

COMPETITIVENESS FACTORS OF OYSTER COOPERATIVES

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Abstract: This article aims to identify and describe the performance factors present in the activities of oyster cooperatives that contribute to their competitiveness. The methodological approach of this research is quantitative; a bibliographic review of the topic was also conducted. For data collection, a Likert-type questionnaire with five response options was utilized, developed based on contributions from factors studied and defined by various experts in the field of social enterprises. Six factors previously addressed by the authors were selected. The study involved 67 members from six oyster farming cooperatives. According to the results obtained from the responses, it was determined that the most relevant factors influencing the productivity of these social economy enterprises are: product quality, the sanitary condition of the enterprise, sociocultural training of the cooperative members, and competitors.

Keywords: cooperatives, performance factors, productivity

JEL Classification: M21

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Introduction

Currently, and given the need to create new forms of organization, generate job opportunities, and take advantage of the resources offered by localities, social solidarity economy companies are emerging, such as cooperatives, which, despite having a focus on solidarity union, must also be generators of economic income that allow their associates to obtain profits to meet their needs. Furthermore, in the same way that private sector companies whose purpose is profit have their performance factors defined, this type of organizations must also have them. A cooperative is an autonomous association of people who have joined together voluntarily to satisfy their economic, social and cultural needs as well as aspirations through a democratically managed joint enterprise in which the relevant factor is voluntary adhesion and the creation of the same to satisfy needs from a multidimensional approach, different from a capitalist company whose objective is the reproduction of capital at the expense of whatever. In addition to being a jointly owned and democratically controlled entity, that is, those who work in it are partners, decision-making depends on everyone, unlike a capitalist company where the partners are shareholders and are the only ones who make decisions within the company according to their percentage of participation (Vázquez, 2016). Cooperatives are non-profit entities and have a relevant role in society by promoting cohesion, employability, and the solution of common problems through solidarity and democracy, as well as roles that are typical of non-profit societies. They constitute an instrument through which it is possible to improve the lives of its members through the practice of principles and values, thereby making it feasible to achieve economic and social improvements for communities, laying the foundations for the construction of a more egalitarian society (Lara, 2020). Cooperatives constitute a clear example of a business sector where there is still room for discussion and analysis on the best way to evaluate performance and competitiveness, which is why the objective of this research is to identify the performance factors that are present in the activities of a social and solidarity economy company, and that contribute to its competitiveness. The study was based on a quantitative approach. A Likert-type questionnaire with five response options was used, prepared with contributions of research in the area of administration that has been carried out by various experts, in addition to the tools that these authors have used to obtain the information. The data for the research comes from a survey of 67 participants belonging to six oyster cooperatives.

Literature review

Cooperative societies constitute an expression of what is called Social and Solidarity Economy, by virtue of their particular features. For this reason, Vázquez (2016) asserts that cooperativism emerges as a social movement due to the need and urgency to respond to social and ecological imbalances as well as to act in a sustainable manner in the face of the needs of change. In addition, it states that it reflects the interests of almost all countries and sectors of the population as a relevant option in the process of change to balance interests and actively guide transformations.

It is an autonomous association of people who come together voluntarily to satisfy their economic, social and cultural needs as well as aspirations through a joint enterprise of democratic management from a multidimensional approach, different from a capitalist enterprise whose objective is the reproduction of capital at the expense of nearly everything. In addition to being a jointly owned and democratically controlled entity, as those who work in it are partners, decision-making depends on everyone (Vázquez, 2016). They are non-profit entities and have a relevant role in society by promoting its cohesion, employability, and the solution of common problems through solidarity and democracy (Lara, 2020).

Cooperative societies constitute an expression of what is called Social Solidarity Economy, by virtue of their particular features. For this reason, Vázquez (2016) asserts that cooperativism emerges as a social movement due to the need and urgency to respond to social and ecological imbalances as well as to act in a sustainable manner in the face of the needs of change. In addition, it states that it reflects the interests of almost all countries and sectors of the population as a relevant option in the process of change to balance interests and actively guide the transformations.

The selected performance factors are presented below, based on the conceptualization proposed by various authors. When discussing the term “quality”, Galdeano (2002) argues that, in recent years, the importance of quality and environmental factors in various products has grown significantly. These elements have come to characterize cooperative entities as crucial for competitiveness as a means of recovering added value, and above all, for promoting the adoption of new working methods that align with the demands of the current market. Cooperative companies are less profitable than private companies owned by investors, therefore the effects of the financial variables on profitability differ significantly between the two groups of companies; that is why cooperatives must modify their capital structure to have financial ratios similar to those of privately owned companies in order to be competitively successful (Ananiadis et al., 2003). Cooperative companies can benefit from their proximity or work network, for example, if they are located in a relevant area of the state or country or by being located in a capital city, which gives them greater access to the resources they require (Grant, 1994). Montegut (2006) argues that cooperatives cannot remain alien to the new current information and communication technologies since they are tools that provide automated solutions that, by facilitating adequate access to information, allow the level of customer service and the degree of reaction to their demands to be optimised, and therefore it is a key factor to achieve competitiveness and differentiation. Market orientation as a strategy for social enterprises refers to the link between the company and the final consumer to the extent that the cooperative is able to discover or anticipate the customer's needs and satisfy them profitably in terms of prices with respect to its direct competition (Benos et al., 2015). One of the relevant factors of competitiveness, according to Casares and Martín (2018), is innovation in distribution systems since it is used in response to consumer demands, market demands and global competition (the current competitive environment causes companies to seek to innovate quickly and efficiently to respond to the changes that are generated). Currently, the focus of organizations is on establishing development phases with higher quality processes,

seeking productivity but guaranteeing respect, care and preservation of the environment, the health and safety of collaborators since it is a factor that helps achieve a more competitive position in the market, along with a positive image as well as generates the trust of customers and interested parties (Antúnez et al., 2017). Another relevant factor of competitiveness has to do with the health and environmental status of the company; therefore, Cerda (2003) argues that in recent years the relationship between the environment, competitiveness and trade has been gaining relevance due to the rapid expansion of world trade thanks to the application of environmental measures for protectionist purposes. Koontz and Weihrich (1998) state that the sociocultural environment is composed of attitudes, desires, expectations, degrees of intelligence and education, beliefs and customs of the people of a group or society. The human aspect is the essence of any company or organization, regardless of its line of business, since it is this that mobilizes the operational and administrative aspects of the company. An element that generates competitiveness is the actions that the company uses to generate added value and commercialize its products. Due to the great competition in today's world, the creation of wealth for company leaders is the most important objective to achieve. Therefore, company leaders need to use instruments to measure the potential value of each business opportunity (the return on investment and earnings per share) and provide valuable information that helps the decision-making process (Vinajera et al., 2017). When analysing factors such as the disposition of their competitors, companies have different strategic objectives, including the search for maximum profit, increasing market share, improving productivity or increasing competitive success (Aragón et al., 2010). Regarding the perceptions and factors of predisposition to associativity, López (2012), based on Porter and taking into account external factors and the existence of public goods, considers it necessary and appropriate to have informal networks and commercial associations, consortia and other collective organizations since they can achieve greater influence and attention together than separating or sharing costs.

According to Michael Porter (1985), competitiveness is defined as the ability of a company to produce and offer products to the market under better conditions of price, quality and opportunity than its rivals. It is the fundamental basis for the success of companies, which need continuous internal change and innovation to continue resisting rapid and successive transformations. Companies are usually classified as public and private; the economic development of a country is directly related to the competitiveness of companies. Derived from the need to identify the factors that generate competitiveness, those that, according to various researchers, are considered relevant for this type of company were selected.

Research methodology

The research design is based on quantitative research techniques, with the use of a Likert-type survey questionnaire including a total of 12 questions, with five response options: completely disagree: 1; moderately disagree: 2; indifferent: 3; moderately agree: 4 and strongly agree: 5. This research involved the participation of 67 active members from six distinct oyster cooperatives located in El Castillo,

Las Aguamitas, Navolato, and Sinaloa, Mexico. The information collection process was carried out in person at the places under study, by email, by phone call and by means of Google form, from December 2023 to March 2024.

Regarding quality, the statements and questions are: the cooperative makes sure to take care of quality in the productive activities it carries out; the cooperative has established processes to take care of quality in the administrative activities it carries out; does the cooperative has certifications and permits to comply with quality guidelines? For the financial resources factor, the questions are: Is the cooperative stable and capable of covering or paying its debts to suppliers? Is the cooperative stable and capable of paying its operating expenses (water, electricity, telephone and other services)? Does the company obtain a good income from the sales of the product. The statements for the location factor are: the purchase and receipt of oyster seed is easier due to the location of the cooperative; it is easy to obtain diesel or gasoline for the equipment due to the location of the cooperative; the location of the cooperative facilitates the receipt of purchase and delivery of supplies and items necessary for administrative and operational activities. For the technology factor, the following issues were addressed: the cooperative frequently invests in machinery and equipment for oyster production; the cooperative has modern office equipment for administration. Regarding the marketing factor, the posed questions and statements were: Does the cooperative company has its own trademark? Does the cooperative use some type of advertising to publicize its product? The cooperative carries out the packaging and labelling of the product. For the distribution factor, the questions are: Does the cooperative use wholesale and/or retail distribution for the delivery of the product? Are the stages to be followed for the delivery of the product clearly established? Is there an established time from harvest to delivery of the product to the customer?

Regarding the productivity factor, the presented statements were: the cooperative ensures that they have quality raw materials; the processes they carry out are constantly evaluated to improve them. The health status factor included questions and statements as follows: the cooperative designates a person to supervise the processes to comply with the required standards; Does it have safety and hygiene manuals (use of safety equipment and clothing) in operational activities? Are they in charge of supervising occupational safety and hygiene, ensuring compliance with health regulations? Are there external organizations that supervise the health and environmental status of the company? For the sociocultural training factor of the partners, the questions and statements are: the cooperative has established policies and regulations that govern the behaviour of members; members are trained to provide their experience and capabilities to the cooperative. Regarding the added value factor, the members were questioned regarding: the cooperative's product has superior characteristics to those of the competition; the cooperative carries out a different process in relation to its competitors. Regarding competitors, the questions and statements include: the cooperative has identified its main competitors; does it have alliances or some type of relationship with competing companies? Has it provided any support to any of the competing companies? Finally, regarding associativity, the questions are whether the cooperative is part of any network, and whether the cooperative would be willing to make alliances with other companies to improve its benefits.

Research results

Below are graphs with the percentages of the results from by the 67 subjects participating in this research from the Likert scale questionnaire.

According to Figure 1, shown below, the quality factor has the following responses: 67% of the survey sample completely agrees, 31% moderately agrees, and those with an indifferent option – 2%.

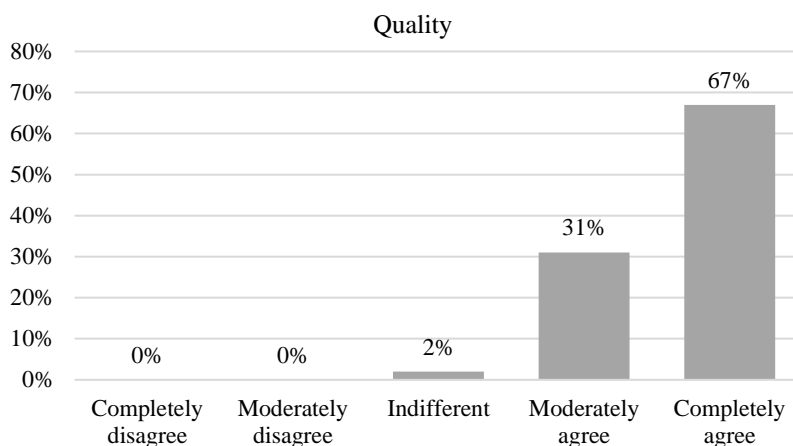


Figure 1. Quality factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

Concerning the financial resources factor, the moderately agree option is 58%, the moderately disagree option received 21%, the indifferent option 11%, while the completely agree and completely disagree options gained 6 and 4%, respectively (Figure 2).

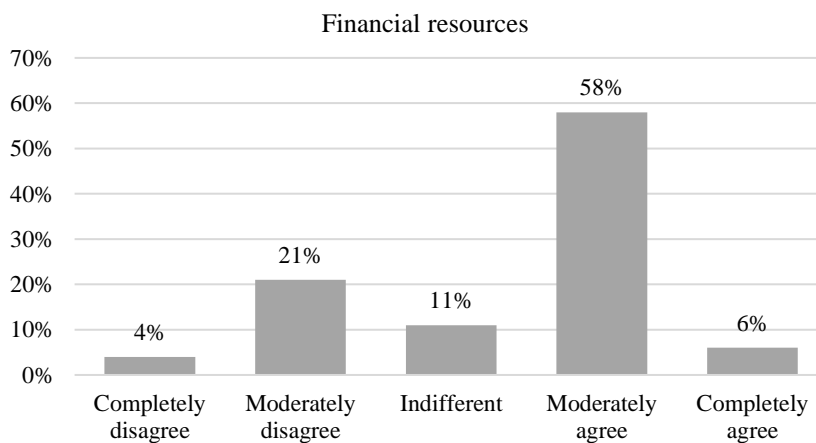


Figure 2. Financial resources factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

Regarding the location of the company (Figure 3), the respondents who were indifferent was of 54%, those who moderately agree was 22%, the moderately disagree option was chosen by 18%, while those questioned that completely agree and completely disagree were 3%, respectively.

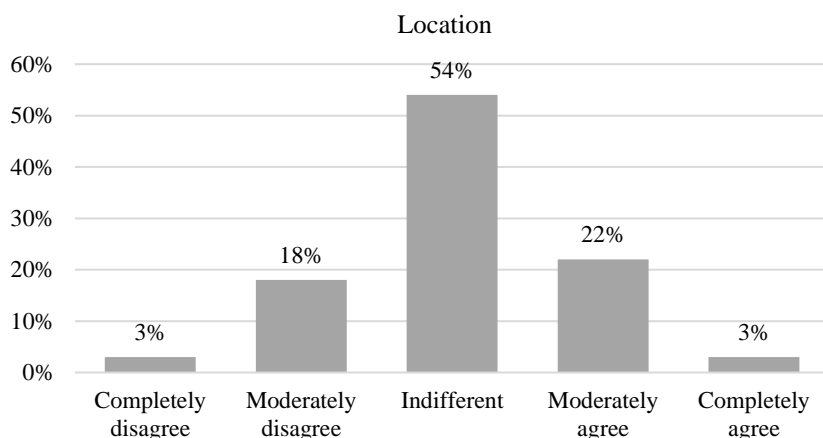


Figure 3. Location factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

The technology factor has the following percentage of responses: the indifferent option received a total of 67%, those surveyed that completely agree was 21%, the moderately disagree option was selected by 7%, the moderately agree option by 3% and those participants that completely disagree was 2% (Figure 4).

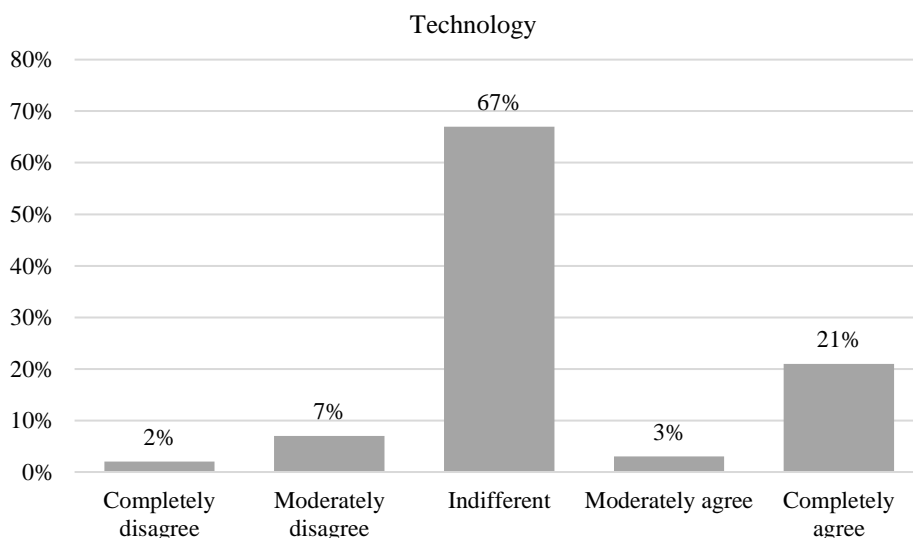


Figure 4. Technology factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

The participants of this research consider, according to their answers, the following regarding the relevance of the marketing factor to the company's productivity: the indifferent option was chosen by a total of 39%, the respondents that moderately disagree was 36%, moderately agree 22% and those questioned that completely agree was 3%.

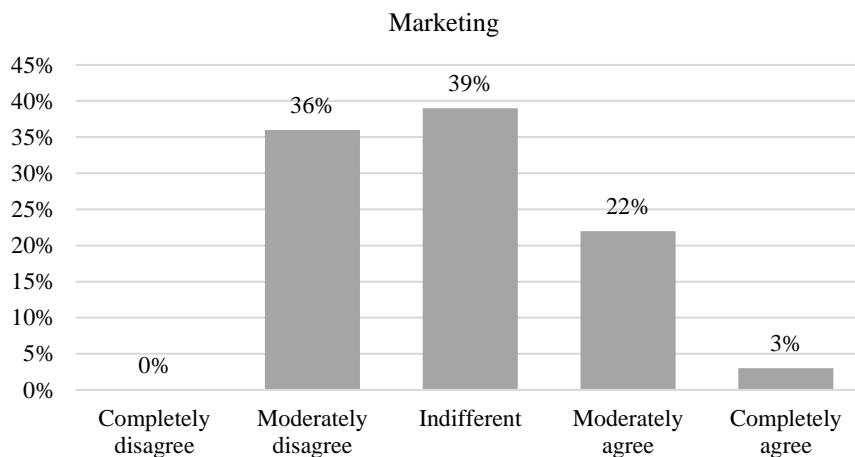


Figure 5. Marketing factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

Regarding product distribution (Figure 6), the moderately agree option gained a total of 40%, the indifferent option was chosen by a total of 37%, those participants that completely agree was 20% and moderately disagree – 3%.

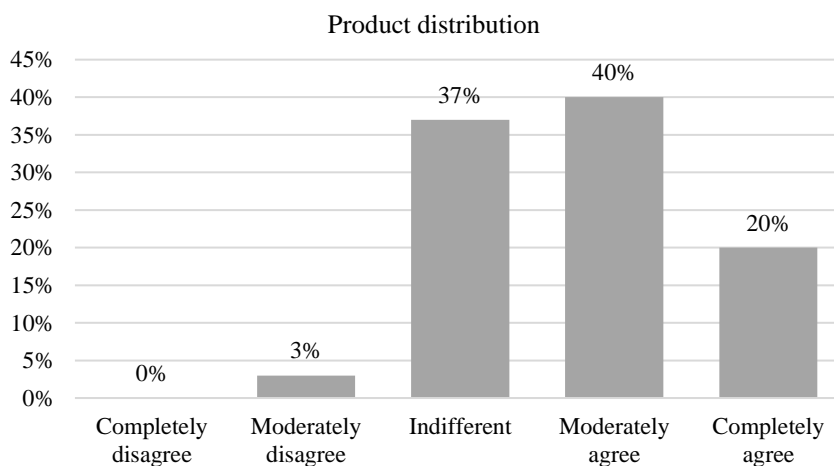


Figure 6. Product distribution factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

Regarding the productivity factor, the option with the highest percentage is moderately disagree with 52%, indifferent 27%, completely agree 18% and moderately disagree 3% (Figure 7).

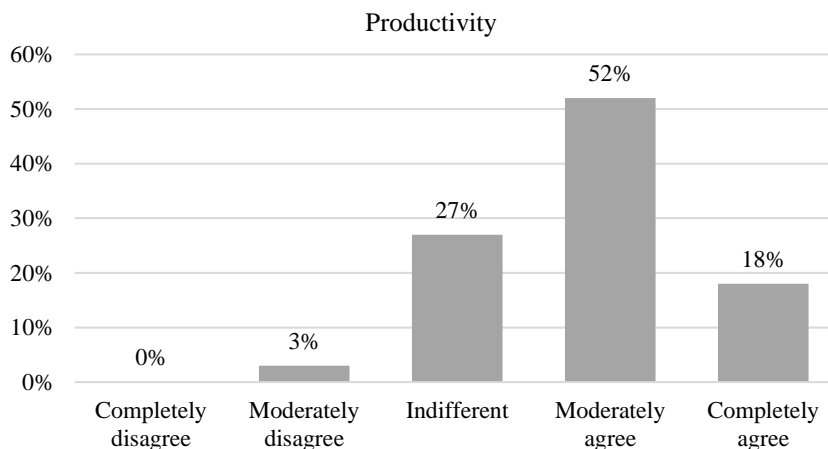


Figure 7. Product distribution factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

Regarding the health status factor of the cooperative, Figure 8 shows that there is a factor with a high response percentage since 87% of the respondents express complete agreement, 6% moderately agree, 4% are indifferent and 3% express moderate disagreement. This distribution indicates that the majority of the participants view the company's situation positively, while the low percentages of indifference and disagreement suggest strong alignment among the respondents.

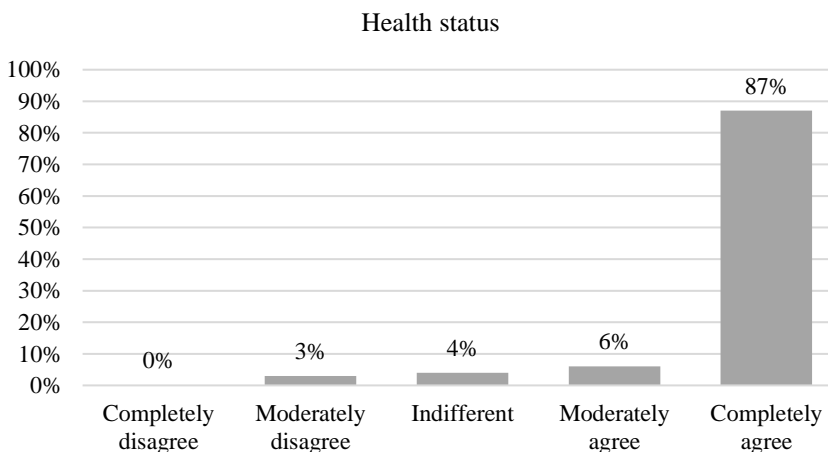


Figure 8. Health status factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

Figure 9 shows the sociocultural training factor of the partners, which obtained the following responses from the participants: the option with the highest percentage is completely agree, which stands at 55%. This is followed by moderately agree at 41%, while both the indifferent and moderately disagree options represent 2% each.

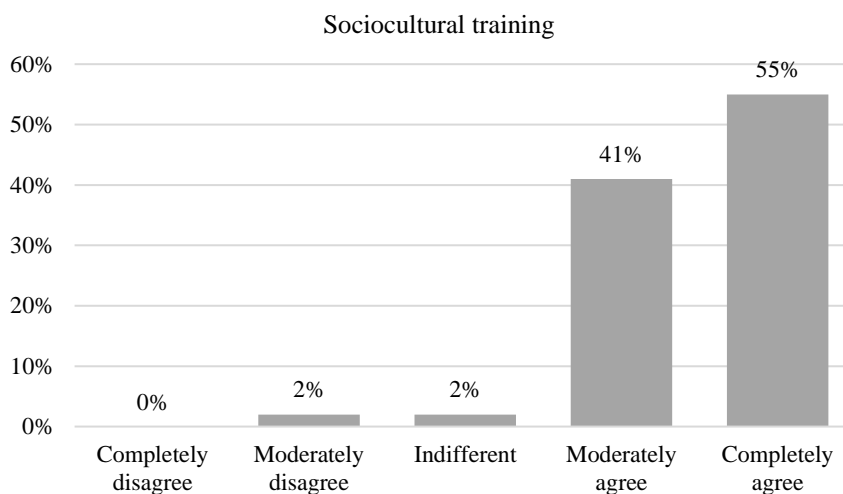


Figure 9. Sociocultural training factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

Concerning the factor of added value, the predominant response was completely agree, accounting for 51%. The moderately agree option totals 23%, while the indifferent category comprises 22%. Lastly, the moderately disagree option represents only 2% (Figure 10).

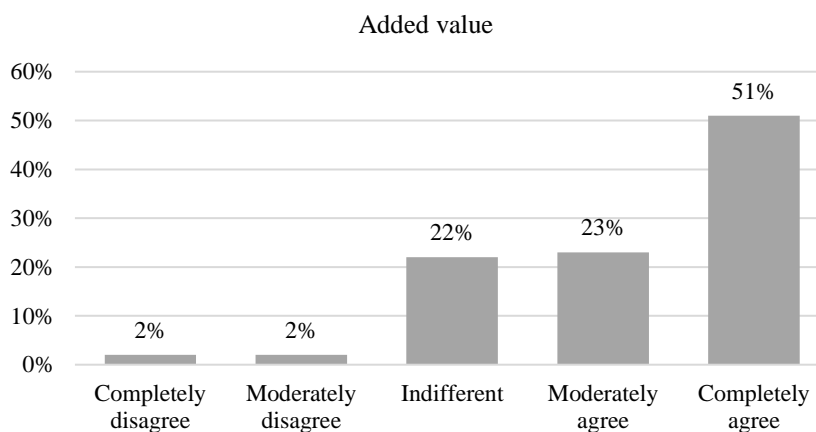


Figure 10. Added value factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

Regarding the factor of competitor identification, the predominant response was completely agree, accounting for 51%. The moderately agree option totals 37%, while the indifferent category comprises 12% (Figure 11).

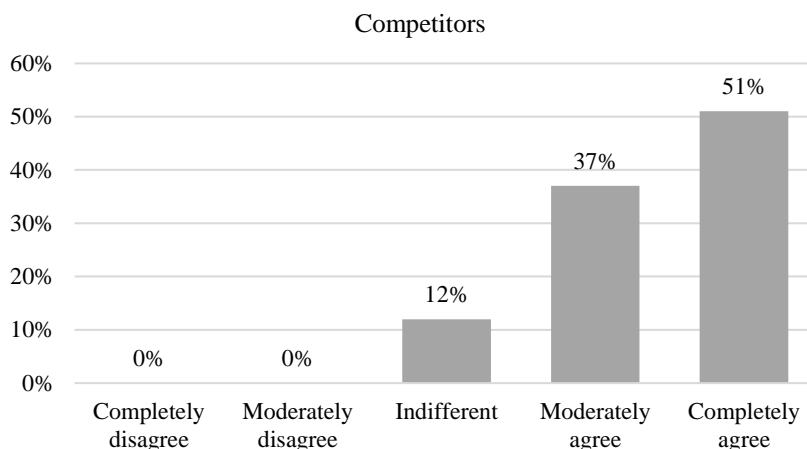


Figure 11. Competitor’s factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

Associativity as a relevant factor in the competitiveness of cooperatives obtained the following responses (Figure 12): the option with the highest percentage is indifferent, representing 46%. The option completely agree accounts for 42%, while somewhat agree was selected by 12% of those surveyed.

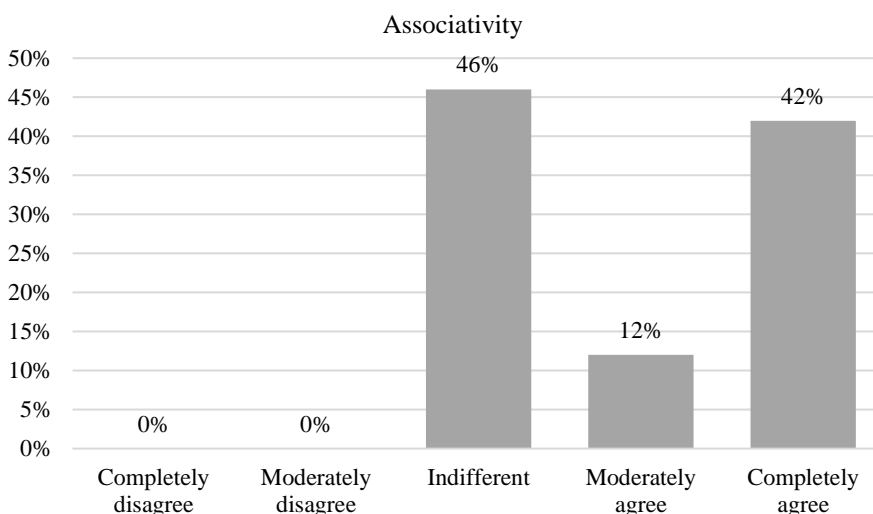


Figure 12. Associativity factor

Source: Own elaboration based on research results

Conclusions

The topic of social and solidarity economy companies and their forms or measurement factors is a matter that is just beginning to be investigated and become relevant, since although there are studies in this area, there is still a great need to define the factors that can be included in the measurement of their performance.

According to the results derived from the application of the tool for data collection, among the factors that are considered most relevant, as they obtained the greatest number of responses with 5 (completely agree), are: 1) The quality of the product, because the cooperatives are very careful and follow the guidelines requested by the various verifying institutions to obtain permits and certifications for both the planting water and the product they offer to the market. 2) The health status of the company, because this has a direct impact on the competitive advantage that the cooperative may have in its production. 3) Sociocultural training of the members of the cooperative: this allows them to be better prepared to know the productive and administrative processes as well as take advantage of the knowledge that the members can provide to the company, in addition to internally have full control of the administration of everything. 4) Competitors: by identifying its competitors, the cooperative can be alert to the threats that may arise, in addition to generating strategies to attack these threats first as well as take advantage of the opportunities and strengths they have.

It is also relevant to consider that there are indicators traditionally used in other types of companies that can be applied to social companies; as additionally, there are also particularities of social companies that suggest the need to define new indicators that help monitor to their performance. Although there are many problems faced by these types of social and solidarity economy companies, it is possible and necessary to define indicators that can be applied to all companies of this type.

These competitiveness factors are also utilized by commercial companies. Therefore, for future lines of research, there is a need to establish indicators with performance metrics specifically aimed at measuring competitiveness in enterprises within the social and solidarity economy.

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Conflict of Interest: In this investigation, there are no conflicts of interest among the parties involved.

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CZYNNIKI KONKURENCYJNOŚCI W SPÓŁDZIELNIACH HODOWLI OSTRYG

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zidentyfikowanie i opisanie czynników, które mają wpływ na konkurencyjność spółdzielni zajmujących się hodowlą ostryg. Przeprowadzono przegląd literatury przedmiotu. W badaniu zastosowano metodę badań ilościowych. Do zebrania danych wykorzystano kwestionariusz typu Likerta z pięcioma opcjami odpowiedzi, opracowany na podstawie czynników badanych i definiowanych przez różnych ekspertów w zakresie przedsiębiorstw społecznych. W badaniu wzięło udział 67 członków z 6 spółdzielni hodowli ostryg. Zgodnie z wynikami uzyskanymi w badaniu ustalono, że najbardziej istotnymi czynnikami wpływającymi na produktywność tych przedsiębiorstw gospodarki społecznej są: jakość produktu, stan sanitarny przedsiębiorstwa, szkolenie społeczno-kulturowe członków spółdzielni oraz konkurencja.

Słowa kluczowe: czynniki wydajności, produktywność, spółdzielnie

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