefore, in the significant costs for the producers of these solutions [Kim, Mauborgne, 2025].

## 4. Research methodology

### 4.1. Industrial background and competitive challenges

The market for building drying services in Poland has exhibited steady and consistent growth, driven by the rising demand for specialist construction services related to property renovation. This is particularly true in the aftermath of flooding, water and sewage system failures, or the restoration of historic buildings. Additionally, the industry is expanding in response to the evolving climate conditions, where episodes of heavy precipitation, flooding, and moisture-related issues in older structures have led to the increased demand for these services. The company operates under the PKD: 43.99.Z Other specialised construction works, not elsewhere classified and 77.32.Z Rental and leasing of construction machinery and equipment.

The market for companies engaged in building drying in Poland is characterised by a high degree of fragmentation, with a multitude of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating within it. Local SMEs, which typically offer services within limited geographical areas, dominate the sector, although larger companies with nationwide operations also exist.

In major cities such as Warsaw, Wrocław, Cracow, and Poznań, the market is more competitive, with a larger number of specialised companies offering a diverse range of drying and renovation services (based on our industry observations). Given the niche nature of services such as building dehumidification, it is crucial for customers to be fully informed about the company's service offerings, the scope of its work, and the locations it serves [Localo, 2024].

#### 4.2. Measurement instruments

The Localo [www1] is a digital tool designed to assist businesses in optimising their Google Business Profiles (GBP), thereby increasing their visibility in local searches. The software offers a number of features, including the ability to monitor search rankings in real time, automate tasks to improve local SEO, and provide AI-driven suggestions for creating posts and responding to customer reviews. The Localo provides businesses with insights that facilitate enhanced performance on Google Maps, the attraction of a larger customer base, and more effective management of their online presence. Moreover, the software offers specialised features for marketing agencies, analysts and strategists. The application was employed for the purpose of competitive analysis, representing one of the available tools of this type currently on the market. Alternative tools also exist, however, due to the tool's user ratings, its knowledge base, and its real-world availability, as well as the authors' experience, it was selected as the research instrument (alternatives to the tool are indicated in point 5 of the article).

#### 4.3. Motivation for the study and its assumptions

The evolving market for drying services, coupled with fluctuating weather patterns that heighten the necessity for such services, represents a substantial

driving force behind the necessity for analysis. The rise in the number of extreme weather events, including floods and heavy rainfall, caused by climate change has a considerable impact on the demand for building drying services. Consequently, the industry is confronted with the challenge of implementing solutions that reduce energy and natural resource consumption during the provision of services, which is a crucial aspect of sustainable development.

The demand for the drying of buildings, the renting of air dryers, the locating of leaks and the management of floods is demonstrably increasing, which renders the industry of “traditional” technical services extremely promising. Despite the traditionally perceived “hard” nature of these businesses, companies operating in this field are seeking competitive advantages, particularly in the context of IT and AI solutions. It is also important to consider the potential for collaboration with SMEs, which represent a significant customer and partner base.

The study makes the following assumptions. It focuses on the local market, which is defined as the Poznan area and the surrounding towns within a radius of up to 50 km. Due to the particular nature of the service activity and its local character, this market is divided into strategic groups, distinguished by the scope of their activities and financial capabilities. Furthermore, the necessity for companies to have an online presence was being considered, including the requirement to have a GBP. An illustrative marketing strategy is based on the appropriate selection of keywords, such as “building drying”, “flood drying” or “dehumidifier rental”, with the addition of local designations, e.g. “Poznan” and other local cities.

#### 4.4. Collection of data

The data collected using Localo tool were subjected to a comparative analysis, which made it easier to identify recurring patterns, themes and critical factors that inform the definition of competition in the selected industry. In order to carry out the analysis, steps were at first designed within the procedure for using the competitive analysis tool. The first step was to identify keywords (in Polish) for the drying industry using Google searches and

KeyWord Surfer 5.3. This list was then entered into Localo. All the collected data were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet after downloading from Localo. The schedule within the tool in question did not allow for manual updating of the position map; instead, this was done automatically once a week. The starting point for displaying the positions of the competing companies was the GBP of SUCHA POSADZKA, a major player in the position analysis as a benchmark. They then searched for local businesses offering similar services in the selected area. The tool analysed the profiles of competitors that appear in local searches on Google Maps and in organic results. Local rankings were then monitored over time. Changes in competitors' rankings were also tracked and compared. The observation period covers the period from June 2023 to June 2024.

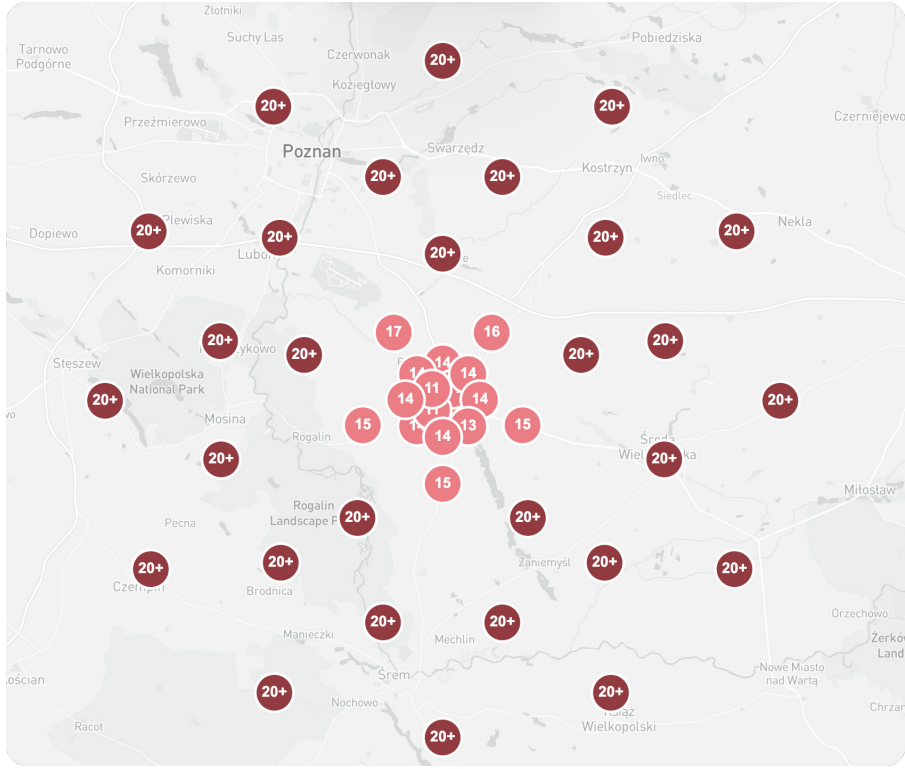
#### 4.5. The position of the main company in the competitive analysis

The Localo helped the company to build a solid GBP – regularly updated, it began to showcase its full offering to potential customers. The information in the business profile also began to be more consistent with the communication on the website. What's more, adding citations to business catalogues also helped to increase visibility – this was easy to do using Localo feature. The app also helps to build the “strength” of the profile on a regular basis – regularly adding photos and engaging with customers after they have purchased a service helps to gain new reviews and to improve the visibility of the business. As the position map below shows, regular activity on GBP has had a very noticeable effect – from a business with low visibility for certain keywords, it has become one of the top ranked businesses in the industry in the Poznan area (success-stories). The before and after position maps are available on the website with footnotes and below Picture 1 and Picture 2).

What the page shows: “As the position map below shows, regular activity on Google Business Profile has had a very noticeable effect – from a company with low visibility on certain keywords, it has become one of the highest ranked businesses in the industry in the Poznan area”.

PICTURE 1

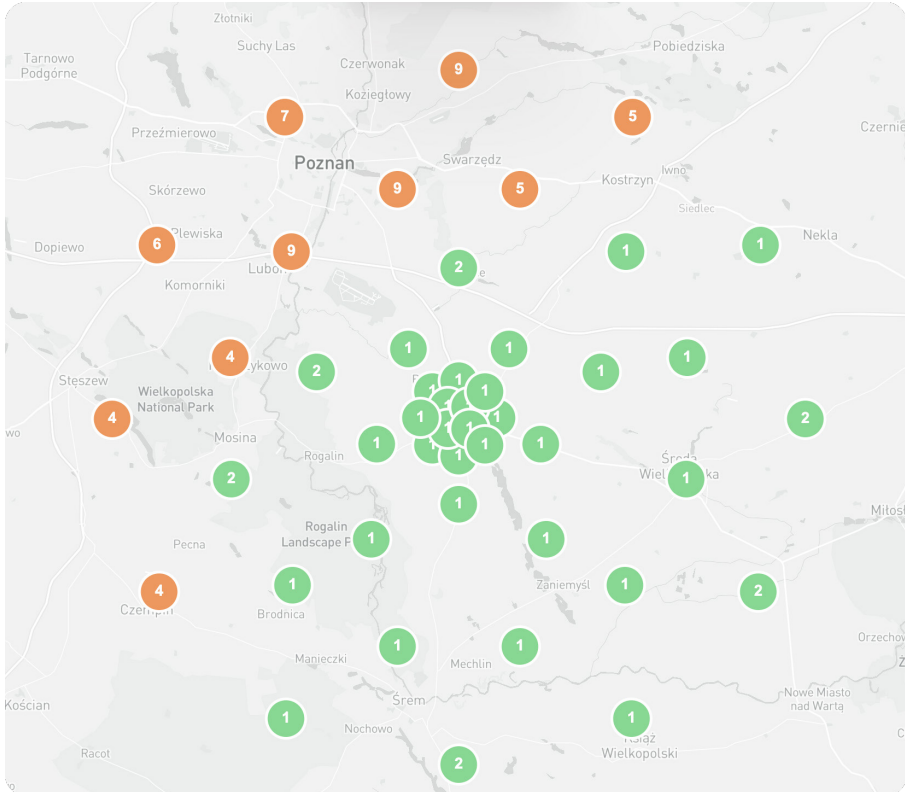
Position map before



Source: [www 2].

PICTURE 2

Position map after



Source: [www 3].

## 4.6. Analysing competitive data

The tool identified all local competitors in each keyword category, allowing us to identify which players compete in which cities and areas. The amount of the obtained data exceeds the possible length of the article, so the sample results are given below. Identification of competitors in specific keyword categories – examples:

- “Dehumidifier rental” – 31 competitors;
- “Drainage Puszczykowo” – 15 competitors;
- “Drying of buildings Kostrzyn” – 22 competitors;
- “Drying after flooding Poznan” – 32 competitors.

The next results that could be obtained were the number of current searches for individual keywords that the identified competitors were competing for in the region – examples:

- “Drying buildings Poznan” – 90 searches;
- “Drying a flat after flooding” – 150 searches;
- “Drying after flooding” – 350 searches.

In addition to the above-mentioned detailed information, the following was observed: two new players entered the local market, 3–4 players maintain and systematically develop GBP, two players base their position on the one achieved in previous years (only collecting opinions), one company achieved significant increases in position for many keywords at the same time and significantly increased the number of opinions for the competitive position. A more comprehensive investigation will prove invaluable when presenting a broader research project in this field, as the tool enables the formulation of a multitude of conclusions pertaining to competitive strategies. The existence of strong competition at the local market level can prompt drying companies to pursue innovative, eco-friendly solutions, which represents an additional dimension of competitive advantage. The implementation of more sustainable drying technologies and a reduction in energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions can enhance the appeal of a company to customers who are environmentally conscious. Furthermore, such practices may also be viewed

favourably by Google itself. One of the latest possible elements to add to the visibility of the company profile is, for example, the attribute: offering online quotations and requiring an appointment, which is in line with resource-saving practices.

## 5. Limitations and future scope of research

The study has yielded several theoretical and practical implications. However, it is not without limitations. The study of competitive strategy in the context of AI tools is constrained by a number of factors. The findings of this study are contingent upon the utilisation of real-time data, necessitating a constant updating process. It is possible to update the position of competitors at intervals of several days in the free version (on the day of the study, because the manufacturer is still developing the tool). This also gives rise to the issue of accessibility of the research results. The company names of individual competitors have been anonymised for research purposes. A variety of tools have been integrated into competitive analysis processes, one of the most prominent being Porter's 5 forces model. A limitation of the tool is the search for direct and indirect competitors. It is not possible to combine this with the search for suppliers or manufacturers, but that is not the purpose of this tool, so this is an indirect limitation. The tool's capacity is constrained by its inability to analyse the entire sector.

Furthermore, the utilisation of the Localo tool is a constraint in itself. There are alternative software solutions available. Localo alternatives can be found in Local SEO Software, but may also be in SEO Tools or Online Reputation Management Software. According to g2.com ranking (one of the most important industry rankings of IT tools), Semrush is considered the best alternative. Other similar apps like Localo are Birdeye, SE Ranking, BrightLocal, and Moz Local [www4].

However, these are international solutions, which are more expensive and more complex, and which do not focus on local competition to such an extent. Consequently, the selection of Localo was a rational decision, driven by the objective of studying activities conducted within national contexts. Nevertheless,

it is crucial to ascertain whether these tools are representative of other local industries. The limitation in itself is niche industries and industries that focus many similar services in themselves, these include construction-related services.

In future studies on the application of AI in the competitive analysis in the building drying industry, it is worth considering aspects related to energy efficiency and sustainable resource management. Implementation of AI tools that actually monitor energy consumption on an ongoing basis and suggest ecological solutions cannot only increase the operational efficiency of companies, but also contribute to minimising their impact on the natural environment, which is not yet detectable today through visibility on the network. Data on operational efficiency before and after the use of AI would be very valuable. Today, the limitation regards the relative lack of such data in tools such as Local SEO Software. The only factor visible in GBP and through tools with AI such as Localo are options for opening a business, on-site or walk-in services, and LGBT friendliness, in which one could look for issues related to sustainable development and social aspects. It is evident that a considerable degree of overinterpretation is currently being applied to the remaining elements.

It is noteworthy that the SM literature does not focus on the use of various AI-based tools, but rather on decision-making in general. In this regard, another area that merits investigation is the extent to which these tools alter the capabilities employed in evaluating competitors in specific sectors. Other sectors facing similar market fragmentation could adopt a similar AI-driven approach to competitive analysis. Extending the analysis to other internal geographic markets in Poland could also be a future research direction.

## 6. Conclusions

From a theoretical point of view, it is interesting to speculate whether the application of AI will extend beyond the domain of directly functional strategies. It is clear that extensive research is essential to provide a framework for the implementation of AI in SM, strategy development, strategic analysis and sustainability.

The research results shed light on the multifaceted impact of AI on competitive intelligence with strategic insights for local visibility in the Google network. Based on the work with the tool, it was found that the elements that determine the position of competitors in Google Maps are: company name, keywords used, company description, number of reviews received by the company, number of photos added to the profile by competitors (quality and suitability of photos), number of posts / updates / offers on the GBP, number of additional details added to the profile (e.g. opening hours, online pricing, offering online quotations etc.).

The comprehensive research findings and analysis highlight the potential of AI in competitive intelligence. The study highlights the importance of AI in the context of a company's online visibility, and thus building customer acquisition capabilities. It is worth noting that without the support of AI-based tools, we would not be able to identify so many competitors so quickly and accurately – in the local market (where it is difficult). In addition, monitoring the competition would be much more time-consuming and therefore more expensive. Current analysis (in real time) allows quick action to be taken, such as adjusting new campaigns, reacting to changes or the behaviour of competitors. However, it should be remembered that local SEO analysis is only a fragment of the competitive analysis using AI and its potential. AI is a valuable tool for businesses, assisting in the analysis of competitors and optimisation of operational processes. This contributes to the improvements in energy efficiency. The utilisation of data analysis enables organisations to more effectively manage their resources, thereby reducing energy consumption. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the building drying sector, where energy-intensive devices are employed. The responsible promotion of practices through the visibility of these activities on Google contributes to the construction of a positive image and the establishment of an exemplar for other entities within the niche industry.

The recommendations support the AI approach and emphasise the need for companies to align the capabilities of current tools with their core strategic needs. As AI evolves, its role in business decision-making is expected to significantly shape the local business landscape. The agenda for future research highlights the urgent need for more in-depth research to both guide the application of AI tools and to effectively integrate Porter's Five Forces model. The study fits in with outcome-oriented research (type B) that examines the

impact of AI implementation at the organisational level, such as its impact on decision making. It will be interesting to see how other AI tools fulfil the remaining forces in the model.

The authors observe that even in the present era, and within the context of such niche industries, the application of AI-based tools continues to exert a significant influence on the development of distinctive organisational resources, in alignment with the RBV and SaP. Furthermore, they suggest that the advent of AI technology at the local level has the potential to alter the competitive landscape, as postulated by Porter's model.

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