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Adaptation Capability and Competitiveness for micro-grocery store, Cuitzeo, Mexico

*Capacidad de adaptación y competitividad en microempresas de abarrotes en
Cuitzeo, México*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to determine if the adaptation capability is a factor of competitiveness in micro micro-grocery store, Cuitzeo, Mexico. The metyod used consisted of applying a survey to a sample of 350 mexican companies. The results indicate that adaptation capability is a factor of competitiveness in a regular range. It is concluded that the companies studied must increase the use of new technologies and the planning of the company to improve their competitiveness.

Key words: Dynamic Capabilities; Adaptation Capability; Competitiveness; Micro enterprises.

JEL CODE: L25, L81, M21.



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RESUMEN

El objetivo de la investigación es determinar si la capacidad de adaptación es factor de competitividad en microempresas comerciales. El método utilizado consistió en la aplicación de una encuesta sobre una muestra de 350 empresas mexicanas. Los resultados indican que la capacidad de adaptación es factor de competitividad en un rango regular. Se concluye que las empresas estudiadas deben incrementar el uso de nuevas tecnologías y la planificación de la empresa para mejorar su competitividad.

Palabras Clave: Capacidades Dinámicas; Capacidad de Adaptación; Competitividad; Microempresas.

Códigos JEL: L25, L81, M21.

INTRODUCTION

Dynamic capabilities are crucial in the mainstream theory on company strategy and theory, as well as within the theoretical framework that analyzes competitiveness in turbulent environments (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece *et al.*, 1997). According to this concept, it is not enough for companies operating in such environments to develop a limited set of basic skills or to rely on routine work to succeed (Lei *et al.*, 1996; Teece, 2018). Companies have to develop the target capacity to learn and redefine their resource base continuously in order to satisfy the demands imposed by their rapidly changing environment. The dynamic capability theory provides a framework that explains competitiveness with a novel approach, where the intrinsic resources of companies and how they are conjugated are key to obtaining better and long-term profits in times of constant change (Schilke *et al.*, 2018).

Micro, small and medium-sized companies (SME) are known for their importance creating employment nation-wide. The OECD acknowledges that they are the majority within the economic structure of nations, contributing to the creation of up to 45% of total employment and 33% of the gross domestic product in emerging economies (Bartolacci *et al.*, 2020).

There are many studies on the competitiveness of micro-enterprises (Khun *et al.*, 2020; Schaefer, *et al.* 2020; Abrham, 2015; Ahmedova, 2015; Matejun, 2014; Gál, 2010; Jeppesen, 2005; Ernst, 2004). In Mexico too, several studies have been conducted on the variables that are a factor of their competitiveness from different perspectives: business, regional, national or international (González & Angulo, 2020; Valenzo & Galeana, 2019). Size is a factor for the competitiveness of micro-enterprises in the trade sector. These companies do not have the economic resources to access economies of scale, generate innovation or simply to be financed in order to grow (Saavedra, Milla & Tapia, 2013; Atristain & Rajagopal, 2010; Solleiro & Castañón, R. (2005).

The purpose of this research is to determine to what extent the dynamic capability of adaptation is a factor of competitiveness in micro-grocery stores in the region of Cuitzeo, Michoacan, Mexico. This study is structured as followed: the research is presented in the first part, then literature supporting the theoretical framework of the research is reviewed, later the methodology implemented is demonstrated, the results obtained by applying the instrument to the study subject are pointed out, continuing with the discussion, to then finalize with the conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Competitiveness

The concept of competitiveness is fundamental in the field of economic sciences as well as in business practice. Nonetheless, there is no unanimous meaning for it. Competitiveness is conceptualized from different perspectives, in accordance with the research analysis, being: country, region, sector or company (Porter, 2007; Valenzo & Galeana, 2019). From a macro perspective, the way economic policy instruments are used by government authorities with the purpose of fostering the development of companies in a region, is important. From the micro and meso perspective, at an industrial or business level, companies seek to increase their efficiency, quality, productivity or profits by themselves.

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The national competitiveness is marked by the structure and institutions of a country with economic growth, depending on the performance of the companies and their growth and potential to provide quality employment (Kharlamova & Vertelieva, 2013; Porter, 1985). The ECLAC considers competitiveness to be fundamental for the development of a country, the competitiveness of an economy being understood as the capability of increasing or at least sustaining its share in international markets, simultaneously improving the population's standard of living (Zevallos, 2003). For a country to be competitive it must overcome its equals in research, innovation, business spirit, competence and education (European Commission, 2015).

Regional competitiveness is defined as the capability of the regions to grow more economically in proportion to other regions with similar conditions of development in the same country or continent (Hurley, 2018). The most competitive regions develop *clusters* of companies with higher productivity. (Porter, 2007). In this sense, competitiveness at country or regional level is imbued in the macro aspect of competitiveness.

At an industrial level, competitiveness is conceptualized as the average productivity of the sector, the capability of generating long-term income on the invested capital. It has an aggregate effect on the behavior of companies in the sector as a whole. Five basic competitive strengths are listed: 1) the competition between companies in the industry, 2) the threat of substituting products, 3) the possibility of entrance into the industry, 4) the consumer's bargaining power 5) the suppliers' bargaining power.

There are business factors of competitiveness in which the company has direct interference, that imply the internal processes of the field where it operates, the knowledge obtained and accumulated, as well as the strategy applied to achieve its goals (Medeiros *et al.*, 2019). From

a business perspective, competitiveness is considered as the capability of an organization to maintain or increase its market share, based on business strategies (Solleiro & Castañón, 2004). In order for a company to stay on the market, it must be competitive. For that matter, competitiveness at a company level and in the retail business is conceptualized as the capability of a company to maintain and consolidate its position on the market (Ortíz & Arredondo, 2014).

Sustainable business competitiveness is the capability of a company to combine its resources, achieving constant long-term profits on a determined market (Herciu & Ogrean, 2018). Accordingly, a factor of competitiveness of a company is determined by its adaptation, looking to obtain profits in its market.

The least competitive companies are micro-grocery stores, due to their size and characteristics, they are oriented towards an internal market, generally working with traditional technologies, they generate a low level of value added and have difficulties accessing credit, training and scale economies (Taxis *et al.*, 2011). Within the segment of micro-companies, one of the least competitive sub-sectors is grocery wholesale and retail trade. This sector is labor-intensive and productivity is low.

DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES

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There are various theories that explain the functioning of successful companies and their differences in competitiveness. The theory on resources and capabilities is one of them. This theory states that companies differ from one another based on their resource endowment at a certain time; as well as the capabilities to use them searching for a better income for the company (Barney, 1991). The combination of its resources and capabilities is the source of competitive advantage against other similar companies. (Garzón, 2016). One of the criticisms against this theory focuses on its static character. The dynamic markets are characterized by constant change, and the value of the resources and capabilities of companies continuously change within these markets (Molina, 2016; Vivas, 2013).

Derived from the theory of resources and capabilities, the theory of dynamic capabilities arises which is defined as the ability of a company to integrate, build and redefine internal and external competences based on rapid changes in the environment. (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece *et al.*, 1997). The theory of dynamic capabilities emerges with the purpose to explain how companies obtain sustainable competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments. For that matter, it can be considered as an extension of the theory of resources and capabilities, moving beyond the static vision and based on the balance of this theory (Carattoli, 2013; Schilke *et al.*, 2018).

The theory of dynamic capabilities implies a strategic planning approach within the business world. Strategic planning has allowed companies to survive and progress in contexts of rapid change. The changes may be diverse, whether technological, competition or market-related or with regards to the consumer's preferences, etc. Difference must be made between a dynamic capability and other types of ordinary or operational capabilities (Albort *et al.*, 2018). Ordinary capabilities are those enabling the daily functioning of companies, such as the activities related to production, sales and logistics among others (Teece, 2016; Zahra & George, 2002).

One way to identify them is by achieving goals: ordinary capabilities allow short-term achievement and dynamic capabilities seek medium to long-term sustainability (Teece, 2007). Dynamic capabilities are not a source of competitive advantage by themselves; the way they are used and applied by the company in its search for better income is what determines their importance. Accordingly, not all dimensions of the dynamic capabilities are necessary to achieve the company's competitiveness, it depends on the specific context in which the company is immersed (Hernández *et al.*, 2018).

54 The process of articulating the existing knowledge with the new learnings continuously obtained from the environment where the company is imbued, is the source or place where dynamic capabilities are created. (Dixon *et al.*, 2010).

The application field of the dynamic capabilities is considered to be mainly focused on large enterprises of rapid technological change, where the lines of each company's market are blurred, with unclear successful business models and an ever-changing competition. (Teece, 2007). This theory offers a useful framework to analyze companies in moderately dynamic markets, small and medium-size companies that deal with changes in a more predictable way. (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2019; Wang & Ahmed, 2007).

At first, studies were centered on developed economies and mature markets, but over the last years research on emerging economies has started to appear (Bin Hashim *et al.*, 2018; Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2019; Pervan *et al.*, 2017; Schilke *et al.*, 2018).

Within the framework of the Dynamic Capability Theory, three different types of processes that are essential for their development have been established, the so-called *sensing*, *seizing* y *transforming*.

Sensing is the capability of companies to recognize opportunities identifying the internal and external sources of information that influence companies' behavior (Teece, 2007). This includes the information regarding the market, competition, suppliers, technologies, legal framework, etc. Perception as well as knowledge influence this capability, given that in order

to make decisions all information must be interpreted. (Teece *et al.*, 1997; Uriona *et al.*, 2013). This process includes the capability of absorbing is identified. The capability to absorb refers to the organization's skills to determine the value of information foreign to it, to assimilate it and later apply it for business purposes (Wang & Ahmed, 2007).

Seizing is the company's capability to develop new products, markets and/or processes that may use the acquired information to their advantage (Teece *et al.*, 2016). To look for the profitability of the new knowledge obtained implies innovation. This way, the capability to innovate is defined, identified as the capability to develop new products, services or processes through an innovative strategy. The innovation does not only consider the creation of products, processes or new services, but also taking some existing ones and modifying them, capitalizing a source of additional profitability for the company (OECD/Eurostat, 2018; Schumpeter, 1978).

Transforming is the company's capability to redefine itself once its environment has changed. (Teece, 2007). It reinvents itself when technology, the market conditions, government regulations, etc. have been modified; it means transforming itself and evolving in order to sustain itself and to continue creating value. The capability of adaptation emerges, derived from this capability. The capability of adaptation is defined as the company's ability to identify and capitalize emerging market opportunities, and it is based on the balance between the exploration of the market and the exploitation of opportunities (Teece *et al.*, 2016). It is redefining itself based on the changes in the environment, seeking the company's permanence (Garzón, 2015). The capability of adaptation aligns the company's internal factors with the changes in the environment where it operates.

Miles and Snow identify the concept of adaptation capability, based on which successful companies develop an identifiable and systematic focus of adaptation to the environment. (Miles *et al.*, 1978). Four types of companies are identified:

- a) Explorers. Those that make changes and improvements to the products and markets relatively frequently, attempting to be the first one to develop new products, with the risk of the innovations not being successful.
- b) Analyzers. Maintain a steady base of products and markets while at the same time imitating companies that have already developed new successful products in those products. They can adopt explorer or defense models depending on the situation.
- c) Defensive companies. Offer a stable set of products for a relatively stable market; they focus on continuous improvement of the work inside their field of activity. Their primary goal is the improvement of costs in order to increase their profitability. They do not look to expand outside their market.

- d) Reactive companies. Do not have a lasting and stable product or market area, they act under pressure of the environment and the competition.

The company's success or failure depends on the type of strategy chosen and implemented. The first three types grant the organization profits and competitiveness, always depending on the context where the strategy is applied. Companies that follow a reactive strategy regularly do not generate competitiveness and may disappear. (Aragón *et al.*, 2010). The abovementioned classification does not mean that the organization always maintains a certain type of strategy; it adopts different strategies over time based on the internal and external conditions.

If the cost of change is higher than the expected benefits, the organization maintains its basic competences, and the change must be to create value (Teece, 2018). There is no universal formula for change management. Making changes in the organization depends on the specific situation of each company.

The company's ability to redefine itself depends to great extent on the innovation made. Innovations are a consequence of the skill of detecting opportunities in the environment where it operates.

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To measure a company's capability of adapting to its environment, different studies use Miles and Snow's strategic model (Aragón, 1996; Aragón & Sánchez, 2003; Ballina *et al.*, 2016; Flor *et al.*, 2011; Giménez, 2015). The strategy used by the company is classified based on three factors: 1) the business factor, how the company is oriented towards the market; 2) the administrative factor, how the strategy is coordinated and implemented in the internal functioning of the company; 3) the technical factor, the processes used to obtain products and services.

The theory of dynamic capabilities fundamentally explains that companies compete in a continuously changing market. One moment the resources and capabilities are a source of competitive advantage and the next moment they are not, which is why companies must evolve or disappear (Dixon *et al.*, 2010). Depending on the characteristics of companies, the development of dynamic capabilities are shown in a different way. The latter is influenced by the size of the company, its business segment, its target market, the characteristics of the competition, the technological development in the industry, among others (Carattoli, 2013).

The SME as subject of study

The micro, small and medium-size company (SME) is the greatest source of employment in the world. SME's are known for their role in the distribution of income and reduction of poverty, creating job opportunity for the population (Bin Hashim *et al.*, 2018). According to

the World Bank, more than 80% of permanent employment in the formal manufacturing sector is created by these companies in Argentina, Bolivia and El Salvador, generating more than 90% of employment in China, India, Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan (Zevallos, 2003). The percentage of companies that classify as SME's reaches 99% in countries like Brazil, Colombia, Spain, Italy and France. In Mexico, 99.69% of companies are classified as SME's (INEGI, 2016).

In Mexico, the criteria used to define the size of the companies is that used by INEGI and derived from the *Law for Competitiveness Development of Micro, Small and Medium Sized Companies* (House of Representatives of the Union Congress, 2015). It uses the sector in which the company operates and the number of jobs created as classification basis (Table 1). The Law defines micro enterprises as those that have up to ten people on their payroll, regardless of the sector in which they operate. This is the classification criteria used in this study.

Table 1. Classification of companies in Mexico

Size based on number of workers			
Sector/Size	Industry	Commerce	Service
Micro	0-10	0-10	0-10
Small	11-50	11-30	11-50
Medium	51-250	31-100	51-100

Source: Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión (2015).

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In accordance with the *Economic Census of 2014*, micro-enterprises represented 95.6% of the total amount of active businesses in Mexico. This percentage has been maintained in similar parameters throughout the measurements by INEGI since 1999. In Michoacan, micro-enterprises represent 96.10% of the total amount.

The retail trade segment is where most companies operate in the country, with 41.6%. Similar behavior is present in Michoacán and the region of Cuitzeo with 41.3% and 38.1%, respectively. In accordance with the classification of INEGI, economic units engaged mainly in purchase and sales, without transformation, of final consumption goods to be sold to people and homes, as well as economic units engaged only in a part of this process, purchase or sales, are considered retail trade. Retail micro-enterprises are the largest group in Mexico, Michoacan and the region of Cuitzeo, which says a lot about their importance for the country's economy.

The smaller a company, the lower its probability of survival, almost 40% disappearing during the first year in the trade and non-financial private service sector (INEGI, 2016). The disappearance of an SME during its first years of establishment is recurrent in countries, this being 10.4% in the USA, 11.4% in Brazil, 10.5% in Colombia, 8.3% in Spain, 7.4% in Italy

and 9.5% in France (Franco, 2012). However, in Mexico the rate is much higher, 33% of companies closing one year after their establishment. In Michoacan, the mortality rate the first year is a little lower than the national average. 30% of businesses close their doors. However, this is reverted during the second year, where 70% of businesses come to an end, and it gets worse for micro-enterprises of 0 to 5 employees, where 82% close and they have the worst life expectancy in the country, only 4.7 years for business of 0 to 2 employees, 6.6 years for those of 3 to 5 employees and 8.2 years in the segment of 6 to 10 employees, the numbers at national level being 6.9, 8.4 and 15 years respectively.

METHODOLOGY

There is no great industry that generates massive employment in the region of Cuitzeo¹. Its economy relies mainly on the service sector, mostly commercial, and a small agricultural sector. Consequently, micro-enterprises engaged in the trade sector in its different ramifications prevail. The main segment of companies established are retail trade micro-grocery and convenience stores, with 10.10% of the total number of companies established, an indicator of the importance of this business segment in the region's economy. It is important to note that within this segment there are only nine small companies, four medium sized and one large company.

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The population surveyed is comprised of the owners of retail trade micro-grocery and convenience stores, in accordance with the classification of INEGI established in the Cuitzeo region. From the total number of these companies, those with more than five years of operation were selected, which duration is above the average survival rate of companies in this sector, 4.3 years according to INEGI data (2016).

The total amount of companies meeting these requirements is 3,711. The survey technique was used. The survey applied had a first paragraph with 23 questions describing ² the subject of study, and a second one with six questions measuring the company's adaptation capability, which is understood by its permanence on the market for at least five years. Stratified sampling was the sampling technique used. A confidence level of 95% was used during the study with a maximum error expectancy of 5%. The resulting sample was of 349 companies.

¹There are ten regions in Michoacán. Of these regions, Cuitzeo has an increased economic dynamism, including the capital of the state and its surrounding suburbs. It is comprised of 13 municipalities, and its geographic extension represents 6.57% of the state. Its total population is 1,090,769 inhabitants, 23.79% of the state population, 79.7% urban and 20.3% rural (INEGI 2016). 53.7% of the population receives an income below the well-being line, 46.4% of the population living in situation of poverty (CONEVAL, 2015).

² 1) Company age, amount of employees, type of employees, education level of the owner and employees, owner's gender, owner's age, previous experience of the owner, legal status of the company.

The survey was applied in eleven municipalities of the Cuitzeo region. For rounding reasons, when stratifying the sample between the different municipalities, 350 surveys were applied, 249 in the city of Morelia and 101 in ten different municipalities of the region of Cuitzeo and semi-urban areas of Morelia. The subject of study was the owner of the company, or alternatively the business manager, as they are the ones who possess the knowledge of the company's operations. The data was gathered face-to-face, seeking to gain the trust of the subject and lower the non-response rate. The information was collected from September 2018 to March 2019.

This study is part of a wider study that measures the degree of correlation between the dynamic capabilities as a factor of competitiveness of micro-grocery stores in the region of Cuitzeo, in the State of Michoacán, Mexico. The focus of the study is mixed, describing the subject of study and determining the correlation existing between the adaptation capability and the competitiveness of micro-enterprises in the grocery sector in the Cuitzeo region. To that effect, the independent variable is the adaptation capability and the dependent variable is the competitiveness. In order to measure the adaptation capability, four indicators are considered in three different dimensions, as is shown on table 2.

Table 2. Dimension and Adaptation Capability Indicators

Variable	Dimension	Indicator
Adaptation capability	Business	Introduction of new products and services
	Technological	Use of new technologies
	Administrative	Enterprise Planning
		Type of control

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Source: Own elaboration.

Within these, the adaptation capability is measured by six items that represent the four indicators that comprise it. In these questions a *Likert* -type scale was used with five options, to know whether the company carries out an activity on a daily basis or never. The evaluation scale is a 5 point rate for Always and a 1 point rate for Never. The average was used to measure the degree of scope.

A *Likert*³ scale was used, which is an ordinal measurement consisting of a set of items presented as statements or opinions with regards to which the subjects are asked to react (Pedraza *et al.*, 2004). When the results were obtained, the highest and lowest favorable items were classified into the variables analyzed, to then carry out the definitive weighing in the response options, with the purpose of establishing the scale values and with it, the ranking

³ This method was developed by Rensis Likert in the early thirties. However, it is still a fairly popular and applicable focus.

positions. Based on these considerations, the rating of the measuring scale was made up of following determined values: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 for each item, this numbering corresponding to the following concepts:

Very high Competitiveness	5
High Competitiveness	4
Regular Competitiveness	3
Low Competitiveness	2
Very Low Competitiveness	1

Given the fact that the *Likert* scale is an additive scale, the ratings are obtained by adding the values understood from each question on the survey, keeping in mind that the number of response categories is the same for all questions. On a *Likert* scale, the maximum rating equals the number of items multiplied by the highest rate in each response option, while the minimum rating is the result of the number of items multiplied by the lowest rate of the response options (Pedraza *et al.*, 2004). The *IBM Program SPSS Statistics 21* was used for the data processing.

RESULTS

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Seeking to establish the reliability of the study, the Alfa of Cronbach was used, achieving a 0.868 coefficient, which is why the instrument is considered reliable for the purposes of the study.

To verify whether the data gathered shows a normal distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was applied (table 3). The SPSS program calculates it with the Lilliefors significance correction. This test is considered to be the most appropriate one for medium sample sizes. When the resulting significance is lower than 0.05 the distribution is not considered normal. The results of the test mark that the data obtained by the study with regards to the Adaptation Capability have a significance of 0.000, which is why it does not fall within a case of normality.

Table 3. Normality of Variables Testing

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistical	Gl	Sig.	Statistical	Gl	Sig.
Adaptation Capability	.088	350	.000	.982	350	.000
Competitiveness	.042	350	.200*	.988	350	.004

*. This is a lower limit of true significance.

a. Lilliefors significance correction

Source: Own elaboration.

When in the distribution of the variables it is found that one follows a normal curve and the other does not, it is recommended to use the Spearman non-parametric correlation test, which doesn't need to assume the distribution of the variable.

Using the Spearman correlation coefficient between the independent variable innovation capability and the dependent variable competitiveness, the resulting correlation coefficient was 0.778, with a significant correlation on level 0.01 (table 4). This shows that there is a strong positive association between the variables, which is why the Adaptation Capability is shown to be a factor of the Competitiveness in the subject of study.

Table 4. Spearman Correlation coefficient

		Adaptation Capability		Competitiveness
Spearman's	Adaptation	Correlation coefficient	1.000	.778**
Rho	Capability	Sig. (bilateral)	.	.000
		N	350	350

** . The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2).

Source: Own elaboration.

The descriptive statistic of the Adaptation Capability variable gives an average with a value of 2.6207 (table 5). The standard deviation is 0.7074. The asymmetry is positive in the adaptation capability with 0.397, pointing out that the values observed tend to group to the left of the curve, as is shown in the accumulated frequency where 55.4% of the data appear in the Very low and Low Competitiveness scale ranges.

Table 5. Central tendency measures of the adaptation capability

N	Valid	350
	Lost	0
Mean		2.6207
Standard error of mean		0,0378
Median		2.5000
Standard deviation		0.7074
Variance		0.5000
asymmetry		0.3970
Standard error of asymmetry		0.1300
Kurtosis		0.1820
Standard error of kurtosis		0.2600
Range		3.6700
Minimum		1.0000
Maximum		4.6700

Source: Own elaboration.

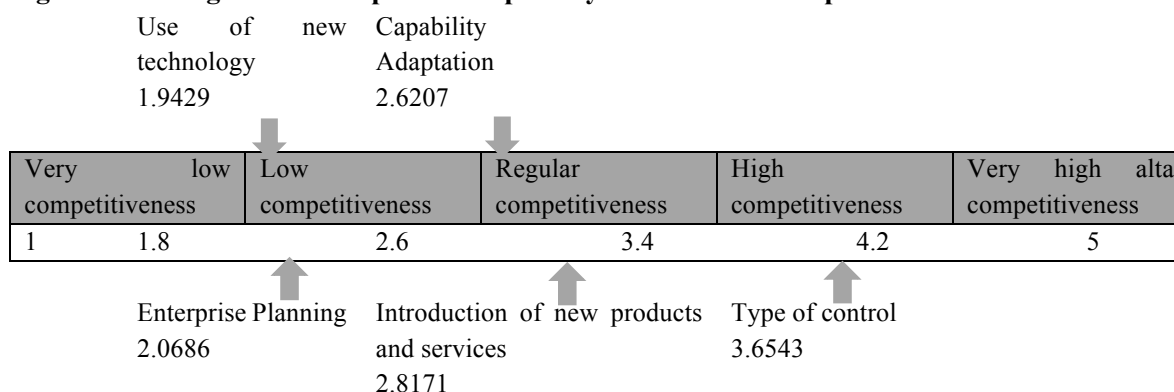
DISCUSSION

The analysis of the competitiveness in micro-enterprises in the trade sector demonstrated that they fall within the Regular Competitiveness range. This implies a higher competitiveness than that identified by Saavedra, Milla and Tapia (2013) in similar companies. It is necessary to keep in mind that the subject of study is the micro-enterprise that has continued to operate for more than five years, longer than the average life expectancy for companies in the sector, which is 4.6 years. The competitiveness of companies is partially corroborated, in accordance with the established framework.

The statistical analysis used for information processing consisted of establishing the distribution of frequencies for the descriptive questions of the subject of study.

Overall, the average of the adaptation capability is shown in the range of Regular Competitiveness, with 2.6207 (figure 1). The concept of competitiveness used at a company level in this study establishes that companies are more competitive when they stay in operation longer than the average life expectancy of the companies of their sector (Ortíz & Arredondo, 2014). In this study, it is higher than five years, therefore the companies to which this instrument was applied have been on the market for at least those five years. They are located in Regular Competitiveness with only 0.2 years above the Low Competitiveness limit. The latter means that even though *a priori* they are considered competitive based on the time in operation, there are other variables not taken into consideration in this study that allow them to stay in the market. Despite this fact, and compared to another study conducted on companies of the same sector (Saavedra, Milla & Tapia, 2013), they are more competitive.

Figure 1. Average of the Adaptation Capability indicators in competitiveness



Source: Own elaboration.

When analyzing the indicators separately, it can be found that the Way of exercising control indicator is established in the High Competitiveness range. This is symptomatic for the SME, where, being mostly family businesses, the control is centralized with autocratic leadership.

The authority is delegated to whoever is in charge of the daily operation, in case the owner is absent. However, decisions regarding the purchase of new products or investments outside of the regular schemes are always made by the owner. The micro-enterprises analyzed have a strong and controlling type of leadership in daily operation, positively impacting their competitiveness (Eikelenboom & de Jong, 2019). This can be partially corroborated by the findings of Salas, García and Azuero (2018), who state that the innovation in SME's is subject to the owner's management. (Salas-Arbeláez *et al.*, 2018).

The information in the paragraph above is corroborated by the Introduction of new products and services indicator, in the Regular Competitiveness range. In a longitudinal study of micro-grocery stores in Cancun, Hernández, May and Martínez (2016) found that a strategy based on the theory of *merchandising* allows companies to survive over time (Hernández *et al.*, 2016). The constant renewal of the products and services they offer is characteristic for the sector, while companies mainly follow an explorer or analyzing strategy that allows them to obtain additional profit, as mentioned by Ballina, García and Martínez (2015), as well as Flor, Oltra and García (2011). Tenjo (2019) came to a similar conclusion; the innovation of products has a positive effect on the company. This is affected by the consumers, influenced by advertising, who require it, as well as the work of sales of the supplier's sales team, a segment of labor which is mostly commissioned. All of this leads to the fact that the entrepreneur is constantly under aggressive sales tactics. This may be an advantage or a disadvantage, always depending on the specific situation of each company. However, identifying the products and services that may be offered to your customers is an area of opportunity already regularly used by the competition from national and international chains.

The Enterprise Planning indicator shows one of the characteristics of the micro-enterprises in the branch. This characteristic is to only view the short-term of operations, influenced by the high customer turnover, sales and purchases that characterize the sector, in accordance with the study of Saavedra, Milla and Tapia (2013) who found that 66.2% of the commercial SME's in the Federal District⁴ have no strategic plan.

Annually is the maximum term for planning, and usually it is related to the aspect of operation licenses and tax payment. They rarely plan for the long-term, daily operation absorbs them and it doesn't allow them to plan for the future. One problem is not visualizing themselves as a company, equating the concept only to large companies (González-Samaniego, 2020). This is also a reflection of the lack of business training consistent with the type of company, which does not allow them to visualize the advantages of medium and long-term planning. The training directed towards the business segment must first of all emphasize visualization as a company, adapting the programs to the idiosyncrasy and knowledge of entrepreneurship.

⁴ Now called Ciudad de México.

(Lorente-Martínez *et al.*, 2020; Scheers, 2010). The use of administration techniques for planning in the SME's leads to better results (Malagueño *et al.*, 2017).

The use of new technologies is the lowest rated indicator, with only 1.9429, positioning itself in the Low Competitiveness Range by only 0.1429. Updating the use of technology in accordance with the business segment is a cause for low competitiveness, because of the reluctance to accept its advantages for the operation, the low access to these technologies, their cost, as well as how little penetration this sector has in the banking market to finance its purchase (Taxis *et al.*, 2011).

This demonstrates that the companies in the sector are reluctant to use new advances in technology focused on their branch (Plazola *et al.*, 2020). A factor for the non-implementation of new technology is the owner's level of formal and informal knowledge, as was found by Lorente and others (2020) in his study on Spanish SME's in retail trade. The indicator points out that the efforts by government and private institutions to impulse this point have been in vain. Access to financing in order to acquire new technology is another additional limitation, mostly making use of family or government sources of financing and with very few access to commercial banking. (Arrieta-Paredes *et al.*, 2020).

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When doing so, the direct competition from national and international new technology chains, little by little undermines the competitiveness of the micro-enterprises in the branch. An important limitation reflected by this indicator is the fact that the entrepreneurs are not convinced of the use of technology. They don't consider these technologies to be necessary for the functioning of their business, such as: point of sale terminals, the use of inventories, electronic sales or bank card payments. Additionally, the lack of financing necessary to acquire the technology in accordance with the segment by the entrepreneurs who do deem it necessary, as well as the abovementioned level of knowledge, contribute to the absence of technology in these companies.

Chart 2. Frequencies of the Adaptation Capability

Adaptation Capability 2.6207				
				
Very low competitiveness	Low competitiveness	Regular competitiveness	High competitiveness	Very high competitiveness
1	1.8	2.6	3.4	4.2
5				
Frequency				
8.90%	46.50%	31.20%	11.10%	2.30%
Accumulated frequency				
8.90%	55.40%	86.60%	97.70%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

When analyzing the accumulated frequency, it is observed that 55.4% of the surveyed companies are positioned in the Very Low Competitiveness and Low Competitiveness ranges, only 13.3% having High Competitiveness and Very high Competitiveness (chart 2). 44.6% of companies may compete with national and international chains. This indicates that the efforts of support to the sector should not be the same, segmenting companies in accordance with their characteristics. In this segment there are companies considered as only surviving, meaning that they do not generate profit for the entrepreneur, providing only the daily support for the people who depend on it (Fundación EU-LAC, 2015).

It has been found that the size of the company is a factor that impacts its competitiveness, the larger they are, the more competitive (Zevallos, 2003). This can be explained by the intrinsic characteristics granted by the size of companies, such as scale economies, a more professionalized organizational structure, position of power when bargaining with customers and suppliers, access to better credit conditions, among others (Aragón *et al.*, 2010; Bin Hashim *et al.*, 2018; Ortiz & Arredondo, 2014). Other studies have concluded that the sector in which a company operates also impacts its competitiveness, being the least competitive trade sector compared to other sectors (Aragón & Sánchez, 2003; Saavedra, Milla & Tapia, 2013).

With the results it was verified that the adaptation capability is a factor of competitiveness in companies (Kareem & Alameer, 2019), the study showing the specific indicators and where they are obtained by the study subject. Not all indicators are equally important in the competitiveness of companies, as stated by Hernández, Kellermanns and López (2018); as well as Teece (2018). There are other factors that were not analyzed in this study that affect competitiveness, such as geographic location, the absence of large competition nearby, or the client service culture, among others.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this study the importance of micro-enterprises in the economic activity of the world was highlighted. In Mexico, they represent 93.6% of companies, generating 41.7% of employment. In Michoacán, 95.6% of businesses are micro-enterprises, this being 94% of the total established economic units in the region of Cuitzeo. Within the segment of micro-enterprises, those dedicated to retail trade in its different ramifications are more important in the region of Cuitzeo. The average life expectancy of a micro-enterprise in the segment is less than five years, based on which it may be assumed that a micro-grocery store that has been established longer than this, is competitive. The strategy implemented by the company in its operation is a factor of its competitiveness.

The theory of dynamic capabilities provides a framework to study the competitiveness of companies when the environment where they perform is ever-changing, a situation not exclusively of one particular sector of the economy anymore. Within it, the adaptation capability shows how companies redefine themselves to remain and continue to generate profit for their owners.

It is determined that the adaptation capability is a factor of competitiveness in micro-enterprises of the grocery branch established over five years ago in the Cuitzeo region. The results show that their highest strength is found in the way of exercising control, which is a characteristic of how this sector is managed. Its most important area of opportunity is the use of new technology, demonstrating that this sector needs to increase the use of new technologies consistent with their business segment. Institutional programs, whether governmental, academic or of private groups, have come to identify this problem. However, the results of the study clearly show that the programs implemented to increase the use of new technology in these companies have not been successful.

66 Company planning is another indicator where competitiveness can be boosted. Owners need to see themselves as entrepreneurs, and in this sense it is important to note that they do not perceive themselves as such, which is why they don't consider any training in administration techniques to be necessary. It is necessary for programs that take the particularities of the sector into consideration to be implemented, without leaving aside the necessary administration techniques, but rather adapting them to their reality, looking to increase their competitiveness, allowing the creation of better living conditions for the people who directly and indirectly depend on this business segment, in accordance with the findings of Toledo, Díaz, Jiménez y Sánchez (2012).

In accordance with the results, there are companies that are competitive and generate profit for their owners, functioning as an important part of the value chain for large suppliers, as well as the small local supplier. Likewise, there are companies that may be considered as surviving companies and that have few competitive characteristics. When considering government training, promotion and financing for the sector, the following must be taken into account: It is necessary to keep in mind that even though the companies studied are considered competitive at staying in business for longer than the average life expectancy of the sector, 8.9% are not competitive.

This study contributes to the knowledge on competitiveness with the theory of dynamic capabilities. The preparation of a longitudinal study will make it possible to determine the evolution of the companies' competitiveness, especially in crisis environments as those afflicting SME's in the year 2020.

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