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Understanding cost and pricing: The perception of women entrepreneurs

Compreensão sobre custo e formação de preço: A percepção de mulheres empreendedoras

Comprensión sobre costo y la fijación de precios: La percepción de las mujeres empresarias

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ABSTRACT

Background: In any variety of business, the aspects of prior knowledge, planning, organization and adopted strategies are considered decisive for growth. In women's businesses, this becomes even more important, because women face additional challenges in their businesses compared to men.

Purpose: The research aims to understand the perception of the cost concept and the adoption of pricing strategies from the perspective of entrepreneurial women. No studies are found in the literature that took on these combined problems.

Method: The study is classified as exploratory-descriptive, with a qualitative and multi-case approach. The investigation heard 14 women entrepreneurs from the city of Fortaleza/CE. Structured Interviews were carried out and the technique of categorical content analysis was applied to deal with the manifestations of the interviewees after the process of transcription of the speeches.

Results: There is a limited understanding of what is defined as cost, regardless of education, but close to the accounting mainstream. Price has cost and market as antecedents. Despite listing gender barriers, the interviewees do not recognize/perceive these difficulties. This research indicates areas and actions on which professional training policies for women can focus. Moreover, this paper highlights the social restrictions that impede female professional development, as many of the interviewees do not perceive such barriers.

Conclusions: It is concluded that women face specific difficulties in conducting and developing businesses, which imposes a competitive disadvantage on their ventures and increases the chance of failure and withdrawal. Despite this, the results show that, with adequate encouragement, women entrepreneurs can improve and consolidate their practical knowledge about establishing the cost of products/services and improve the pricing strategies learned, often through practical experience. This would reduce the social distance between men and women in the field of entrepreneurship.

Keywords: costs management; female leadership; female managers; social roles; field of entrepreneurship.

RESUMO

Contextualização: Em qualquer variedade de negócio, os aspectos conhecimento prévio, planejamento, organização e estratégias apropriadas são considerados determinantes para o crescimento. Em negócios femininos, isso se torna ainda mais importante, porque as mulheres enfrentam em seus empreendimentos desafios adicionais frente aos homens.

Objetivo: O objetivo da pesquisa é entender a percepção sobre a concepção de custo e a adoção das estratégias de precificação sob a ótica de mulheres empreendedoras. Não são encontradas na literatura estudos que assumam essas problemáticas conjugadas.

Método: Classifica-se o estudo como exploratório-descritivo, com abordagem qualitativa e multicase. Neste estudo, foram indagadas 14 mulheres empreendedoras no município de Fortaleza/CE. Foram realizadas entrevistas estruturadas e aplicada a técnica de análise de conteúdo categorial para tratamento das manifestações das entrevistadas após o processo de transcrição das falas.

Resultados: Há compreensão restrita sobre o que é a definição de custo, independente da formação escolar, mas próxima ao *mainstream* contábil. A precificação tem custo e mercado como antecedentes. Embora enumerem barreiras de gênero, as entrevistadas não notam ou reconhecem essas dificuldades. A pesquisa indica áreas e atuações que as políticas de formação profissional para mulheres podem se concentrar. Além disso, o estudo ressalta restrições sociais que impedem o desenvolvimento profissional feminino, já que muitas das pesquisadas não percebem tais barreiras.

Conclusões: Conclui-se que as mulheres enfrentam dificuldades específicas para conduzir e desenvolver negócios, o que impõe aos seus empreendimentos desvantagem competitiva e aumento da chance de insucesso e desistência. Apesar disso, os resultados mostram que, com o incentivo adequado, mulheres empreendedoras podem aperfeiçoar e consolidar seu conhecimento prático sobre o estabelecimento do custo de produtos/serviços e aprimorar

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as estratégias de precificação aprendidas, muitas vezes, por meio da vivência prática. Isso reduziria a distância social entre homens e mulheres no campo do empreendedorismo.

Palavras-chave: gestão de custos; liderança feminina; mulheres gestoras; papéis sociais; campo do empreendedorismo.

RESUMEN

Contextualización: En cualquier tipo de negocio, el conocimiento previo, la planificación, la organización y las estrategias adecuadas son cruciales para el crecimiento. En las empresas propiedad de mujeres, esto es más importante porque las mujeres enfrentan desafíos adicionales en comparación con los hombres.

Objetivo: Comprender la percepción del diseño de costos y la adopción de estrategias de precios desde la perspectiva de las mujeres emprendedoras.

Método: El estudio se clasifica como exploratorio-descriptivo, con enfoque cualitativo y multicaso. La encuesta escuchó 14 mujeres empresarias de la ciudad de Fortaleza/CE. Se realizaron entrevistas estructuradas y se aplicó la técnica de análisis de contenido categórico para tratar los discursos de los entrevistados luego del proceso de transcripción de los discursos.

Resultados: Hay una comprensión limitada de lo que se define como costo, independientemente de la educación, pero cerca de la corriente principal de contabilidad. El precio se basa en el costo y el mercado. A pesar de enumerar las barreras de género, los entrevistados no reconocen/perciben estas dificultades. Esta investigación destaca áreas y acciones que pueden centrarse en las políticas de formación profesional de las mujeres. Además, el estudio destaca las restricciones sociales que impiden el desarrollo profesional femenino, ya que muchas de las entrevistadas no perciben tales barreras.

Conclusiones: Se concluye que las mujeres enfrentan dificultades específicas en el liderazgo y desarrollo empresarial, lo que impone una desventaja competitiva a sus emprendimientos y aumenta las posibilidades de fracaso y jubilación. A pesar de esto, los resultados muestran que, con el estímulo adecuado, las mujeres empresarias pueden mejorar y consolidar sus conocimientos prácticos sobre cómo fijar el costo de los productos/servicios y mejorar las estrategias de fijación de precios aprendidas, a menudo a través de la experiencia práctica. Esto reduciría la distancia social entre hombres y mujeres en el ámbito del emprendimiento.

Palabras clave: gestión de costes; liderazgo femenino; mujeres gerentes; roles sociales; ámbito del emprendimiento.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In any business variety, prior knowledge, planning, organization and appropriate strategies are determining for growth. In women's entrepreneurship, this becomes even more important (Machado, Guedes, & Gazola, 2017), since women face further challenges in comparison to men. In trying to balance multiple social roles, they fight against social barriers, conflicts to attune family and business, lack of credibility and family support, and less time availability (Bandeira, Mesquita, Araújo, & Matos, 2021). Acker (1990) showed that feminism recognizes hierarchical organization as enforcement of male domination. Despite that, correlated studies in this field assume that organizational structure is neutral, which is a misconception.

According to Castro, Staduto and Kreter (2022), the western labor market is marked by male predominance. This is because men were considered family providers. In turn, it was attributed to women the role of taking care of the house, the children and the other vulnerable members of the family. Castro *et al.* (2022) showed that the rate of female activity has grown, from 42,63% in 2005 to 43,01% in 2015, more than 38 million women. This figure, according to the authors, represents a shift in the social role of women and in gender relationships.

As for management, of the many aspects which can hinder women's wholesome development in their businesses, this research emphasizes specifically the understanding of cost and pricing of products and services. Overall, it is assumed that great knowledge on cost associated with products and services and its pricing increase the chance of business success. In this case, amidst all the specificities that can prevent female enterprises from growing (Bandeira *et al.*, 2021), women who have knowledge of costing and pricing can manage more efficiently, leading to the continuity of their business.

This way, in this research, cost is defined as the sum of all expenses resulting from the elaboration of goods and services. The use of costing methods as a management tool produces crucial information for the decision-making process and control assistance. One of the most common managerial decisions is that of facing competition in the best way (Martins, 2003; Melo & Leone, 2015; Ribeiro, 2017). Through cost analysis, the weigh between providing products with higher quality and/or affordable exchange value is made possible (Martins, 2003; Melo & Leone, 2015; Ribeiro, 2017; Viceconti & Neves, 2018; Zanievicz, Beuren, Santos, & Kloeppel, 2013).

Assigning prices to products and services is a procedure that permeates sales, financial management and accounting. If performed adequately, it is both the faster and more efficient way to maximize results in businesses (Amaral & Guerreiro, 2018a; Viceconti & Neves, 2018). However, there are some factors which can interfere with pricing, such as market conditions, competition, classification as price maker/taker, and product/service differentiation. (Amaral & Guerreiro, 2018a; Marn &

Rosiello, 1992; Milan, Toni, Larentis, & Gava, 2013; Souza, Guerreiro, & Amaral, 2021; Viceconti & Neves, 2018).

Considering the characteristics of the project and the contingent factors, it is necessary to decide the most suited pricing strategy for the enterprise, whether they are based on cost, competition, or product/service value (Amaral & Guerreiro, 2018a; Milan *et al.*, 2013; Souza *et al.*, 2021). In women entrepreneurship, costing attributions and pricing products/services can pose even greater challenges because of the cumulative social demands, compared to men. Acker (2006) explains that most of the socio-economic demands in industrialized countries originate from organizations, daily work activities, work organization and work relationships.

Given that context, this research poses the following question: what is the perception of the concept of cost and pricing strategies from the point of view of women entrepreneurs? The main goal is to understand the perception of the concept of cost and the adoption of pricing strategies under the light of women entrepreneurs.

In this sense, the research is justified by the need to understand how the concept of cost is applied by women entrepreneurs, given its essentiality to business management, yet acknowledging additional challenges faced by women due to their multiple social roles. The results of the study can help produce solutions and policies to strengthen and encourage women entrepreneurs, which can, in turn, generate social gains (Rodriguez, 2022). Investigating pricing strategies adopted by female businesses and the way that cost is used from this managerial point of view sheds light on a problem that can impact the longevity of these undertakings. There has not been found in the literature any research which assumes these questions collectively, pointing to a differentiation in this area, which proves a study with these characteristics relevant.

Rodriguez (2022) exposes that protagonism and the empowerment of the role of women are becoming a necessity for the health and the development of communities. In many countries, what exists is a context in which women do not share the same decision-making and leadership power as men. Furthermore, according to Rodriguez (2022), based on that, there is an evident imbalance in the family's decision-making due to a preexisting discrimination. Considering this, Tinker and Neimark (1987) have already highlighted how it is fundamental to give attention to a broader social context to understand, among others, the scenarios in which women are prejudiced or even explored. This is because the insertion of women in the market reflects modifications in the family structure. Management of responsibilities and the conduction of household chores must be altered (Silva, Machado, & Pucca, 2022).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Considering the objective traced to this research, this section was organized into four parts. Initially, it sought to

discuss the importance of proper cost knowledge in the context of managerial decision-making. The second part argues how sales pricing is a relevant process in business management, which can even relate to costing of products and services. The third subsection exposes characteristics and barriers specific to women's businesses, positioning knowledge of costs and pricing as a competitive advantage and an aspect related to the continuity of the enterprise. The last subsection circumscribes this scientific investigation in front of research already carried out surrounding the object of study under analysis.

2.1 Costs and management decision making

For some, accounting and gender may not be so obvious axes of investigation for an advanced and broad understanding of accounting social functioning. Despite this, there is a change in the sexual composition of the various functions and attributions in the accounting area (Hopwood, 1987) as well as management. According to Hopwood (1987), considering this, one cannot consider accounting sciences and its ramifications as a mere technical phenomenon. This phenomenon has the power to relate to a wider conception of the society we live in. The relationship accounting-gender can direct organizational and social values, attention, operating means and its consequences. This is equally valid for cost accounting.

Cost is a main concept in this research, which makes its establishment relevant since the onset of the study. This way, cost encompasses the sum of all expenses incurred such as goods and services used or consumed in the manufacturing of other goods and services. This piece of information becomes relevant for accounting and business management since, as cost occurs, they make up the value of elaborating and elaborated product stock, respectively. At this stage, they become company assets. On sale, costs are converted into expenses, make up results, and are set off against the value of sales revenue. (Ribeiro, 2017; Viceconti & Neves, 2018).

Ribeiro (2017) explains that, historically, before the Industrial Revolution, costing of goods destined to the sale of trading enterprises was done in financial accounts, restricted to the cost of inventories based on values of the purchase documents issued by suppliers. With the emergence of industries in the eighteenth century, the necessity of allocating cost to the stock of manufactured products arose, something more complex in the face of what used to be done in commercial firms. In addition to the cost of raw materials, it has become necessary to include labor expenses and manufacturing overheads. This milestone establishes the importance of accounting and business cost management.

Therefore, it is convenient for organizations of all sizes to employ costing methods as an essential management tool since they provide crucial information for the decision-making process (Zanievich *et al.*, 2013). Martins (2003) exposes that decision-making consists of the supply of information on relevant short- and long-term

values for the management of selling price, introduction or possible product cutting, purchase or production decision. The second most relevant function in managerial cost, in accordance with Martins (2003), is the control assistance, which consists of the provision of data for the implementation of patterns, budgets and other forecasting methods. For this purpose, monitoring what occurred in comparison to what had been planned is important.

To highlight the importance of accounting and cost management in companies, Melo and Leone (2015) show that the choice of an effective costing system and an adequate costing method can represent a resource for businesses to tackle competition through quality products on offer and affordable exchange value. By looking into a group of small industries, Melo and Leone (2015) noted that more than 90% adopt practices of cost accounting as a form of measuring manufacturing costs.

However, even though good knowledge and adequate management of costs bring advantages to enterprises, Zanin, Magro and Mazzioni (2019) found results different from those of Melo and Leone (2015). The authors discovered that many companies did not apply costing methods. Those which did focused on less complex methods with reasonable cost-effectiveness. Firms with lower turnover did not use methods, which can be explained by the high cost of implementation and complexity of its process. Larger businesses have a more comfortable status (Zanin, *et al.* 2019).

Furthermore, it is necessary to qualify the responsible for accounting and cost management in order to make cost relevant information, capable of bringing benefits to the business, as suggested by Granzotto and Gregori (2016). One way to identify if companies have mastery of their own costs is to check that controls are carried out and know who oversees that. From data belonging to micro and small entrepreneurs, Granzotto and Gregori (2016) found out that most firms (70%) used only notebooks with handwritten notes to function as an instrument of cost measurement.

Additionally, it stands out that there are many factors which influence cost management and use as relevant information for the process of managerial decision-making, such as company size, taxation, use of technologies and competition, suggest Zanin *et al.* (2019). From this discussion, it can be realized that several businesses have difficulties using costs in management, regardless of their importance. The constraints emerge because of the absence of deep knowledge of this information (Granzotto & Gregori, 2016). This causes difficulties in activities on the decision-making process and in creation of value. Among harmed activities, the management of selling prices is highlighted (Martins, 2003).

With respect to company size, the small-sized have their particularities in relation to the others, which, several times, can incur in their early mortality, arising from lack of management knowledge, plan structure and short- and long-term goal setting (Neitzke & Oliveira, 2014). Cêra and Escrivão (2003), points out that environmental,

organizational and behavioral particularities of the small-scaled companies' director can make their success difficult due to uneven competition with larger-sized companies, low or non-existent power of influence on the impositions and changes of the macroenvironment, the informality, the lack of professional qualification, the few materials and financial resources, and business informal management. In contrast to the obstacles, these enterprises are responsible for most of the employability in the country as they are preponderant in number compared to the large-scale firms, thus, in need of an efficient management which targets to development, not to an early end (Pereira, 2008).

Besides cost and decision-making management, another important challenge for companies, especially small and middle-scaled, is the formation and the management of price. There are some variables which can affect this task and models that should be observed in determining the price of products and services appropriately since this data functions as an important management tool. The following subsection establishes these points for discussion.

2.2 Pricing and price management

According to Nichele and Milan (2006), for sustaining a business in the long run facing the harsh competitiveness (higher offer and more aggressive competitors), price consists of a fundamental instrument of management. Cavalcanti, Castro and Cavalcanti (2019) support this view by emphasizing that the survival of companies in a globalized and competitive market, pricing products and services adequately becomes indispensable.

This condition is because the fair determination of price is the faster and more efficient means so that a company maximizes profit, at the expense of volume increase. On the other hand, inadequate pricing could minimize profit just as fast. The fact is that many enterprises still avoid managing and improving their pricing for fear of losing customers, and the result is more damaging. (Marn & Rosiello, 1992).

Price attribution is the decision-making process which involves many company areas, such as sales, financial, and accounting sector. The sectors can have conflicting ends in this process. Sales seek for a higher participation in the market and the increase in turnover. The financial and the accounting sectors are concerned about the weight of the productive structure in finance and resource economy aiming to enhance results (Souza *et al.*, 2021). It is up to management to find the intersection between different goals based on the use of pricing strategies which can generate improved performance (Milan *et al.*, 2013; Souza *et al.*, 2021).

According to Viceconti and Neves (2018), pricing strategies are classified into three groups: based on cost, competition and value (utility) of the product/service. As the authors mention, pricing strategies based on cost take into consideration all goods and services expenses aimed at the production of other goods and services. In turn, the competition-based strategy accompanies values proposed

by other companies in the same business. The tendency is for companies to cover the price of their "rivals".

Bruni and Famá (2019) establish the pricing characteristics. First, it is needed to understand their origin: if it is based on cost, the consumer, or the competition. Cost-based pricing is characterized by applying a margin to this expense, so that the company can cover this cost, pay for other expenses and generate a profit. Pricing models centered on the consumer depend on information about customers' preferences. The enterprise manufactures to fulfill this need. Competition-based pricing, on the other hand, is characterized by the process of utilizing what the market and the competitors establish as appropriate. (Bruni & Famá, 2019; Viceconti & Neves, 2018).

The value-based approach requires the use of information on customers' perception surrounding offered product and service benefits and how customers perceive the trade-off between benefits and sacrifices, including price. (Souza *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, as Amaral and Guerreiro (2018a) suggest, this pricing strategy should be the ideal for companies' development, yet, with the elevated competitiveness, it is the least used since businesses focus on the offering of more affordable products and services. Beyond that, some factors interfere in the adoption of the value approach, such as conditions of market and competition, framing as price maker (companies use formulae to set the prices) or price takers (companies use formulae to adjust to market prices), and differentiation from product/service. (Amaral & Guerreiro, 2018a; Souza *et al.*, 2021).

It should be noted that not all firms have power to set prices due to the degree of differentiation between its portfolio and the importance attributed by customers to what is being offered. This way, depending on these factors, one company may or may not be exclusively a price maker or taker, but, predominantly, one or another, explain Amaral and Guerreiro (2018a). Regardless of the strategies employed in price formation, cost information becomes imperative for the management of business and accounting. However, one must consider how much the market can bear (Souza *et al.*, 2021).

Amaral and Guerreiro (2018a), when studying industries, verified that the price makers are associated with the offering of customized products; takers associate them with standardized products. They also concluded that the use of cost information was extremely high throughout the sample. In price setting, it was verified that the main approach was "cost plus margin", both for takers and makers. The latter seek information on the value of products, whereas amidst takers prevails the verification of competitors' offers. Amaral and Guerreiro (2018b) obtained 380 answers from several establishments in the five Brazilian regions on how to carry out price assignment. One noted that, in most cases, the responsible for the decision is a man and he is linked to the sales department.

With respect to pricing in small-scale firms, Purificação, Neves, Cavalheiro and Conceição (2022)

revealed in their study results that the main obstacle found is cost measurement, and a major part of their sample claimed that they did not use costing formal methods, insofar as they use their intuition. In turn, Silva *et al.* (2022) concluded in their research that costs and expenses, customer and product are the main interfering factors on price formation, and that even though managers are little knowledgeable of the process, they show interest and concern about pricing.

It is noted that management of sales price can have as managerial balance as cost in the role of relevant information for the decision-making process and the conduction of business. However, some types of enterprises can face some difficulties in the implementation of an efficient cost management and in price setting strategy. The following section has the goal of clarifying how challenges related to cost management and price formation can be even more complex when it comes to the context of female-dominated businesses because of the overload their social roles require to perform.

2.3 Women entrepreneurs: Characteristics and difficulties faced

Unfortunately, women's history came to be established under a submissive as well as inferior condition in comparison to men. One of the marks of this fact is the fight for full citizenship (equal entry into the labour market, acceptance in higher education, holding command positions and political participation) and this should encompass difficulty in balancing paid work and unpaid household work (Carvalho, 2016).

Acker (2006) defines inequality in the context of organization as any form of systemic disparity, which means, articulated mechanically, even if not evident, among participants. This can occur in various areas: power, control, resources and result, leadership, work organization, decisions, opportunities, safety, respect and pleasure in the light of work tasks. What is assumed is that inequality has migrated from outside, society-wise, to the inside of organizations and their relationships.

The private world was only assigned to women, that is, household chores and taking care of their own families. While men were responsible for the public sphere, political activities and providing for the home. This way, these cultural elements derived from patriarchy normalized judgments and non-complementary, opposing conditions between genders, sorting them in strong/weak, rational/emotional, superior/inferior, public/private. These issues certainly influenced the unequal access to power (Carvalho, 2016), with clear disadvantages to women.

Considering Cramer, Cappelle, Andrade and Brito (2012), at first, the increasing women's participation in the labor market took place with the occupation of positions which demanded lower qualifications and competences. On the other hand, in recent context, they have reached more important and higher positions as entrepreneurs of their own business, which is the focus of this piece of research.

Nevertheless, reinforced by Cramer *et al.* (2012), these new female positions have still faced some obstacles because they were mostly taken by men.

During a modern scenario of women's insertion in business management, encouraging female entrepreneurship and income generation must be an explicit target of socio-economic development and the establishment of The Democratic Rule of Law. By attaining financial autonomy, women do not have the urge to subject to abusive and violent relationships as they do not depend on third parties for their livelihood (Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas [SEBRAE], 2021; Silva *et al.*, 2022).

It is known, however, that the challenge is much greater since, overall, due to differences that were socially built in relation to men, women confront greater difficulties when undertaking and keeping their business. The barriers transcend the matter of gender once they involve the conflict between family (maternity) and work and the feeling of guilt generated by trying to reconcile it with the obstacles to entering careers seen as masculine. They lack family support, credibility, business management, availability of time and qualifications (Almeida, Antonialli, & Gomes, 2011).

About the main reasons which influence women to create their own companies, Almeida *et al.* (2011) found out the following: a desire for independence, a desire for supplementing income, and personal fulfillment. Machado *et al.* (2017), in turn, investigated what were the main determinants for the growth of female business in the Brazilian state of Piauí (PI). It was observed that (i) time devoted to the business, (ii) prior knowledge, (iii) creative and innovative capacity and (iv) new products and services stood out. About the main adversities to growth, lack of personal qualification, self-confidence, planning and organization, information on the business and growth strategy, as well as lower innovative capacity were highlighted.

It is worth mentioning that entrepreneurship can bring two types of consequences for women: premeditated and unpremeditated. The premeditated are the search for autonomy and financial independence, social acknowledgment (status) and balance between personal and professional life. The unpremeditated are male customers' prejudice towards the women entrepreneur, change in women's own behavior, interference of stereotypes (masculine e feminine) and absence of social acknowledgement (Versiani, Mota-Santos, Carvalho, & Caeiro, 2021). Versiani *et al.* (2021) explain that the customers' prejudice leads women to question their capacity to occupy their position. Along with that, the fact that there is interference in women's behavior, making them seek a masculinization to survive in an environment legitimized as "belonging to men".

Silva *et al.* (2022) mention the issue of women-associated stereotypes when developing a business. In a carried-out study with focus on individual

microentrepreneurs, it was verified that women composed 48% of this set. To this group, it was found that the dominating branches of activity were: i) beauty (hairdressers, esthetician, waxing specialist, manicures, make-up artists) and ii) sales (clothing shops, jewelry, and accessories). In the research, men stood out as mechanics, locksmiths and electricians.

This finding aligns with the perspective represented by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM). The GEM was created in 1999, the result of a partnership between Babson College in the United States, and London Business School, in the United Kingdom. This partnership brings information on entrepreneurship and business ecosystems around the world (GEM, 2022). Among the reports elaborated by GEM, the Global Report 2020/2021 calls attention since it mentions that in most countries around the globe new businesses are very likely to be initiated by men rather than women. This becomes evident even though observed tendencies indicate an increase in women's participation over the last years (GEM, 2021a).

The gender difference in business, also observed by Silva *et al.* (2022), demonstrates that some world economies will still lose income, jobs and aggregated value in comparison with what they can attain through a more equal representation (GEM, 2021a). According to the Women's Entrepreneurship 2020/2021 report, also elaborated by GEM, the global average of total entrepreneurial activity in women entrepreneur's early stage was almost half of all active entrepreneurs in the world. In this way, by comparison, women account for one in three owners of globally established companies. Another aspect should be pointed out: despite the lowest permanence of women enterprises in Brazil, average schooling among women is one year higher than the average for men (GEM, 2021b). Thus, it would not be the deficit in formal knowledge that would explain the gap. It may be associated with other factors (GEM, 2019), such as those mentioned in the studies by Silva *et al.* (2022) and Versiani *et al.* (2021).

Considering the exposed overview, it is worth mentioning the context of the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic, identified in 2019, which causes covid-19 (coronavirus disease). With the pandemic, there was a great negative impact in female business with regards to the unequal division of household chores. It fell on women with an additional load of family care, who had to reconcile with work demands. One can cite a large-scale closing of nurseries and schools as one instance of the problem (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey, & Tertilt, 2020; GEM, 2021b).

The report Women's Entrepreneurship 2020/2021 denounces that women were more affected by pandemic than men and 20% more inclined to have reported closing a business deal due to the pandemic. On the other hand, in this piece of research, it was verified that men and women were on an equal footing when reporting that the pandemic provided new business opportunities (GEM, 2021b). Thus, it can be realized that female enterprises constitute an important object of research by virtue of their specific

characteristics and the difficulties faced by women. These deals can be more sensitive to scenarios of crisis, which calls for attention with respect to cost management and sales price making aiming at their operational continuity. Therefore, there is still space for studies focused on these aspects, as proposed by this research.

The following subsection has the goal of presenting a small section of literature that touches on the investigated topic. These studies have demonstrated that women have limited power of management and results in organizations, once what can be seen is the accumulation of social roles which restrict women's professional development at its best. This creates a clear-cut advantage for men, who end up taking more positions and roles of leadership in companies.

2.4 Previous studies

In the literature, there are studies which observe women's leadership and performance in business management. These bodies of work keep similarities to a certain extent with the objective of this research. Pavão, Espejo, Camacho and Borges' study (2018) examined the perception of costs of quality and their management for women entrepreneurs in the clothing sector in the Brazilian state of Paraná. It was highlighted that female participation has grown in micro companies and that they are a standout in the measurement of quality costs, training cost management and time wasted. Women dedicate more time to staff development.

In Pessoa, Nascimento, Guimarães, Rocco and Silva's research (2020), they studied the relationship between female participation in boards of directors and performance of publicly traded companies in Brazil from 2012 to 2017. Evidence suggests that the association between the presence of women in the governing body and part of the best performances identified. In a similar vein, the research conducted by Krüger, Porta and Moura (2021) verified if female participation in management affected the performance of publicly traded companies listed on the Brazilian stock exchange between 2011 and 2017. The increase in female participation was in administration observed alongside the positive impact on companies' value.

Pauli (2021) highlighted that loans directed to companies managed by women are more effective, especially to boost female employability, which is like the employment generation in general. Aung, Khor, Tran, Shikuku and Zeller (2021) investigated if women's participation in the decision-making process is significant for the technical efficiency of small-scale aquaculture in Myanmar (South of Asia), analyzing 440 families. It was verified that women empowerment led to a great use of supplies and better performance of aquaculture activity.

In another piece of research outside the Brazilian context, Pierotti, Friedson-Ridenour and Olayiwola (2022) studied agricultural farms in Nigeria focusing on the links between women's time constraints and the quantity and quality of work available for their agricultural activities.

Women's time and work restrictions are related to social expectations that men's agricultural plots have priority.

Sant'Anna, Diniz, Carvalho, Santos and Lima-Souza (2022) try to understand discriminatory practices which are related to the management of female professionals. They examined the findings of a piece of research carried out along with over 45 thousand professionals, men and women, from companies that integrated the "Alliance for Women's Empowerment" belonging to the United Nations (UN). Their findings demonstrated that women remain underrepresented at higher hierarchical levels in organizations. They still possess low participation in more demanded professional areas in the so-called Industry 4.0.

Fagundes, Schnorrenberger, Gasperetto and Lunkes (2022) have set out to verify among management position occupants from commercial and industrial organizations located in the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina if women had lower risk tolerance when making investment and management decisions compared to men. The sample, composed of 115 women and 121 men, was subjected to an experiment. It was noted that the starting premise, referring to the field of personal decisions (less risk tolerant women), is less frequent in organizational decisions.

Pinto, Vieira and Silva's proposal (2022) questions women in senior positions as an important variable for overcoming periods of crisis. This way, the challenges faced during the covid-19 pandemic were investigated in a hospital located in Belo Horizonte-MG, Brazil. Differences in the leadership style were checked out based on opposing gender stereotypes. The condition creates barriers that lead to discrimination, manifested in the wage gap and the questioning of female competence. Also according to Pinto et al. (2022), in the crisis scenario women felt challenged to prove their ability to perform their managerial duties on an equal footing with men, with total professionalism, competence and dedication. The coping strategies employed by the women were patience, persistence and a focus on people management, helping them to feel stronger, more tolerant and adaptable.

The literature review on this theme shows that several aspects are looked into in this area of study, prevailing differences in terms of management/decision-making between men and women. Research signals that these differences can be relevant. Its understanding enables it to

extract benefits for business management. However, one can notice that research assuming explicitly the issue of knowledge about cost and pricing among women entrepreneurs cannot be found. This raises the relevance of studies with these characteristics. The studies show that some benefit or competitive advantage can be achieved in organizations with female participation in the decision-making process or in leadership positions.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this section are presented the methodological framework of the study and the description of the executed procedures aiming to reach the objective established in the research plainly.

3.1 Methodological framework

The aim of the study is to classify it as exploratory-descriptive. It is intended to bring to the knowledge field another analysis angle of women entrepreneurs by investigating their knowledge of cost and pricing (Sordi, 2017). The study is qualitative, focusing on the subject's subjectivities, expressing data in face of their perceptions, statements, and opinions to form new approaches to the problem (Sordi, 2017; Marques & Walliman, 2015). The study was only directed to women entrepreneurs and the chosen instrument of data collection was the interview. It was sought to point out to the participants the general objective of the research, and the interviewees' adherence was voluntary, making up the sample by accessibility criteria. In this case, characteristics of a multicase study are also considered, because this type of approach investigates contemporary phenomena inside the context of real life - in the case of women entrepreneurs and the challenges of cost and pricing management. In this research, one's interest is in how and why this phenomenon occurs, not demanding control of behavioral events (Yin, 2010).

3.2 Research participants, data collection and analysis

Table 1 shows the sample of 14 interviews without identifying the participants, time of completion and time used in the interview process. Overall, data collection was carried out in a 20-day interval, for a total of more than 220 minutes of recordings to be transcribed and analyzed.

Table 1
Research participants, time and duration of the interview

Interviewed	Day	Duration (minutes/seconds)	Interviewed	Day	Duration (minutes/seconds)
I1	09/05/2022	16:13	I8	09/11/2022	26:21
I2	09/05/2022	13:16	I9	09/11/2022	11:52
I3	09/06/2022	19:30	I10	09/16/2022	17:19
I4	09/08/2022	11:45	I11	09/17/2022	12:26
I5	09/08/2022	20:08	I12	09/19/2022	12:21
I6	09/09/2022	17:04	I13	09/21/2022	16:11
I7	09/11/2022	16:39	I14	09/25/2022	16:23
Total duration					227:28

Source: Data from the research.

The script to the interview was structured and organized into 23 questions subdivided in: i) enterprise and entrepreneur's profile; ii) knowledge of cost; and iii) pricing. The script of the questions in each of these 3 sets is grounded on literature. The first set was elaborated from Almeida *et al.* (2011), Silva *et al.* (2022) and Versiani *et al.* (2021) studies. The second was based on studies as those of Ribeiro (2017), Viceconti and Neves (2018), Zaniewicz *et al.* (2013) and Martins (2003). The latter set of questions was based on Nichele and Milan (2006) and Viceconti and Neves (2018).

It should be noted that there was not a similar research instrument in the literature that fulfilled the objectives of this research, therefore it was necessary to build our own instrument. Some questions were adapted, and others elaborated considering the referred studies. The instrument was submitted to researchers with a doctorate degree experienced in the field of applied social sciences with the aim of detecting and correcting problems. Afterwards, it was applied to respondents who had similar characteristics to the expected interviewee profile. These respondents did not participate in the study and did not know the final participants. At this stage, we tried to verify the suitability and understanding of the questions to adjust for the final collection phase.

The use of interviews is justified by the possibility of greater flexibility and depth of the answers, in addition to enabling the reception of more accurate insights from the entrepreneur. This minimizes distortions predicted in questionnaire research, generating more accuracy of results to investigate how cost and pricing knowledge can signal the management and the longevity of female businesses (Marques & Walliman, 2015).

Criteria for the inclusion of women entrepreneurs who work or reside in Fortaleza, Ceará were established; they own or manage the total or the most part of their businesses. The subjects surveyed were chosen upon geographical proximity and recommendation. Participations were voluntary by means of prior awareness of the research goal, guarantee of total confidentiality of personal data, and demand to record the interview for transcription. The interviewees could withdraw from the study at any time during the interview due to personal matters. By the end of the inquiry, they could state any restrictions regarding the questions and the answers. There was no opposition to remaining in the study.

The choice of Fortaleza as the place for the study occurred in virtue of the fact that it is the city with the highest GDP in the Northeast and ranks 11th in Brazil, as well as being the 3rd largest in terms of job creation in the country. These are the factors that explain Fortaleza among the cities that are economically growing. The factors that explain why Fortaleza is one of the fastest-growing cities in the economy are the actions aimed at training, encouraging entrepreneurship and job creation, with tax incentive laws

and reducing the bureaucracy of processes for new businesses (Prefeitura Municipal de Fortaleza [PMF], 2023).

Data collection took place in the period between the 5th and the 25th of March 2022. Nine interviews took place in person, and five via video call on the Google Meet® platform, according to the interviewee's availability. They were conducted through a script based on the research objective and theoretical framework. Each set was announced to the respondents: i) enterprise and entrepreneur 's profile; ii) cost knowledge and iii) pricing. The issue of interview saturation should be highlighted. Saturation has to do with the fact that new respondents don't add new information, and the understanding of the phenomenon under study no longer changes. This was observed by reaching the 10th interview, especially concerning questions on cost composition and price formation. Previous scheduling allowed us to continue the collection of data, there were greater differences in responses regarding the merits and individual reasons for starting a business and the difficulties faced.

The interviews were recorded with express permission of the interviewees through the following apps and/or softwares: 1) WhatsApp® voice recorder version 2.22.23.77; 2) Splend Apps voice recorder version 3.19; 3) Voice Recorder version 55.1 for Android; and 4) screen recorder OBS Studio® version 27.2.4. Afterwards, interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Word® file. The total duration of interviews was 3,78 hours (or 227:28 minutes), from that, 16:14 minutes on average in each interview. Data from interviews were treated by Categorical Content Analysis (CCA), given that evidence was collected in a sound format, and converted to text (Sordi, 2017). For Vergara (2005), a CCA has the goal of identifying what is being said about a topic, which is important to find out which aspects of costing and pricing are best known and used by women in the management of their companies. Thus, this technique proved appropriate for the purpose of the study. Researchers carried out analysis of transcribed interviews, reading them in full and reviewing the statements in order to avoid misunderstandings. Results are in section 4, reported and discussed as follows.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The section of results and its following discussion was divided into three parts. The aim of the first section is to establish which is the respondents' profile and their undertakings. Then, the results are presented regarding their knowledge of the theoretical construct and managerial artifact cost. The third part details evidence on managerial practice of pricing products/services carried out by the women who took part in the study.

4.1 Profile of the entrepreneur and the business

The analysis of the results begins with Table 2, which shows the entrepreneur's profile along with their business

Table 2

Profile of interviewees and their businesses

#	Education	Age	Marital status	Children	NRLE ^(a)	Employees	Operating time
I01	University education	55	Married	2	No	0*	10 years
I02	Illiterate	52	Single	2	No	0*	14 years
I03	Superior Incompleto	20	Single	0	Yes	0	5 years
I04	High school/Technical education	41	Married	2	Yes	3-6**	13 years
I05	Incomplete university education	28	Single	0	No	0*	7 months
I06	Incomplete university education	33	Divorced	2	No	0	1 year and 6 months
I07	Especialização	46	Married	2	Yes	2**	12 years
I08	Especialização	30	Married	1	No	0	9 months
I09	Doctorate degree	32	Single	1	Yes	0	1 year and 5 months
I10	Master's degree	27	Single	0	Yes	0	2 years e 2 months
I11	Middle school	46	Married	0	No	0	11 years
I12	Incomplete university education	22	Single	0	No	0*	2 years
I13	University education	26	Single	0	Yes	0	1 year
I14	University education	32	Married	1	No	0	1 year

Note. * Help from a partner (husband or boyfriend), children or siblings; ** Service providers; ^(a) National Registration of Legal Entities. Economic activity according to the interviewee: I01 – Breakfast sale; I02 – Sale of regional foods; I03 – Stationery e-commerce; I04 – Beauty salon; I05 – Clothing store e-commerce; I06 – Selling cosmetics and lingerie; I07 – Pilates and physiotherapy clinic; I08 – Digital media and agency; I09 – Toy store e-commerce; I10 – Selling lingerie; I11 – Clothing making; I12 – Stationery e-commerce; I13 – Facial aesthetics; I14 – Selling cosmetics.

Source: Data from the research.

With regards to the field of activity, Silva *et al.* (2022) investigated the matter of women-associated stereotypes. It was found that most fields of women entrepreneurship are in the areas of beauty and sales (clothing stores, jewelry and accessories). In this study, half of the respondents are within the stereotype profile, which may indicate partial corroboration of this research. However, differences are also evident when pointing out that half of the women surveyed participate in non-stereotypical areas, which suggests more space in various segments, breaking the barrier of gender, corroborating Castro *et al.*'s numbers (2022) and their indication that there is an increase in Brazilian female participation, pointing to a shift in women's social role and gender relationships.

The branch of activity of the interviewees was grouped into commerce (seven occurrences), production/trade (three occurrences) and service provision (four occurrences). This can be explained by the fact that it is a branch of commerce that brings greater practicality to women's lives in terms of balancing their domestic and family care routines with the business, since it doesn't require them to spend more time producing the goods. This result contrasts with the research carried out by SEBRAE (2023), which found that the majority (53%) of female entrepreneurs work in the service sector, and not in commerce (27%), which may be due to the geographical limitations of the study.

Table 3 demonstrates the grouping of answers to questions 1.9, 1.10 e 1.11.

Table 3

Answers to questions 1.9, 1.10 and 1.11

Question	Answers	Frequency
1.9 Reasons that led to entrepreneurship	Financial need	4
	Additional income	4
	Desire to have their own business	4
	Opportunities	3
1.10 Challenges faced in the business	Increase in the price of inputs/costs	3
	Difficulties during the Coronavirus pandemic	3
	Difficulty in passing on price adjustments to customers	2
	Difficulty reconciling time with other activities	2
	Difficulty organizing the business	2
	Value of taxes (MEI and Interstate ICMS)	2
	Financing working capital	2
	Fear of starting due to inexperience	2
	Customer acquisition	2
	Others*	14
1.11 Perception of whether you have difficulties because you are a woman in your business	No	8
	Not in my line of work	4
	Yes	1
	Yes, in certain branches	1

Note. * Only one occurrence of the following challenges was identified: difficulty in maintaining the quality of products sold with lower quality inputs; fear of not pleasing the public; fear of not making a profit; must always be qualified; unfair competition; reconciling business with motherhood; difficulty selling online; difficulty in achieving financial balance between costs and sales; delivery logistics; difficulty in finding good suppliers; customer outreach and acquisition; difficulty in finding qualified employees; clothing crisis during the Dilma Government; difficulty in selling.

Source: Data from the research.

The answers to question 1.9 corroborate the results of Almeida et al. (2011). They also found that the desire for independence and the desire to supplement income were the main reasons that influenced women to set up their own companies. The aspect of opportunity can be seen among the respondents, highlighted in E9's statement.

It started as a joke, but it started to generate profit. I opened my eyes because it makes money. But it started as a joke. I went to these places, these bars and followed these bands more as an audience, I made the little videos, and they started to like it, both the bands and the bars, they started reposting and then they said to me "you should work with this". And since, whether I like it or not, I know about it, I'm studying it, it was a way for me to gain experience in this market, which is digital marketing. So I went into it and I liked it. I've always liked it and it's paying off, I'm earning money (digital media and agency service, no CNPJ). (E8, our emphasis).

Regarding the challenges of the business, price rises and the covid-19 pandemic (interruption of activity) were cited. Other aspects emerged in the answers, such as adjusting prices to customers, reconciling the activity with social life, family and studies, business management, taxes, financing, inexperience and attracting customers. These elements are clear in the excerpts from E1 and E2. The pandemic has led to difficulties such as sacrificing product margins and reducing profits in order to keep customers, according to the interviewees.

Sales, before the pandemic and the changes in government, were one thing, and then things got a lot harder. **Prices have increased a lot, and we can't always pass the increase on to the customer, because they won't understand.** I'm picking up the cost and reducing my profit. Sales aren't what they used to be either, people don't have the money to eat out anymore, they want to save money. So we're trying to keep up, adapt anyway (breakfast trade, without a CNPJ). (E1, our emphasis).

The prices of things. Some months I can't cover it. Sometimes I want to improve my things, but I can't, I can't afford to buy something better, so I'm not making too much profit (regional food business, no CNPJ). (E2, emphasis added).

When asked about difficulties in the business due to the fact that they were women, only one interviewee answered in the affirmative. The majority answered, with doubts, no. However, what is striking are the answers with reservations, suggesting a certain influence from the industry, as highlighted in the examples of E2 and E4.

No, not because I'm a woman. **If you want something, you don't have to be a man, you just have to have the willpower and go for it.** I don't have this kind of problem (business selling regional foods, without a CNPJ). (E2, emphasis added).

No, I don't have that concept, maybe other people do, but not me. **I think that the beauty area is for women,** men come in with their hands full (beauty salon service, with CNPJ). (E4, emphasis added).

Despite emphasizing that the fact of being a woman did not create barriers, the answers were complemented by the idea of demarcating branches and activities that are recognized as masculine and feminine. For example, there were responses from women whose businesses included a cosmetics retailer and a sex shop. They were adamant that the inclusion of men in these types of market was practically

unfeasible. According to them, women have greater public acceptance in this type of business, as well as greater sales capacity.

It is noteworthy that 85% of the participants do not perceive any difficulties due to the fact that they are women. This could suggest a reduction in gender barriers and inequality, as well as greater access to power (Carvalho, 2016). This evidence diverges from the results of Almeida et al. (2011), who highlighted aspects such as insertion in "male careers"; lack of family support, credibility, business management, time and qualifications. The convergence came in the aspect entitled reconciling business and motherhood. However, the complementary statements made by the interviewees on this and other issues leads to the possible scenario of not perceiving the difficulties imposed by gender.

As Carvalho (2016) points out, even with the improvements brought about by the feminist movement, patriarchy is still dominant. As such, women are the ones who face the most barriers to starting and maintaining their businesses (Almeida et al., 2011). Therefore, the entrenchment of macho culture can generate a false perception that many activities portrayed as everyday are gender impositions and thus hinder the management of the enterprise. The expressions of E8 and E9 help with this understanding.

Culturally, everything is difficult for women, that's all there is to it, because when I make the videos they don't care if I'm a woman, they just want to know if it's good. This cultural issue of things being more difficult because I'm a woman I get over. **The difficulty of being a woman, married, with children, and I have another job, what I do doesn't influence me.** So even when I can't get to the gigs because I don't have anyone to leave my daughter with, the band films them and I do the editing and posting at home, it's more flexible" (digital media and agency service, no CNPJ). (E8, emphasis added).

I think for me what makes it hard is not being a woman, it's being a mother, because I always have to try to balance motherhood with my work, since I'm self-employed, so I'm the one responsible for balancing it, for trying to balance it. **I think what makes it difficult is to become an entrepreneur while being a mother, and without a support network,** so I'm the one who has to sort everything out, I'm the one who has to think about everything in my company and take care of everything for my daughter, so that's what makes it difficult, this whole process" (virtual toy store, with CNPJ). (E9, emphasis added).

The statements suggest controversy, as the respondents say they don't notice any difficulties because they are women, but they list situations linked to gender barriers (reconciling business and motherhood). One interviewee mentions that she stops going to work when she can't find someone to leave her daughter with; another already understands that the virtual store brings her closer to caring for her daughter. On the one hand, there is the accumulation of roles for women. On the other, we can see the respondent's concern about what she might perceive as "guilt" for momentarily absenting herself from caring for her offspring.

4.2 Cost: Perception and understanding

Table 4 contains the answers to the second block of the interview, questions about cost knowledge. Content

Analysis (CCA) made it possible to organize all the answers into broad categories.

Table 4

Interview stage related to cost knowledge

Questions	Answers	Frequency
2.1 Considering your business, and according to your knowledge, what is cost?	Value of goods for resale	3
	Value of the inputs that will be transformed into the product	2
	All business expenses	2
	She didn't conceptualize, she cited examples	2
	All the costs of the product until you can sell it	1
	Value of goods for resale and other business expenses	1
	All expenses related to the product and the sale of the product	1
	All spending on the product	1
2.3 How do you use cost information to manage your business?	Value of materials used in the service	1
	To form the sales price	7
	To form the sales price and check the profit	1
	To guide the search for input prices	1
	To adjust sales prices	1
	To form the sales price, know the profit and assess the possibility of giving discounts	1
	To grow and invest in the business	1
	To control cost payments	1
2.4 Do you think it's important to know your business costs? If so, why?	Do not use this information	1
	Yes, to see if there's a profit	9
	Yes, for financial organization	2
	Yes, to find out the best place to buy inputs	1
	Yes, to form the sales price and run promotions	1
2.5 How do you determine the cost of your products/services?	Yes	1
	Sum of the costs mentioned	12
2.6 Do you manage the business and costs?	Couldn't answer	2
	Yes	9
	No, by a relative	2
	Yes for business management, no for costs (by a daughter)	1
	Yes, with the boyfriend's help	1
2.7 If yes to the previous question, did you have support from someone or a course on this?	No, by husband	1
	Yes (courses, training, college courses, online videos)	7
	Help from children, siblings, friends, partners	4
	No	2

Source: Data from the research.

To better highlight the discussion of the results in this section, some of the transcribed answers on understanding and comprehension of cost are given as examples:

Cost is **everything you spend on your business**. The price we pay to have our own business, everything I invest in my business (clothing production/commerce, no CNPJ). (E11, emphasis added).

Cost is everything I'm going to spend when I'm going to buy both my merchandise and what's going to surround my merchandise (virtual stationery business, no CNPJ). (E12, emphasis added).

There is, in fact, a broader understanding of cost information. This understanding can lead entrepreneurs to overestimate the costs of their products/services, which can affect their competitiveness. Despite this, eight respondents suggested concepts similar to what is described as a mainstream concept in the light of Ribeiro (2017) and Viceconti and Neves (2018). The women cited more than 30 different items to exemplify cost. More than 70% were, in fact, classified as this type of expense. The rest, however, were classified as expenses, investments or non-business expenses: operating expense items (1); sales expense items (1); fixed asset items (3); and intangible asset items (2). The most frequently cited examples were: goods for

resale (7); labels (4); electricity (4); products used in the service (3); packaging (3); rent (3); and water bills (3).

50% of respondents use cost information to set prices. More than 60% indicated that it is important to know the costs in order to know the profit and 14% for the organization of their finances and the business. Regarding how they determine the cost of their products/services, the majority (86%) answered that they add up the costs they mentioned to find the unit cost, and when necessary, they make a proportion (for example, when they can produce more than one product from an input); however, two (14%) did not know how to answer. The challenge here is to properly conceptualize and identify its elements. If they don't do this correctly, since these women are responsible for managing all or most of the business, they run the risk of distorting the cost of the product. This has an immediate impact on the gross margin and on continuity and competitiveness in the medium and long term.

Zanievicz et al. (2013) and Martins (2003) state that cost management is an essential management tool for decision-making, helping to control and monitor what has been planned. This was not perceived in the interviewees' responses. In general, it is the women themselves who

manage the business, but they do receive some kind of help, either from someone close to them or by seeking information and training on the subject. We can therefore see that these women have a restricted view of using this tool as a means of enhancing their business and developing their activity. Granzotto and Gregori (2016) point out that it is necessary to qualify those responsible for cost management in order to treat it as relevant information that can benefit the business. This social barrier can be seen in the study.

The results are in line with studies by Aung et al. (2021) and Pierotti et al. (2022). In these studies, carried out outside of Brazil (Myanmar and Nigeria), women can add value to the business (gain efficiency in decision-making). This involves encouragement and empowerment in terms of structured business leadership. Establishing better conditions for women to perform their managerial skills helps organizations. On the other hand, restricting and limiting them ends up damaging business activities at

various levels. Pauli (2021) emphasized that women boosted female employability. According to Pinto et al. (2022), in addition to incentives, women need to be challenged and elevated to senior positions, exercising their leadership outside the stereotype scenario that is prevalent in companies and various businesses. It is important to mention that the different activities do not significantly affect or interfere with the analysis of cost results. The terminology used in costing should be uniform across the different branches (industry, commerce and services). This means that the approach is adapted to the business context and accounting is structured for this purpose.

4.3 Pricing strategy

Table 5 organizes the questions and answers from the third block of interviews. The explanations required, once again, from the reduction of data via categorization allowed by the ACC technique.

Table 5
Pricing interview phase

Questions	Answers	Frequency
3.1 How are the prices of your products set?	Market research	9
	Cost plus margin over cost	5
	Customer profile	4
	The cost	3
	Cost of inputs	2
	Number of sales	2
	Margin on the band's fee	1
	The price is set by the magazine	1
3.2 What factors do you think influence price determination?	Costs	10
	Others*	7
	Competition	5
	Number of clients	3
	Client profile	2
	Products that sell more than others	2
3.3 Is the pricing method the same for all products?	No	7
	Yes	6
	Yes, it's the magazine's fixed price	1
3.4 Do you determine prices?	Yes	11
	Yes, with my sisters' help	1
	No. By my husband	1
	No, price is fixed	1
3.5 If yes to the previous question, did you have support from someone or from a course on these subjects?	No	6
	Yes, help from third parties (boyfriend, siblings, children, people in the same industry)	4
	Yes, courses	2

Note. * We identified only one occurrence of the following factors: quality of parts; band fee; packaging; knowledge of your name in the market; added value to the piece; gifts; form of payment.

Source: Data from the research.

According to Viceconti and Neves (2018), pricing strategies are classified into three groups: based on cost, competition and the value (utility) of the product/service. The group studied gave answers in line with these groupings, with the market and cost prevailing as references when setting product/service prices. Amaral and Guerreiro (2018a), in their study, noted that "cost plus margin" was the most frequent strategy. However, for these authors, not all businesses have the capacity to set prices due to portfolio differentiation and consumer preference. This is evident in the parallel responses of interviewees E10 (can manage price) and E3 (does not always manage price).

The first thing is cost, and the second is how much value I can add to that garment. [...] So more versatile pieces, depending on the greater use you can make of them, I can increase the value added to them (lingerie retailer, with CNPJ). (E10, emphasis added).

I try to set the margin, I try to double it, and I always keep an eye on the market so that it doesn't differ so much. [...] I try to follow this pattern, but I'm always analyzing and pondering, I'm researching the values of other physical places and virtual stationery stores, I can't always have the lowest price, but it's important to monitor to see if I'm within the market range (virtual stationery store, with CNPJ). (E3, emphasis added).

They were also asked which factors influenced price formation. Twelve different items were mentioned, the most frequent being: costs (10); competition (5); number of customers (3); customer profile (2); products that sell more (2). Regarding how to determine the price of products/services, half of the interviewees replied that they proceed with an identical approach between products/services. Interviewee E4 (beauty salon service, with CNPJ) said that, in general, pricing doesn't change, but there are specific characteristics of the products/services that must be observed. This was a similar response to that given by E13 (facial aesthetics service, with CNPJ), both of whom work in the aesthetics economic segment.

As for who is responsible for setting prices, more than 85% of the women interviewed took full responsibility. Half of these 12 women said that they did not receive any help or support in this task. The others said they seek support from their families or from people who know the business. They also seek information/training on the subject. E14 (cosmetics retailer, no CNPJ) reported that the prices of her products were fixed and this restricted her competitiveness. E14 explained: "I have to form strategies to be able to sell more according to the benefits they offer (to customers)". The results show, above all, how the price of products/services is of concern to women entrepreneurs, mainly because of the rivalry between what they offer and other products available from competitors. It can be seen that the survival and continuity of the enterprise are pertinent concerns in this group.

In cross-referencing the previous literature mentioned in the research, the results are in line with those of Pavão et al. (2018), since what was seen was a greater role for women in management and operation. However, in many cases this participation is conditioned by the social context. It cannot be said that there is a direct benefit in the performance of these businesses, as Pessoa et al. (2020) and Krüger et al. (2021) found. However, what can be observed is a strong role for women in the performance of multiple tasks and a profile of giving back to the business, which may result in some kind of competitive advantage in the medium or long term. However, effectiveness and efficiency end up depending on women's qualifications and the possibility of them having time to professionalize themselves, without being overloaded with tasks. In this sense, the results could lead to future evaluations that find similarities with the findings of Pauli (2021) and Aung et al. (2021). In this part of the results, it is also relevant to consider that the differences between the activities of the interviewees actually show similarities or even similarities between the perspectives regarding price formation, regardless of whether the businesses are trade, service or product production. Future research could pay attention to these industry differences.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to understand the perception of the concept of cost and pricing strategies from the point of view of female entrepreneurs, given the context in which female entrepreneurship is an important object of research. This is because of the specific characteristics and difficulties faced by women due to their multiple social roles and the predominance of an organizational culture that restricts women's access to management and leadership positions. According to the literature, this could restrict their development and prevent them from accessing the higher earnings that come from the competitive advantages that female human capital offers, if they didn't have to put up with (in)visible gender barriers when running their businesses.

The main challenges pointed out by the interviewees are increases in the price of inputs and costs and difficulties during the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the respondents reported not perceiving gender barriers in the management of their business, despite reporting them in the interviews. These results allow us to understand that, on the one hand, financial availability emerges as a crucial factor for maintaining the business, especially in times of crisis; and on the other hand, the aspect of gender inequality does not appear to be an additional barrier to women's businesses, at first. However, it should be noted that although the survey data suggests this result, it is necessary to take into account other factors that go beyond the personal conception of the interviewees, such as the social context and the possible lack of a reliable self-assessment of perception on this topic due to the rooting of macho culture in Brazilian society, which can be seen from conflicting statements.

The results also show that the majority of women entrepreneurs have a notion of cost that is close to that proposed in the literature. This allows them to use this information, albeit to a limited extent, to make decisions and to help with control. As the respondents mentioned, this information is essential for choosing where to buy inputs and how to price their products and services without incurring losses or being left out of the competition. With regard to pricing, the results showed the importance of proper knowledge of the concept of cost, because those entrepreneurs who don't have a concept close to the mainstream may be allocating items as costs that shouldn't be considered in pricing and putting themselves out of competition. Or they could fail to include expenses that are costs in the sales price and incur margin distortions and erroneous income statements. However, as market research is also strongly present in the management of women's businesses, according to the results, it can help in cases where pricing based on cost is incorrect or out of touch with the social reality in which the business operates. In these cases, it ends up working as an important evaluation tool that women can use in their businesses.

The study highlights the importance of women entrepreneurs having more access to knowledge about management, costs and pricing as determinants of business

success. The inclusion and encouragement of female entrepreneurship can guarantee not only the subsistence of these women, but also the generation of more income for Brazil. It has already been pointed out that this should be a goal for socio-economic development and reinforcement of the Democratic Rule of Law. Studies on this subject are still scarce, as it is challenging to discuss cost management and price formation in any type of business. When analyzing women entrepreneurs, with the problematization of the social role of women, the object of study becomes more complex. In addition, the geographical location of the interviewees is a limitation. Certainly, if the study were to be extended to other regions, the results would be broader. However, the difficulty imposed by qualitative studies must be taken into account.

Another point that deserves attention is the divergence between what women perceive and what they express. At this point, future research could usefully undertake to study this dissonance. It was beyond the scope of this investigation to ask the respondents about their perception of gender barriers to the difficulties they mentioned, and to reflect on the apparent disconnect between what was perceived and what was experienced. Hopwood (1987) recalls that it is more significant to examine issues relating to the focus of accounting, especially conceptions of organizational and social functioning, which become more explicit when gender is more clearly brought to the center of the discussion. Another limitation is the different activities of the interviewees and their businesses. A more homogeneous sample could produce valuable insights, this time taking into account the specific nature of the types of business (commerce, production, service). The study contributes by expanding the literature on cost management and female leadership in small businesses. From a practical point of view, this research indicates areas and activities that vocational training policies for women can focus on. Another important contribution is the impetus to discuss the social restrictions that hinder women's professional development, since many of the women surveyed do not perceive such barriers. No research has been found in the literature that looks at the challenges of cost management and pricing in small businesses run by women together, considering the various types of organization, but focusing on small ones. This is an important distinguishing feature of this research.

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