The Perception and Cultural Practices by International Craft Companies

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Introduction

The main of this chapter is to analyse the perception of the environment (Goodstein and Polasky, 2005) of those who compete internationally by running companies that produce handicrafts. Based on the Competitive Advantages Theory (Grant, 1991; Barney and Clark, 2007; Algieri, Aquino and Succurro, 2018; Liu and Atuahene-Gima, 2018; Makadok, Burton and Barney, 2018; Teece, 2018; Salunke, Weerawardena and McColl-Kennedy, 2019; Buckley & Casson, 2019), the analysis and identification of craft companies that sell in foreign markets. The field visits, the systematic observation, the application of a questionnaire and the interviews allowed to know this perception and its relationship with international activities.

Entrepreneurs consider themselves better than the competition in terms of strategies and generating competitive advantages; although, they are usually prudent when evaluating the possibility of being imitated by competitors.

It is considered that the research results of this project seek an answer to the possibility of an own and autonomous economic development, to the indigenous representativeness, as well as the right to maintain and develop their cultural practices, remains a constant demand of a rich country in ancient cultures.

Given the new poverty profiles, migratory flows and climate change; as well as the geopolitical reconfiguration that has been developed in recent years, the studies are directed to companies that generate social value.

International organizations encourage the study and implementation of policies and programs that support inclusive, resilient and value-creating economic activities with a positive impact on local development. Especially if these organizations have proven to achieve higher competitiveness in international markets.

This last statement is related to the present work, which exposes the way in which artisans operate in various regions of the world without abandoning the traditional mode of production to compete.

In the way they increase their international activity, they strengthen the traditional way of production and keep alive the historical roots through crafts inherited from their ancestors.

Hence the importance of identifying how the craft sector conceives, what benefits it gives them, to what extent they are considered better than the competition, how this perception relates to the decision to operate internationally.

The Ethnic Environment in Mexico

There are 68 ethnic groups that turn in 364 variants throughout the national territory, covering the 32 states of the Mexican Republic (Table 1). These groups have borne the enormous responsibility of preserving natural resources, traditions, and customs despite the urban and industrial development that has undermined their environment.

The indigenous municipalities are agglomerated, while the municipalities with indigenous presence and dispersed indigenous population are distributed throughout the country (INEE, 2017).

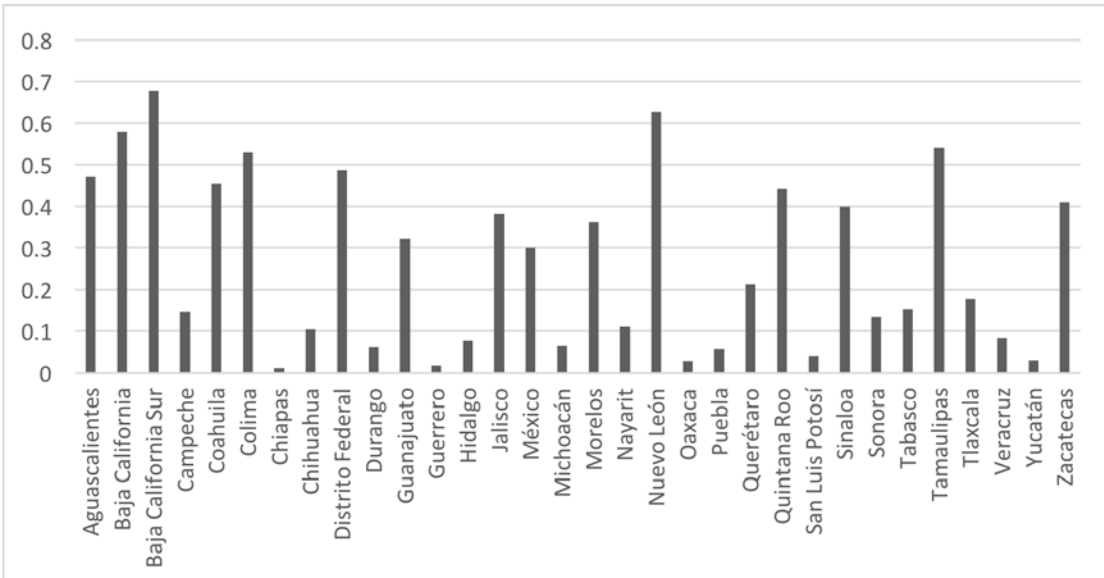
Table 1
Indigenous peoples by state

State	Settlements	Groups	States	Settlements	Groups
Baja California	5	Cochimí, Cucapá, Kiliwa, Kumiai y Paipai	Morelos	1	Náhuatl
Campeche	4	Maya	Nayarit	2	Cora y Huichol
Ciudad de México		Maya, Mazahua, Mazateco, Mixe, Mixteco, Náhuatl, Otomí, Purépecha, Tlapaneco, Totonaco y Zapoteco	Oaxaca	15	Amuzgo, Chatino, Chinanteco, Chocho, Chontal, Cuicateco, Huave, Ixcateco, Mazateco, m Mixe, Mixteco, Triqui y Zapoteco
Coahuila	1	Kikapú	Puebla	2	Chocho, Mixteco, Náhuatl y Totonaca
Chiapas	11	Cakchiquel, Chol, Jacalteco, Kanjobal, Lacandón, Mame, Mochó, Tojolabal, Tzeltal (tseltal), Tzotzil (tsotsil) y Zoque	Querétaro		Otomí y Pame
Chihuahua	3	Guarijío, Pima, Tarahumara y Tepehuán	Quintana Roo		Maya
Durango	1	Tepehuán	San Luis Potosí	2	Huasteco, Náhuatl y Pame
Estado de México	3	Mazahua, Náhuatl y Otomí	Sinaloa	2	Mayo
Guanajuat o	1	Chichimeca Jonaz	Sonora	5	Mayo, Pápago, Pima, Seri y Yaqui
Guerrero	4	Amuzgo, Mixteco, Náhuatl y Tlapaneco	Tabasco	1	Chontal y Chol
Hidalgo	2	Náhuatl y Otomí	Veracruz	2	Náhuatl, Tepehua, Popoluca y Totonaca
Jalisco		Huichol	Yucatán	1	Maya
Michoacán	1	Mazahua, Otomí y Purépecha			

Note: migratory flows result in indigenous migrants dispersed in all states.
Source: Own elaboration based on the Cultural Information System (SIC, 2018, SNTE, 2018)

Due to this situation, indigenous communities have had to fight against high rates of poverty and precarious social conditions. According to the Ministry of Culture (2017), the indigenous population in the country rises to more than 11 million inhabitants, a percentage greater than 10% of the total population of Mexico (Graph 1).

Graph 1
Percentage of the Mexican indigenous population that was not born within the entity in which they reside, 2015



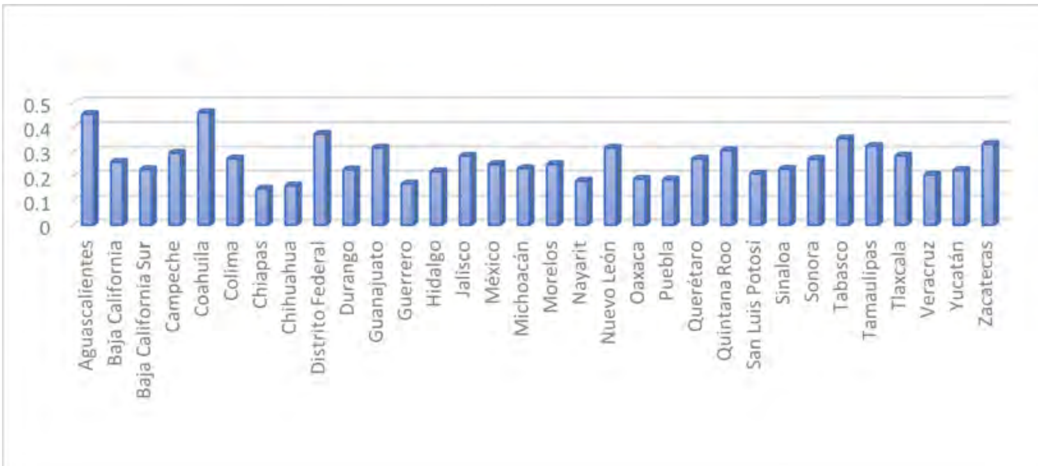
Source: Own elaboration based on INEGI (2015).

Middle high education was added as part of compulsory education in 2012. In addition to imparting knowledge of the socially productive activity, it has a propaedeutic character that allows continuing with higher education (Graph 2). With a scarce presence are the careers of the technical professional model, which have a terminal character (INEE, 2017).

The bilingual artisan is a bridge between two or more cultures, allows the insertion and preservation of indigenous art, as well as the fusion of new knowledge in the global economy. This also makes them agents of change in the face of improving the quality of life in the locality, in parallel with their craft activities.

The language represents the conception one has of reality, the uses and customs. This largely determines how we interact with the world, what we dress, eat and celebrate. Bilingualism and even multilingualism are a key element to recognize, preserve and sustain the pluricultural wealth of Mexico in the system.

Graph 2
Percentage of the Mexican indigenous population with more than fifteen years of age and with higher and/or higher education by state



Source: Own elaboration based on INEGI (2015).

Mexican Artisan Sector facing the world

In Mexico, each group has a particular identity that is reflected in pieces with unique and diverse materials, giving rise to 17 particular branches of crafts (Table 2). Suarez and Zapata (2007) qualify handicrafts as part of the vision of indigenous peoples who manage to unite economic, social and cultural aspects of their beliefs.

According to the latest report by IMARC Group, titled “Handicrafts Market: Global Industry Trends, Share, Size, Growth, Opportunity, and Forecast 2018-2023”, the global handicrafts market reached a value of US$ 526.5 Billion in 2017. the market value is projected to reach approximately US$ 984.8 Billion by 2023, expanding at a CAGR of more than 11% during 2018-2023.

Table 2
Artisanal branches in Mexico

1	Pottery and Ceramics	9	Papel
2	Textile	10	Saddlery
3	Wood	11	Lacquer
4	Wax	12	Stonework
5	Metals	13	Huichol Art
6	Goldsmith	14	Bone
7	Jewelry	15	Shell
8	Vegetal fibers	16	Glass
		17	Feathers

Source: Own elaboration based on the Manual of Differentiation between Handicrafts and Handicrafts of the National Fund for the Promotion of Crafts (2009)

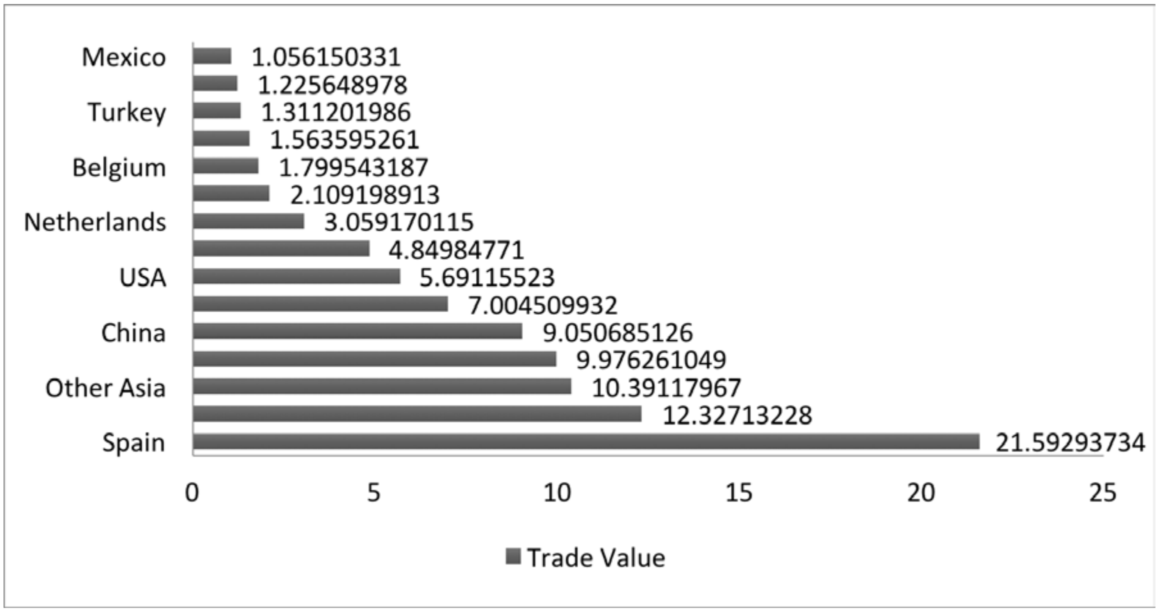
The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO, 2001) recognizes that the artisanal sector plays a decisive role in local economic development and the fight against poverty.

If the production and commercialization of handicrafts are analysed from an economic perspective, handicrafts cease to be only an expression of culture and are transformed into business opportunities (Hernández, 2003).

Additionally, ceramics are the product in the position number 657 most traded in the world and is in the position 914 of the Product Complexity Index according to the data of the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) in 2017. For all this, the study focuses on these companies.

Unfortunately, of the universe of 18 thousand Mexican companies (mostly made up of micro and small companies) dedicated to the sector, only 12% of exports (Fonart, 2014). There are other countries in which the export figure far exceeds the Mexican one (Graph 4).

Graph 4
Craft exporting countries



Artisanal line: pottery and pottery. Represented in thousands of dollars.
Source: Own elaboration based on comtrade.un.org (2017).

Competitive Advantages and Strategic Management for competitiveness.

The main actions of the company are directed towards competitiveness. Business organizations focus on a large part of their resources and daily activities on this action since it is what allows them to remain in the changing market.

Competitiveness is the means that companies must generate profitability, taking into account strategies and competitive advantages can face the current critical situation due to abrupt changes in the way of doing business, the demand of consumers and new environmental standards that should be considered. For this reason, competitiveness has become indispensable in the action plan of companies to obtain the desired results in the market.

Over time, the concept of competitiveness has been addressed through the vision of different authors; Such is the case of Dussel (2001) who defines it as "the process of dynamic integration of countries and products into international markets, depending on both supply and demand conditions".

In turn, Padilla (2006) conceptualizes competitiveness as "the ability to increase the standard of living of the inhabitants, to generate sustained increases in productivity, to successfully insert themselves in international markets".

However, the contribution of these authors has a macroeconomic vision, they integrate the performance of countries and internationalization in their writings, and it is necessary to address competitiveness from a business perspective. In the Mexican environment, during the last years, several research works have been developed to focus on the competitiveness of the company.

One way to approach the competitiveness of the company in a more limited way is based on a competitive advantage. This focus emphasizes that the unique intrinsic and/or extrinsic resources that a company possesses, which allows it to differentiate itself from competitors having a superior position, so that companies focus their efforts on finding strategies that allow them to increase their performance in the market through the implementation of its sustainable advantage, obtaining much greater benefit.

Exactly what Herrmann (2005) thought: "Strategic management has sought from its principles to answer the fundamental question of how companies achieve sustainable competitive advantage."

The first model, developed by Caves and Porter in 1977, and subsequently deepened by Porter in 1980 known for studying the competitive advantage environment with an external analysis is based on opportunities and threats under the assumption that all companies within an Industry or sector are similar in terms of the relevant strategic resources, their level of control and the strategies they carry out to achieve their objectives. In this way, the competitive advantage is related to the perception of the strategist. The latter is the one who formulates the strategies in terms of their interpretation of market signals.

The multiplicity of resources within a group tends to be very short or limited sense, these same resources are those that are being used and being the specific motives to apply the strategies that they pose from the beginning.

Research Method

The evidence obtained is strictly based on Jalisco ceramic craft companies that present international activity. The artisanal sector is one of the most representative in the state of Jalisco, however, despite the efforts are obstacles to achieve establish an accurate record of the companies that comprise it.

For this reason, with the support of the Institute of Jalisco Crafts (IAJ), a census was conducted throughout the state, which in turn resulted in the registration and information of 10,241 companies dedicated to this activity for the year 2017.

With the information gathered in conjunction with the IAJ, it was possible to create a database with the necessary fields to classify the companies by their location, craft branch, tools used, financial status, international presence, sales, among other important points creating a relevant cartography of the current panorama of the sector in Jalisco.

A second filter was applied, delimiting a group of 163 companies (1.59% of 10, 241) artisan in the state that are strictly dedicated to the production of ceramic elements. Mexico is privileged since it has a unique ceramic branch for its shapes, texture, and patterns, which directs the study to identify the specific informants in this artisan branch.

Using a third filter, 12 companies were obtained (7.36% out of 163) that have an international presence through exports, this is because they intend to identify the intangible resources and dynamic capabilities of these companies that allowed them to generate competitive advantages in the face of competition and therefore adapt to the environment to generate local development through internationalization.

According to the filters applied, the gathering of evidence is limited to the 12 informants, who are artisan ceramic companies located in the state of Jalisco; mainly in the municipalities of Guadalajara, Tlaquepaque, Tonalá and Puerto Vallarta.

Based on this last filter, the study group made up of the 12 artisanal ceramic companies is applied a questionnaire in a particular way to each one to get to know the internal situation of the same and in this way identify the resources and dynamic capacities that they are the support for the international competitive advantages they enjoy.

Analysis of Results

In the state of Jalisco, 163 ceramic companies were identified. The majority of these are located in municipalities in the metropolitan area of Guadalajara where the largest commercial and productive activity in the state is concentrated.

A characteristic is a way in which the craftsman acquires the trade. According to the results achieved, 59.5% of the total ceramic artisans in Jalisco learned this activity through family inheritance. The production process is transferred from generation to generation, maintaining cultural value.

The activity is characterized by having ancestral elements that add particular details to the production and make it representative of a specific geographic group.

14% of the artisans obtained the knowledge of the ceramic artisan technique by means of self-learning looking for a way to generate economic income. At the same time, it can be observed that 12% obtained an approach to this activity through a workshop. The same percentage (12%) is learning through the training of an institution.

Once the trade is acquired, it is important to have training that raises the value of artisanal work along the production chain. Based on the information collected, artisans express the need to obtain greater knowledge in areas such as artisanal technique and design, administration and marketing, marketing, computing, and technologies, as well as the possibility of acquiring an additional language to the one already used for extending the possibility of marketing your product with foreign consumers, this is where the sector is related to and its participation in the Tourism GDP into the Mexican economy.

Regarding the 163 companies, 111 have requested a certain type of financing, 79.27% of the 111 have done so for the acquisition of raw material. Despite this, 2.70% have used the liquidity of this type of instrument for the remodeling of their work area, the workshop.

The ceramic artisans have a particular way of marketing their products, due to the size of the companies have positioned themselves in the mind of the consumer so that he himself feels comfortable and confident of the quality of the product he is acquiring.

The production process in the workshop becomes a showroom for the client. Of the 163 companies identified, 47.23% sell their product directly in the workshop, while 22.69% sell in craft markets. 13.49% of these companies have positioned themselves in the market through the sale of their handicrafts in their own premises.

In addition to these points of sale, there are other options that artisans use, such as: marketing their products at points outside the town (5.52% of 163); in fairs and exhibitions (2.45% out of 163) and in a case, it is marketed in IAJ.

With respect to the capacity of companies to export, only 12 craft ceramic companies in the state of Jalisco have managed to apply the internationalization strategy. This represents 7.36% of the total of companies dedicated to this artisanal branch, leaving a very high number of companies that do not carry out this activity and that could be wasting the opportunity.

With this context, knowing that intangible resources and the dynamic capabilities that generate a competitive advantage for this type of companies can take advantage of and better implement the internationalization strategy for the development of companies, the sector, and the local economy.

The twelve companies that export have managed to market their products both in America and in Europe and Asia. To mention a few countries, it can be said that there is a profitable market in the United States, Spain, Italy, Australia, Canada, and even Russia.

In the twelve companies studied, it is a common distinguishing feature that the form of organization is totally familiar, so that business management tends to be different between each organization.

It has been observed that when comparing companies among themselves, from the point of view of the artisan strategist, 83.33% of the organizations (10 of the companies studied) consider that their strategies are better than the competition.

This includes establishing a general and long-term vision of the objectives, the creation of strategic plans, routines, tasks, communication, salary policies, human resources, and even marketing.

The other 16.66% of the companies that were considered for this study, established the impossibility of comparing their tasks with those of other companies, emphasizing the fact that one of their strengths was having identified the actions that have led them to success. without the need to investigate the actions of the competition, isolating themselves from the ceramics business community.

It could be said that these companies do not cooperate with the rest, unlike the 10 companies mentioned above, who have managed to identify the tasks in which they differ from the competition due to cooperation and collaboration to stay current in the market.

One of the most important characteristics of these companies is the possibility of differing among themselves; which generates competitive advantage and promotes the growth and development of the sector. Because of this, the attributes of the products must adapt to the demands of the market.

The total of companies considered for this research agrees that the price, functionality, availability, aesthetics, quality, service, innovation and customer suitability, are the most important characteristics to achieve consistent marketing of your product and brand in the local market.

It is important to emphasize that, thanks to the approach that was had with each one of the companies it was possible to observe that, in spite of working with the same type of raw material, the final product, in each one of the workshops, was different.

Each company and an artisan print a particular style of the ceramic pieces, which reflects their experience, knowledge, and growth as artists and human beings, which allows them to offer the consumer, either local or foreign, a range of possibilities in terms of the art of ceramics is concerned.

These craft companies have achieved the position of their businesses through the reputation of their products, preferred by customers due to their traditional production process and ethnic/regional value.

The originality, creativity and specialized distribution of each of the ceramic product lines reinforce the preference of the buyers before the art due to the exclusivity that each piece emits.

However, despite having these competitive advantages and achieving a special place in the market, each company has had to overcome the weaknesses of the sector in which it is located, considering it from a national point of view.

The entrepreneurs interviewed expressed very clearly that the commercialization of their unique products, reflecting years of traditions and culture, involved overcoming economic, legal and fiscal barriers in Mexico.

In order to understand the internationalization of the artisan enterprise, from the twelve companies, considered important cases, field visits and interviews with at least seven businessmen were achieved. From the results of these visits were able to identify their perception of the artisanal sector, particularly its closest competitors.

A characteristic of these entrepreneurs is that, for the most part, they have higher education. They are not bilingual in the sense of speaking an indigenous language at the same level as Spanish; however, they do have a multicultural profile.

When comparing the strategic capacity of the company in comparison with the competitors, it could be observed that in general, they consider better their strategies than the competition (table 3).

Table 3
Own valuation in relation to the other companies in the sector: strategies

Code	Professional Management	Overview of the objectives	Long-term vision	Preparation of strategic plans	Definition of organizational design	Establishment of organizational routines	Assessment of threats and opportunities
2791	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better	Equal
1045	Better	Better	Equal	Better	Better	Better	Equal
1395	Better	Equal	Better	Better	Equal	Doesn´t know	Better
2694	Better	Better	Equal	Worse	Equal	Worse	Better
5668	Worse	Equal	Doesn´t know	Equal	Equal	Equal	Doesn´t know
6936	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better	Equal
8566	Better	Better	Better	Equal	Better	Doesn´t know	Doesn´t know

Source: own elaboration based on the results achieved in the project "Generation of value and international cooperation in the smallest companies in Ibero-America" UDG-CA-484.

However, when addressing the comparison on the establishment of organizational routines that lead to the achievement of the objectives, only three entrepreneurs were considered better than the others in the market.

There was a case of an interview that didn't know how the competition acted and, therefore, did not know how to evaluate the company. Another entrepreneur claimed that was worse than the competition.

This point draws attention if one considers that they are workshops with deep-rooted values, in which the organization of the production is closely linked to the quality of the craftsmanship.

Regarding the comparison of policies and organizational programs, responses were more diversified, although the trend to be considered Better remained (table 4). There is the case of an entrepreneur who indicated a lack of knowledge in each of these points about what does the competition make.

Table 4

Own assessment in relation to the other companies in the sector: programs and policies

Code	Coordination of tasks	Internal communi-cation	Definition of sanctions and incentives for staff	Human Resources Policy	Salary policy	Marketing Policy	Finance Policy	Production Policy
2791	Better	Better	Better	Better	Equal	Better	Better	Better
1045	Equal	Equal	Equal	Equal	Better	Better	Better	Better
1395	Better	Better	Equal	Equal	Better	Equal	Equal	Better
2694	Equal	Better	Worse	Equal	Better	Worse	Equal	Equal
5668	Doesn´t know	Doesn´t know	Doesn´t know	Doesn´t know	Doesn´t know	Doesn´t know	Doesn´t know	Doesn´t know
6936	Equal	Better	Equal	Equal	Better	Equal	Better	Better
8566	Better	Better	Doesn´t know	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better

Source: own elaboration based on the results achieved in the project "Generation of value and international cooperation in the smallest companies in Ibero-America" UDG-CA-484.

Then questioning the competitive advantage of the company, the informant was directed to different factors that contribute to it (table 5). Based on the assessment of the difficulty considered by the competition to imitate them, a tendency towards high difficulty was identified.

Table 5
Level of difficulty to be imitated

Code	Price	Quality	Esthetic	Availa-bility	After sales service	Inno-vation	Adjustment to the needs of the consumer	Functio-nality	Image
2791	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Low
1045	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High
1395	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
2694	High	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	High
5668	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
6936	Medium	High	High	High	Low	High	High	High	High
8566	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium	High	High	Medium	High

Source: own elaboration based on the results achieved in the project "Generation of value and international cooperation in the smallest companies in Ibero-America" UDG-CA-484.

There were only six occasions in which some factor was classified as easy to imitate (low difficulty). Rather, it was identified that one of the entrepreneurs shows a more prudent view of the competition (code 2791), while the others express a more optimistic view as to their position in relation to competitors and, more specifically, the difficulty to be imitated.

Table 6
Benefits obtained in the artisanal sector

Code	Identified benefits
2791	2
1045	6
1395	13
2694	12
5668	15
6936	3
8566	4

Source: own elaboration based on the results achieved in the project "Generation of value and international cooperation in the smallest companies in Ibero-America" UDG-CA-484.

All entrepreneurs identify the benefits of the sector (table 6). Three of them indicated more than 13 benefits; while four of them had six and even two benefits that the artisanal sector gives them. The benefits in which the majority of coincided are location, brand, and personal contacts.

Conclusion

In relation to the question, how do the entrepreneurs who have managed to internationalize the artisanal sector conceive? You can answer based on the results that you perceive to the sector in a positive way, consider that it is a sector that offers benefits. Entrepreneurs consider themselves better than the competition in terms of strategies and generating competitive advantages; although, they are usually prudent when evaluating the possibility of being imitated by competitors.

The reality with respect to the competitive advantages of ceramic artisan firms in the state of Jalisco is determined by the capacity for differentiation thanks to the particular strategies taken by the artisan/strategist of each organization. This shows the importance of bilingual education and higher education.

The identification of the characteristics and nuances of this type of companies in the artisan sector ensures a broader vision of the success stories of these business organizations that operate internationally through the commercialization of cultural elements that are highly linked to the evolution of the country.

This broad vision leads to work proposals and prescriptive models that can facilitate internationalization with favourable results for those artisans who have not yet ventured into other markets.

The number of artisans in Jalisco is numerous in comparison to the quanta that have internationalized. This shows the importance of learning from these success stories in order to induce or provoke new experiences favourable to internationalization in parallel with sustainable development.

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