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EDITORIAL

The question of who should be responsible for pricing decisions has not yet been satisfactorily answered. There is only scarce research on certain aspects of this topic, which primarily focuses on how much influence the sales force should have on pricing decisions. However, in many companies, there is no clear answer to the question of who should make prices in a company because pricing processes and responsibilities are not clearly defined. The survey sought to find whether the organizational position of persons with pricing responsibility (e.g., whether the pricing responsibility was within the marketing, the sales, or the controlling department or with a dedicated pricing manager) in European companies had an effect on performance measures and on factors related to the domains of strategy formulation, implementation, organization, and environment.

It was shown by Roll et al. that different groups of managers (pricing, marketing, sales, and controlling managers) have different competencies and approaches regarding different managerial aspects of pricing and therefore perform differently in these domains. When controllers were responsible for pricing decisions, strategic issues were better formulated and important steps were better implemented than in those cases in which controllers were not responsible for pricing decisions. This positive influence can be explained by the analytical way of thinking that is often attributed to controllers. The results are also in line with the knowledge that controllers possess concerning internal processes.

Consistent with prior work, the study results indicate that the delegation of pricing responsibility to the sales force can be disadvantageous for many managerial and, especially, performance aspects of a company. The reasons for this negative affect on firm performance might be found in the configuration of incentive systems. A noticeable result was that top management support was lower when the sales department was responsible for pricing. Pricing managers seem to have strengths regarding aspects of firm organization. Company revenues were especially higher if pricing managers were responsible. However, the causality in this case might be that only companies generating larger revenues have the necessary structures and can afford to employ specialized pricing managers. The other performance measure that showed significant results for pricing managers was customer satisfaction. This indicates that pricing managers are more able than others to analyze their customers' willingness to pay and subsequently price products higher than their colleagues do. By combining competencies and information from different organizational divisions at a single point in the company, processes are optimized and pricing performance improved. Consequently, customers will buy the products, but are not happy with the prices.

The implications of this study are that optimized processes and improved pricing performance can be achieved by combining the competencies of people from different functional areas. A cross-functional approach on marketing issues such as pricing can be very successful, even though it might be time-consuming and difficult. Pricing as a managerial challenge of high importance is too complex to leave it to just one department. The combination of knowledge from different functional areas of a company under the umbrella of one dedicated pricing manager seems to be a good solution. It is important, however, to clearly define competencies and responsibilities for a group of different managers that is working on pricing issues in order to avoid frustration or misunderstandings.

The recent European financial crisis has become one of the most common issues in the global news agenda. Apart from the economic downturn, it has also affected international trade and the presence of national products in foreign markets. The paper by Zaris and Dimakakos aims to empirically investigate the impact of mass media on the behavior of British and German consumers, regarding the purchase of Greek products, and to identify whether media exposure can be considered as an antecedent that causes or increases the concepts of consumer ethnocentrism and consumer animosity. Additionally, it analyses the correlation between media exposure and the country-of-origin effect.

The results indicated that the two-year media coverage on Greece's debt crisis had a significant impact on the British and German consumers' behavior. More specifically, although consumers did not show any animosity feelings, consumer ethnocentrism made them reluctant in purchasing them. Furthermore, despite the fact that British and German consumers had a positive view of Greek products, a significant portion was not well informed about them.

The aforementioned findings are extremely important for companies that operate under conditions of economic instability, and experience a decline in the domestic market. For such companies, exporting is perhaps the only way to increase their sales. Therefore, a better knowledge of foreign consumers' behavior (and not the country's behavior) could be a powerful tool for Greek companies so as to promote their goods more efficiently. Moreover, a systematic co-operation between the firms' managers, the commercial associations, and the Greek government is recommended in order to enhance the country's image in the foreign markets.

Manufacturing plays a vital role in the economic health of a country, and therefore, building the appropriate environment and applying policies for firms to survive and flourish is of utmost importance for the country's economy. The competitiveness of a country's manufacturing sector is critical for its economic prosperity and growth. Intense competition in global and local markets urges firms to improve their competitiveness.

The study by Voulgaris et al. investigates the systematic differences between exporting and non-exporting firms, based on the assumption that an exporting firm is a competitive firm. The authors use firm-level financial data of Greek manufacturing firms from random sample of 335 listed and non listed firms with the highest sales, from the two most important in terms of exports, manufacturing sectors, in Greece, i.e. Food & Beverages and Textiles, covering a period of 11 years (2000-2010). The study attempts to identify the critical factors of exporting firms and to detect if there exist any differences among the two sectors. The methodology used is a binary logit regression models on all firms (335) of the sample (exporting and non-exporting), and one for each sector using as dependent binary variable exporting activity and as independent variables financial ratios. A qualitative model is also estimated based on both financial and qualitative data which are derived from questionnaires addressed to 100 firms.

Descriptive statistics pinpoint the financial and managerial characteristics of the exporting firms in those sectors and show significant differences between exporting and non-exporting firms, suggesting that exporting firms are younger, smaller, have higher labor productivity, lower financial leverage, and lower domestic market share vs. the non-exporting firms.

The results of the logit regression models suggest that age, size, effective management of production expenses, sales growth, inventory control, and moderate liquidity have a considerable impact on a firm's ability to export. Profitability is inversely related to exports, suggesting that firms in those traditional sectors compete on low pricing and that they have to be efficient to survive. It is proven that for low technology industries, such as F&B and textiles, the inability to exploit monopolistic power leads them to a greater level of export involvement. So the results indicate that Greek manufacturers view exporting activity as a residual activity in the period under study.

The results also indicate that exporting firms must have a low reliance on debt. Greek exporters are light manufacturers with low value added products, due to low fixed assets because of constrains in financing and the small size of the domestic market. In terms of management and strategic characteristics, factors that are found to increase exportability, are foreign firm affiliation and cooperation, size, low cost imported raw material, and use of e-commerce. However, innovation and new technology does not seem to affect Greek exports of food, beverages, and textiles firms, since they mainly compete through low pricing.

Due to the economic crisis, customers' preferences have changed, turning towards low priced quality products. Competition has been increased from firms which, originally coming from low cost countries (BRIC), have become now industrialized, investing in developed economies through FDI and thus improving fast the quality of their products through application of west technologies, providing low cost quality products. Greek firms have to compete now with those firms in the export market.

Small and medium size firms focusing in market niches innovate and broaden their markets globally. This applies to Greek exports. Non-price competitiveness introduces product differentiation that improves quality and characteristics of exports. Low cost is important, but not without elements of differentiation. In the food and beverages sectors, firms should focus on quality products differentiated with new tastes and healthy food characteristics. In the textiles industry, firms that have succeeded in producing differentiated and quality products with the use of international partners cooperation are the ones that will survive and grow.

For policy makers, our results suggest that exporting firms should be supported by the State through easy access to financing for fixed assets investments in new technology and innovation, through lower taxes, lower bureaucracy, and improvement in the quality of physical infrastructure. However, the recovery of the lost competitiveness of the Greek economy can be achieved not only from exporting firms, but through the transferring of productive resources from public services and commerce to firms with export orientation and exportable goods and services. At the same time, along with the shrinking of the public sector, important structural changes are needed, such as labor and product markets flexibility and the provision of incentives for investments in sectors with strong export orientation.

During the last decades, the rivalry in the retail sector seems to be more intense through the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT). Nowadays, the high level of competition in the textile and clothing sector, combined with the financial crisis, have contributed to the reduction in both the profit margin and the size of the sector. In this context, the perceived value has become a fundamental construct in commercial distribution, being both a consequence and an antecedent of key behavioral variables in retail operations. In this framework, the present study by Gil-Saura et al. tries to analyse the effects of the changes of dynamic variables like the ICT in the point of sales, on perceived value, commitment, and loyalty. The starting point of this study is the evidence of previous studies about the significance of the factors that influence this process. Additionally, the authors intend to detect the possible differences between the generated perceptions of conclusions, to the supplier efforts in order to provide sustainable competitive advantages through the development of management systems and business differentiation, based on client orientation and, more specifically, on the delivery of value.

The results corroborate the effects of perceived value on commitment and loyalty, although perceived value does not seem to be influenced by ICT. With all that, it can be concluded that in order to maintain in the market, the suppliers have to deliver a proposal of value to the consumer in order to attract the consumer, induce the purchase, and foster loyalty. This process can be achieved through the creation of functional–quality, price-, emotional, and social links. However, not all of them act with the same intensity. According to the study results, the effect of emotional value on total value and commitment is stronger than that which is produced by the other types of value. Therefore, the authors perceive as possible implications for the retail companies the concentration of their efforts on investing in the resources that improve customer's experience in the point of sale. These resources can be developed through increased staff training in the store, with a true vocation towards customer orientation, service customisation, and interpersonal relationship.

Finally, in this study the authors found that nationality factor affects the behaviour of the model variables, pointing towards a possible moderating effect. Perhaps, the non-significant effect of ICT can be explained by the significant differences found in the empirical research between the two customer profiles of nationality. All the above constitutes a new perspective in the analysis of relationships between customers and stores of clothing and footwear.

Erdener Kaynak
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