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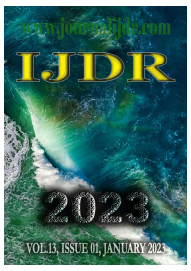

RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

TRANSACTIONAL MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR THE AMERICAN MARKET IN THE DIMENSION STONES SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Folk tales, one of the most beautiful communicative techniques among human beings in the African oral tradition, have, throughout many decades, shown their importance in entertainment and people's education. Like almost all the ethnic groups of the African continent, Yoruba people have their own folk tales which displays a great number of their customs. To make their customs known to all the other civilizations of the world, some Yoruba authors, among whom the prolific Tutuola, include them in their literary works. Through his use of Yoruba folktales, he revealed some of their cultural aspects which includes; the importance of myths, the concept of the supernatural and their living ways in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*and *Yoruba Folktales.* This paper focuses not onlyon revealing some of the Yoruba customs aspects hidden in Amos Tutuola's selected works, but it alsoshow how the use of these cultural components in contemporary literature can give birth to an original artistic work. In achieving this goal, the qualitative research approach, which consists of exploring the existing documents that are in accordance with the current research topic, were used. Based on the theoretical framework, sociological mythological criticisms that are also deemed convenient were applied.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society has been facing various transformations and, among these, we may refer to consumer awareness of a high level of knowledge of the technical specifications of products and related information, mainly in B2B (business-to-business) relations, as is the case of the dimension stone market.

Demands have simultaneously grown in organizations for marketing professionals who employ approaches with a stronger epistemological focus, which enables wider interaction between individuals and organizations through direct interaction, or customization (Constantinides, 2006). Through a differentiation strategy, entrepreneurs, or companies, can define their market positioning, since this is are levant marketing strategy. The strategy is an additional tool to assist in this process (Haque *et al*., 2021; Buccieri; Javalgi; Gross, 2021).

Previous studies in the field of marketing have examined specific organizational characteristics (Albert; Whetten, 1985), questioned the implication of promotions and merchandising as a marketing tool (Ailawadi; Lehmann; Neslin, 2001), and presented the need to create a long-term relationship with customers (Alsem; Hoekstra; Heide, 1996). To summarize, they have discussed the focus of TM (Shaw, 1912; Weld, 1916; Ryan, 1935; Mcgarry, 1950; Mccarthy, 1960), supported by strategies based on the 4 Ps (product, price, place, and promotion).

In times of adversity, marketing has proven to be a recurring and cyclical phenomenon and, essentially, for Star-Glass (2011) should consider the creation and maintenance of trust within the basic mechanism which supports these efforts. Thus, the following research problem emerges: **Which transactional marketing (TM) demands are more applicable to competitiveness for the negotiation of in natura dimension stones targeted for the architecture of houses, and companies competing in the retail export market?**

The aim of this article is to evaluate which TM demands are more applicable to competitiveness for the negotiation of in natura dimension stones targeted for the architecture of houses, and companies competing in the retail export market.

From a theoretical, resource-basedperspective, and with the support of their staff, companies can pool resources and knowledge and, thus, create inimitable capacitiestoincreasetheirsupplementary resources. The marketing mix resource can be adapted in the form of a functionality, or the knowledge incorporated by expanding this functionality (Grover; Kohli, 2012). Thus, the overall objectiveof this research was to investigate TM demands which are most applicable to competitiveness for the negotiation of dimension stoneswith the American market.

Consequently, the search for competitiveness in commercial relations involves the need to understand the capacities and resourcesin different alliances, targets, requirements, and expectations. A number of companies are currently adapting to this new context, and transforming by providing offers, services, and messages to specific individual customers. For this reason, they have been considering the advantages of direct interaction with customers (Crick; Karami; Crick, 2021; Jia; Li, 2016; Šonková; Grabowska, 2015; Gummesson, 2010; Kotler; Keller, 2006; Mckenna, 2005) and developmentofadherenceto the system at nationaldimension stone companies in increasingly globalized, segmented and personalized markets (Janda; Shainesh; Hillebrand, 2021). Consequently, these companies have paid more attention to the dimension stone sector (DSS), which is characterized by outstanding geodiversity.

This research is justified, as demonstrated by Dolley (2016; 2019) in the period between 2011 and 2014 and 2014 and 2017 since Brazil was the second largest exporter of dimension stones to the USA. Consequently, the USA is unilaterally highlighted as one of the main world markets and Brazil's main commercial partner.

The relevance of this work can be highlighted by academic desire, and that of researchers in general, to increase understanding of the dynamics of TM management. Thus, we seek to underst and how theoretical precepts can regulate and enhance the practice in commercial relations between individuals and organizations in the business to consumer (B2C) model and between organizations, in business-to-business (B2B) in distinct nations, considering the rapid advance of technology, combined with changes in needs and consumer behavior.

Therefore, theimportanceof selecting this topic can be characterized due to the profileof these consumers observed in the market asmanufacturers (local manufacturers who import containers of dimensions stones containing a broad diversity of materials); constructors (local constructors who acquire prefabricated and/or fabricated materials), and wholesalers (known as distributors, with a more aggressive profilein relation to imports).

Consequently, the development proposed is the expanded reach of marketing management theory in a distinct marketand, therefore, suggests relevant conceptual advances to associated theory (Grover; Kohli, 2012; Constantinides, 2006). Hence, and according to Hofstede (1984, 2001), Americans (the main importer) and other importers, have adapted to theculturally distinct contextof the Brazilian environment; in other words, more individualist, with a shorter distance from power, and less aversion to uncertainty. Thus, the results of this research may result in a source of competitive advantage for the local Brazilian market, since there is little relevant conceptual knowledge of the target-market.

Following on from the first chapter, we present the theoretical foundations of the topic, in which the objective is not to provide a summarized list of what each researcher presents, but to focus on the body of work, with the mindset of conducting a literature review, in order to provide theoretical support. The methodology used is detailed in the third chapter, and the data analysis presented in the fourth chapter.TM strategiesare presented in the fifth chapter. The debate comes to a close in the sixth, and last chapter, presenting the final considerations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Originally, the conceptof marketing emerged within the field of economics, prior to the formal emergence of the field of marketing, and seen as the concepts of markets and competition (Shaw, 1995; Shet; Gardner; Garrett, 1988; Shaw; Jones, 2005). The first era of marketing evolution in the USA began during the period 1900-1920, entitled the establishment of the field of marketing, perceived specifically as applied to distribution channels (Wilkie; Moore, 2003). However, Hollander *et al*. (2005) defined the first marketing erain a distinct way, as that of classic marketing thinking (1900-1960), followed by the marketing management (1950-1985) and service management eras (1975 until the present day).

Transformations took place from a knowledge-based societytothat of a knowledge-based economy and, with this, later explained the social and economic problems created with the appearance and dissemination of this knowledge. Thus, employees with a priori knowledge altered the nature of jobs, since with this a posteriori knowledge, society expressed the need for more people who expected and required knowledge-based jobs and, in time, altering the majority of labor relations (Di Nauta *Et al*., 2018; Young; Muller, 2015; Drucker, 1974).

During the second half of the 20th century in particular, the marketing process underwent harsh criticism for the presumption of misuse of allegedly scarce environmental resources, and its alleged disregard of public well-being (Sheth; Gardner; Garrett, 1988). The modern marketing system is the result of the work of researchers such as Butler (1923), one of the pioneers to use the term 'marketing,'and Weld (1916) who was concerned with justifying the role of the intermediary in the present system, and their usefulness in the relationship between producers and consumers, highlighting the efficiency of distribution channels. Thus, the expression 'marketing'inits early days proposed to replace terms such as commerce, business, and distribution (Bartels, 1962).

In order to achieve marketing goals, Zhang *et al*. (2016) andŠonkováand Grabowska (2015) highlight the need for a sophisticated marketing mix as an expression, and commonly used in the field ofmarketing. As presented above, the marketing mix was originallyformed of four Ps, which represented the product, price, place and promotion. With the passing of time, a number of scientists included a fifth P in the definition of the marketing mix, which represented people (Chart 1).

A marketing program comprises a set of activity-related decisions, which may take various forms. One way of describing these activities is in terms of the marketing mix of products to plan operational marketing (Constantinides, 2006).

Consequently, in the stricto sensu of this comparison, the concept of the marketing mix and four Ps ofmarketing (product, price, place, and promotion), initially introduced by Borden (1964) during the 1950s and later attributed to McCarthy (1960), became an indisputable paradigm for decades. A large part still remains today, and is defended by many, in a focus called TM, since it is specifically based on achieving short-term transactions, without the concern for building relationships.

Chart 1. The marketing mix and extensions proposed to the 4 Ps

4 Ps Shaw (1912) Weld (1916) Ryan (1935) McGarry (1950) McCarthy (1960)	5 Ps Judd (1987)	6 Ps Kotler (1984)	7 Ps Booms and Bitner (1981)
Product Price Promotion Place	Product Price Promotion Place People	Product Price Promotion Place Political Power Formation of Public Opinion	Product Price Promotion Place Participants Physical proof Process

Source: Adapted by the author from Gummesson (1994) and Sheth, Gardner and Garrett (1988).

Thus, this marketing focus now requires a new and broader approach. As highlighted by Sheth, Gardner and Garrett (1988), in fact the 4 Ps only derive from pursuing a company's end goals, and represent an earlier classification system presented by theories from the school of thought of functional marketing, such as Shaw (1912), Weld (1916), Ryan (1935) McGarry (1950) and McCarthy (1960). Chart 1 describes the marketing mix and extensions proposed to the 4 Ps.

Although the consumer perception of price, value, and qualityisconsidered the central determinants of purchasing behavior and selecting a product, for Zeithaml (1988), research on these conceptshasproduced insufficient results. Thus, entrepreneurs, in their search to add significant value to their organizational activities in the future, should center their attention on obtaining additional knowledge of market dynamics and regulations (Schiavone; Simoni, 2019) in the marketingenvironment (Donthu *et al*., 2021). In these terms, marketing orientation for organizations should modify 'doing and selling', which focuses on the product, to a new philosophy; in other words, of 'feeling and responding', which is customer-centered (Gummesson, 2017).

However, the marketing mix and 4Ps were the voice and needs at the source, developed as aseemingly easy concept to sell consumer products in the manufacturing sector, and orientated towards the populationof the USA during the 1960s; in other words, product-centered, where companies dedicated greater attention to product development, ratherthan a customer focus. Consequently, for 21st century marketing, anapproach personalized for the customer, and service, became a necessity. Therefore, entrepreneurs should wait for customers to become not only more sophisticated, but also more interactive, with individual needs and communication (Constantinides, 2006; Srijumpa, 2017).

However, moving consumer control to collaboration, a rational underlying issue in marketing practices resides in self-control of consumers' minds, based on objectiveknowledge ofthem, takenfrom research and databases on their attributes and purchases (Stevens *et al*., 2017).

Also according to Šonková and Grabowska (2015), Roosand Gustafsson (2011), Sheth (2002), Vargo and Lusch (2011), and Sharman (2015), when discussing the business-to-business market (B2B), the price usually differs in accordance with a single, specialized product at a specific company. In relation to the third P, which stands for place, marketing also strives to satisfy customers on a large scale, by offering a wide range of possibilities of how customers obtain the product they desire; in other words, they are offered alternative ways of ordering the product (via the internet, telephone, and personal request, etc.). With regards to the fourth P, which stands for promotion, they may also offer specific payment and delivery options, since some companies provide alternative forms of product installation, or repair. Considering the intrinsic characteristics of each sector, the following hypothesis test is recommended:

H1: Competitiveness in companies which have 51 or more members of staff is positively influenced (due to their size), compared to those with up to 19 members of staff.

METHODOLOGY

With the aim of achieving the objective proposed for this research, the methodological investigation strategy observed was a quantitative and qualitative study.

Quantitative Approach: In relation to the quantitativefocus, this article was organized using hypothetico-deductive logic. With regards to the objectives, this study is classified as descriptive and cross-sectional (Hair Jr. *et al*., 2005; Creswell, 2010).

General Characteristics: This research sought to identify situations, events, attitudes, and opinions explicitly provided by the research sample. It strives to describe the distribution of these situations through research in this section, througha comparison between the variables which are the object of this methodological approach. The characteristics of the statistical variables are presented in Table 1 below. In relation to the length of time active in the sector, members of staff presented a diverse profile; in other words: 30.3% of staff members had between 14 and 21 years of experience; and 29% of staff members had between 7 and 14 years of experience. Continuing in this segment, 21.3% of respondents had been active in the sector for aperiodof less than 7 years.

Sample: The sample was formed of staff who work in distinct areas in DSS companies, and have knowledge and involvement in this economic export activity. The sample was also characterized as to whether the activity was exercised individually, or cumulatively.

Table 1. Characteristics of the statistical variables

General measures of in natura dimension stone export companies					
Variable Nº	Description of the Variable	Question Nº	Category Levels		Scale
2	Main export destination	1	7		NOMINAL
3	General measures	5	5	LIKERT	ORDINAL
4	Factors of competitiveness	7	2	DICHOTOMOUS	NOMINAL
5	Relevance of dimension stones	14	5	LIKERT	ORDINAL
6	Probability of purchase and repurchase	3	5	LIKERT	ORDINAL
7	Perception of company as anexporter	6	5	LIKERT	ORDINAL
DEMOGRAPHICS					
8	Activities performed	1	7		NOMINAL
9	Length of timeactive	4	4		NOMINAL
10	Type of activity	5	2		NOMINAL
11	Numberofstaff	5	4		NOMINAL
12	State	26	1		NOMINAL

Source: Prepared from the research questionnaire.

Therefore, the main activities exercised by the staff researched were identified as follows, highlighting that 46.5% cumulatively exercise administration and commercial/sales activities, and 65.8% have commercial/sales as their main activities.

In relation to the demographic data of the sample researched, the commercial and/or sales sector is the activity most exercised at the companies (38.06%). 30.97% have worked in a company in the economic sector for more than 14 years, and less or equal to 21 years. The nature of the economic export activity of the company processing dimension stones/distributor correspondsto61.29%, and 51.61% of the companies have up to 19 members of staff. 85.16% of the companies are based in Espírito Santo, according to the researched sample. Thus, the understanding related to the characterization of a non-probabilistic sample, for convenience, is reinforced (Creswell, 2010; Hair Jr. *et al*., 2005). The fact of the sample not being proportional in relation to the extension of its universe is highlighted.

Continuing with the characterization of the sample, we highlight that these export companies are characterized with regards to the nature of their economic activity, as follows: 61.3% of the data researched

refers to companies which exercise dimension stone (DS) processing as their main economic activity in this sectoral chain; in other words, the sample is characterized by companies which basically break down blocks into slabsof various measurements and thicknesses, with one side being polished. Thus, we also highlight that 18.1% are mining companies; in other words, companies which conduct mining activities, to extract blocks of dimension stones; and 16.1% of the sample is formed of entrepreneurs described as distributors; in other words, companies whose main activity is the sale of slabs in domestic and foreign markets.

Data collection: We used primary data to conduct this research. The target population is specifically made up of members of staff who work at national DSS companies. For this stage, the information collection method selected was a structured questionnaire, formed by a set of standard questions with the responses limited to a number of mutually exclusive, andpreviously predetermined, possibilities (Hair Jr. et al., 2005; Creswell, 2010; 2014).

The structured questionnaires were made directly available to the respondents via technological support (email), orinperson, in printed form for data collection, which did not hinder the maintenance of the authenticity of the responses attained. Since the researcher was not present while the questionnaires were completed, closed-ended questions were selected, accompanied by clear and specific instructions which could be easily applied and analyzed (Hair Jr. et al., 2005; Gil, 2008; Creswell, 2010; 2014).

Prior to application, the structured questionnaire was duly validated, for a priori confirmation that the construct scalescorrectly represented the respective concepts. Since the characteristics of the population were inferred from a sample, the standard errorwas introduced in the process, with regards to the real difference between the sample and the population. The data was collected at a single point in time, and summarized statistically (HAIR JR. et al., 2005).

Statistical data analysis technique: In accordance with Hair Jr. et al. (2005), for statistical analysis of the data collected, a description was given of the data presented in the form of absolute frequency, percentage, minimum, maximum, and median values.

A multivariate approach was adopted to analyze the structure of the internal relations between the perceived variables on the questionnaire, i.e., this approach involves simultaneously analyzing more than two variables, with the objective of achieving a more in-depth analysis. The SPSS system used for this phase clustered the variables into factors. The variables were measured on a Likert scale, or semantic differential, with five ordinal points (Freitas et al., 2000; Creswell, 2014).

We used the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) technique to analyze the main components perceived, and Varimax orthogonal rotation, in order to describe the structureof the variables observed from the factors created. According to Hair et al. (2006), the standard for the number of cases suggests that a final sample with more than 50 observations is advisable. For other authors, the minimum standard is 100 cases, in order to attain results with more robust data. However, it also establishes that the ratio between the number of cases and variables should be a minimum of five cases per variable tested.

An analysis of the reliability of the overall internal data consistency was also conducted in this phase, by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951; Malhotra, 2012), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olk in standardization criterion, and Spearman's correlation matrix.

Continuing with an analysis of the quantitative approach of this research, we sought to verify the correlation or internal consistency between the responses achieved from the questionnaire, through an analysis of the response profile provided by the respondents (Cronbach, 1951; Hora; Monteiro; Arica, 2010) through Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α - Cronbach), and the result achieved was 0.88% (Table 2), which is considered almost perfect by Landis and Koch (1977) and Malhotra (2012) (Table 3).

Table 2. Internal consistency

Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	Nº of items
0.885	0.885	28

Source: Prepared by the author, based on the research conducted.

Therefore, it was initially highlighted that the concept of internal consistency for this study relates to verification by application of this coefficient and, thus, favorsinternal reliability of the structured questionnaire used in the research, with regards to the adequacy of each inserted variable (Hora; Monteiro; Arica, 2010; Grilo; Mendes, 2011). An agreement between the different variables which intend to measure aconceptis thereby guaranteed.

Table 3. Agreement measures for categorical data

Kappa Statistic	*Strength of Agreement*
< 0.00	*Poor*
0.00 – 0.20	*Slight*
0.21 – 0.40	*Fair*
0.41 – 0.60	*Moderate*
0.61 – 0.80	*Substantial*
0.81 – 1.00	*Almost perfect*

Source: Landis and Koch (1977, p. 165).

Adequacy of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) sample was conductedusing the Kaiser-Meyer-Olk in – KMO test measurement (Kaiser, 1970) and Bartlett's sphericity test (BST) (Bartlett, 1950) for data adequacy. EFA scores were then allocated to the retained factors (Hair Jr. et al., 2005; Levine et al., 2008; Malhotra, 2012).

To continue, for the adequacy and presence of a significant correlation between the sample variables, the Kaiser-Meier-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's sphericity test were applied (Table 5). The sampling adequacy measure value provided by the KMO test was 0.631, which suggests a good degree of data explanation from the factors, and is considered satisfactory (Corrar; Paulo; Dias Filho, 2007). According to Corrar, Paulo and Dias Filho (2007), a minimum suggested value of 0.600 from the factors is considered satisfactory. However, for Hair Jr. et al. (1987) the minimum acceptable values suggested are between 0.500 and 1.000.

The association of the demographic variables with all the factors was evaluated by quantile regression, with a robust standard error, since it did not need to take on certainpremises and, therefore, multicollinearity did not require diagnosis through the variance inflation factor (VIF). According to Koenker and Bassett Jr. (1978), the advantages of this model are based on the fact that distribution is Gaussian (normal) and, in this case, the outliers are robust.

When the residuals are not normal and/or homocedastic, they produce more efficient estimators than those by ordinary least square (OLS) regression, and are more informative, notonly restricted to an average, enabling the researcher's criterion of obtaining the regression in various quantiles of interest.

Continuing along these lines, the Kruskal-Wallis test allowed a comparison of the median score factors (Koenker; Bassett, 1978; Hair Jr. et al., 2005; Levineet al., 2008).

These analyses were required to confirm, or otherwise, the level of significancein the correlation between the variables. In order to analyze the differences found between the variables, the level of statistical significance of 5% was used, and the level of confidence of 95%to reject the null hypothesis between the tested variables. We used IBM software – SPSS version 24, and Stata 14 software to analyze the statistical data.

Qualitative Approach: This research approach can be classified as exploratory and qualitative (Hair Jr. et al., 2005; Creswell, 2010).

Accordingly, the objective is the discovery of new possibilities and dimensions of the researched population. Thus, it is a "non-structured and exploratoryresearch methodology based on small samples, which provides perceptions and an understanding of the context of the problem" (Molhotra, 2012, p.111).

Sample: The research subjects are members of staff active in the DSS, essentially directly involved in the export chain, primarily to the USA. It is defined as non-probabilistic and by convenience (Gil, 2008; Creswell, 2010, 2014), organized through a technique called snowball sampling (Glasser; Strauss, 1967; Biernacki; Waldorf, 1981). Definition of the sample size was achieved through thecritical judgment perceived by saturation of the collected data (Glasser; Strauss, 1967; Paiva Jr.; Leão; Mello, 2011). Thus, we conducted a total of 21 interviews, with a total duration of ten (10) hours and 14 minutes, and resulting in a total of 352 transcribed pages.

Data collection: This was formulated through interviews, which followed a semi-structured, previously approved script, which were recorded and transcribed by qualified professionals. The interviewees were informed that their responses would not be considered right and/orwrong, since the object was not concentrated on evaluating competencies (Hair Jr. et al., 2005). We used Nvivo 12 software for the data analysis.

Content analysis technique: The data collection and analysis process involved a simultaneous perspective, and started from the first interview. This methodology enabled us to make reliable discoveries from the start to the end of this process. Thus, the accuracy of the qualitative researchstemmed from immediate factors: the researcher's presence; condition of mutual control between the parties; data triangulation; a record of insights, and a rich and extensive circumscription (Creswell, 2010).

exporters, and directors of national distributors established in the USA, specialized in the dimension stone business. We applied a code to identify the interviewees, as follows: national dimension stone distributors established in the USA: DistA#01 to DistA#03; and, equally, a code was given to identify national exporters established in Brazil who export dimension stones DistN#04 to DistN#21.

DATA ANALYSIS

The marketing process requires specialization in the research process and market development and, asdemonstrated, there is a thriving market for the dimension stone sector. However, it is noted that the market is formed of strong direct and indirect competitors.

In relation to variable 3, which characterizes general measures, as demonstrated 54.84% of respondents agree that their employees have the qualifications deemed necessary for customer service. 61.44% agree that, Brazilbeing the country of origin to achieve a sale of dimension stones interferes favorably. Concurrently, 62.75% agree that in a purchasing decision, Brazil being the country of origin contributesaccordingly. 56.86% agree that their customers opt for Brazilian stone when there is a choice between one of Brazilian or foreign origin. 55.03% agree that the Brazilian stone industry is competitive in relation to foreign companies (Table 4). Thus, the viability of factorial data analysis is demonstrated, since the variables are not correlated in the population, with $p<0.001$ (Table 5).

The communalities are the correlation values of each variable explained by the factors; in other words, "they represent the proportion of variance for each variable included in the analysis, which is explained by the extracted components" (Figueiredo Filho; Silva Jr., 2010, p.176).

Table 4. Characterization of general measures

		No.	%
(V3.1) –Do your members of staff have customer service qualifications?	Disagree	33	21.29
	Indifferent	15	9.68
	Agree	85	54.84
	Completely agree	22	14.19
(V3.2) –Does Brazil being the country of origin interfere in achieving a dimension stone sale?	Completely disagree	5	3.27
	Disagree	19	12.42
	Indifferent	31	20.26
	Agree	94	61.44
	Completely agree	4	2.61
(V3.3) –In your opinion, does the fact that the country of origin is Brazil interfere in the buyer's purchasing decision?	Completely disagree	4	2.61
	Disagree	17	11.11
	Indifferent	31	20.26
	Agree	96	62.75
	Completely agree	5	3.27
(V3.4) –On choosing between a dimension stoneof Brazilian origin and one from another country, do your clients opt for stones of Brazilian origin?	Completely disagree	2	1.31
	Disagree	7	4.58
	Indifferent	39	25.49
	Agree	87	56.86
	Completely agree	18	11.76
(V3.5) –The dimension stone industry iscompetitiveinrelation to its competitors in the internationalmarket	Completely disagree	1	0.67
	Disagree	29	19.46
	Indifferent	16	10.74
	Agree	82	55.03
	Completely agree	21	14.09

Source: Prepared by the author basedon the research conducted.

We analyzed the data in accordance with the categorization method proposed by Flores (1994). The objectiveof these clusters was to create categories and subcategories, and to investigate their inter-relations,in line with common affinities contained in this information, which refer to situations and contexts, activities and events, behaviors, opinions, perspectives of a problem, and relations between people, among others. The data reduction process, e.g., segmentation of expressions by categorized units took place using a simultaneous procedure, defined a priori from the interview data and theoretical framework. We interviewed 18 members of staff directly involved in dimension stone export activities; in other words, active as national

Thus, for Marôco (2010) the greater the communality, the greater explanatory force of a variable in relation to the factor. Therefore, they represent the percentage of explanation that a variable obtains on the factor in a factorial analysis. Thus, according to Marôco (2010), HAIR JR. et al., 2005, and Creswell (2010), values under 0.50 should not be considered. Therefore, we can observe that all of the communalities are higher than 0.50, which indicates a good explanatory power (Table 6). Factor selection comprised the establishment of a reduced number of factors which enabled a better explanation of the original variable structure. The number of essential factors to be retained to clearly describe the research variables were

determined at this stage. Thus, we proceeded in two ways: a) factor extraction methodology; and b) the number of factors which, following selection, represent the latent research data structure. Thus, it was achieved by the variance total explained at the minimum of 50.0% (Marôco, 2010) and eigen values >1.

were clustered and presented in the order of higher factorial load (component). Consequently, the factors were clustered and presented in the order of higher factorial load (component); in other words, those which contribute the most, and have the highest percentage of explanatory factor variance, are the first presented in Table 7.

Table 5. KMO and Bartlett's tests

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.631
Bartlett's sphericity test	Approximate chi-squared	249.981
	Gl	10
	P value	**< 0.001**

Source: Prepared by the author based on the research conducted.

Table 6. Communalities (Variable 3)

	Initial	Extraction
(V3.1) Do your members of staff have customer service qualifications?	1.000	0.751
(V3.2) Does Brazil being the origin of a dimension stone interfere in achieving a sale?	1.000	0.809
(V3.3) In your opinion, does the fact that the country of origin is Brazil interfere in the buyer's purchasing decision?	1.000	0.864
(V3.4) When choosing between a dimension stoneof Brazilian origin and one from another country, do your customers opt for Brazilian stone?	1.000	0.597
(V3.5) Is the dimension stone industry competitiveinrelation to its competitors in the international market?	1.000	0.744

Extraction Method: main component analysis.
Source: Prepared by the author based on the research conducted.

Table 7. Factors, factorial load, Cronbach's alpha, self-value, and % of total variance

Factor	Description	Components	Cronbach's alpha	Self-value	% of variance
(F1) - Competitiveness (CO) factor	(V3.1) –Do your members of staff have customer service qualifications?	0.866	0.82	2.359	47.185
	(V3.5) – Is the dimension stone industry competitive in relation to its competitors in the international market	0.854			
(F2) - National origin (NO) factor	(V3.2) –Does Brazil being the origin of a dimension stone interfere in achieving a sale?	0.899	0.68	1.405	28.097
	(V3.3) –In your opinion, does the fact that Brazil is the country of origin interfere in the buyer's purchasing decision	0.929			
	(V3.4) –When choosing between a dimension stone of Brazilian origin and one from another country, do your clients opt for stones of Brazilian origin?	0.712			
Total		-	-	-	75.282

Extraction method: main component analysis.
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser standardization

Table 8. Association of the competitiveness factor with the activity exercised variables, length of time at the company, nature of the economicactivity, and numberofmembers of staff

Dependent variable – Competitiveness (CO) factor (F1) score		B	Robust standard error	t	P value*	95% Confidence interval for B		Tendency
						Lower limit	Upper limit	
(V8) –What is/are the activity (ies) exercised in this company?	Others	0	-	-	-	-	-	
	Sales and others	-0.041	0.195	-0.210	0.836	-0.427	0.346	Stable
(V9) –How long have you worked at this company or economic sector?	Less than 7 years active in the position (company)	0	-	-	-	-	-	
	More than 7 to 14 years active in the position (company)	-0.205	0.475	-0.430	0.666	-1.144	0.734	Stable
	More than 14 to 21 years active in the position (company)	0.504	0.444	1.140	0.258	-0.373	1.381	Stable
	More than 21 years active in the position (company)	0.504	0.449	1.120	0.263	-0.383	1.391	Stable
(V10) –What is the Nature of the exporting Economic Activity of your Company (or Entrepreneurial Group)	Other	0	-	-	-	-	-	
	Mining	0.000	0.179	0.000	0.999	-0.354	0.354	Stable
(V11) –Numberofdirect members of staff active in this company or group:	Up to 19	0	-	-	-	-	-	
	20 to 30	-0.041	0.285	-0.140	0.887	-0.605	0.523	Stable
	31 to 40	0.000	0.262	0.000	0.999	-0.518	0.518	Stable
	41 to 50	-0.041	0.518	-0.080	0.938	-1.065	0.984	Stable
	51 or more	-0.879	0.382	-2.300	0.023	-1.635	-0.124	Decline
Pseudo-R^2 = 4.5%								
(B) Coefficient; t –Test statistic; (*) Multiple quantile regression; VIF–Variance inflation factor; (0) Reference category; Significant if p<0.050								

Consequently, for 'General Measures' (variable 3), two factors were retainedwhich explains 75.3% of total data variability. The internal consistency of factor (F1), called Competitiveness (CO), was considered almost perfect (α = 0.82), and factor (F2), called National Origin (NO),was considered substantial (α = 0.68). Then the factors

Thus, Competitiveness (CO) factor 1 (F1) is responsible for the explained data variance percentage of 47.19%, and factor 2 (F2) National Origin (NO) is responsible for the explained data variance percentage of 28.10%; in other words, F1 and F2 are responsible for 75.28% of the accumulation model explanation.

Chart 2. Transaction marketing strategies identified in the study

Elementof transactional focus	Transactional marketing strategy proposed	Description of the activity
Product	Building the brand	The Brazilian product is seen as being of a good quality. We have a way of producing excellent granite, so the name Brazil behind the materials addsa lot [...] Yes, there is a large market for Brazilian stone, even with the invasion of this engineered, produced, and industrialized quartz material. It has lost a little of its share, but stone is still one of the first choices for house owners, and the Brazilian market has really diversified, and is very strong – DistA#01. What the American market needs is to be confident that the product it places in its customer stock will have continuity, so [...]. So, you have to convince your customer that your company is solid, and your production line is continuous. You have to show this strategy to A + B [...],and explain that you have quarries,orstrongquarry partners, [...] – DistN#04.
	Broad geodiversity	[...] Brazil is the only country in the world which is constantly having launches; it can afford to hold one fair per year, to launch new products. And this attracts the entire world, to be able to see what it has brought [...] this time. So, we have this wealth, and [...], let's say, natural stone. They are open to new developments because they want something exclusive. I also heard a comment made by a stone salesperson, a guy who had a showroom, and a customer arrived and said, "I need a stone", so he showed them [...]; they said, "Is this what nobody else has? Is it new?" And he replied, "yes" [...], "So, this is the one I want; I don't want the other one." – DistN#09. Because natural stone is an exclusive product, and exclusivity, and the majority, and there is a large variety in Brazil. The variety of stones we have in Brazil does not exist in any other place in the world [...] DistN#08.
	Variety of items	[...] I am always introducing new materials. I am always looking for new materials; looking for different products to offer customers, and that is why I have such an extensive line. Last year I sold more than 170 different coloredmaterials [...] I am able to give my customers this range of diversity,so they can benefit from a good service – DistN#08.
	Intuitive image	The first thing for an American is the surfacetreatment we do; applying resin, [...], adding qualityin relation to resistance, [...]. And also the question of finish, in relation to pores and cracks; Americansare very concerned about this because they use a lot of stone in kitchens. So, the material has a lot of cracks, [...], so that is why our material is appreciated there, because we know how to work with resin and chemicals, to seal and waterproof the stone – DistA#01. Americansreally like to buy straight from the source, and this was an advantage. As an advantage,andstrategic issue, what we had was the issue of mastering extraction here; so we created this procedure of them buying straight from the source, and not from someone who was only reselling; we controlled the process – DistA#01
	Price policy	China entered very strongly, although it had a lower quality product, but China has some natural materials at a very attractive price, so we can highlight the issue of price. Sometimes, in Brazil, despite the excellent quality, thisweighs a little more than in other countries, and there is also the issue of cost. Brazil is very expensive – DistA#01. We've had a very significant change to this profile in the last five years. It was distributors who bought the material in Brazil. Companies had agentlemen's agreement that companies here could not sell to a United States manufacturer. But this has been changing. For example, today we have a customer profile whichimportsexoticmaterials, which is a more expensive material, and does not have such a high turnover, so they attain [...] these materials, and really increase their margin – DistA#01. Successful sales strategies have been adopted, e.g., notreleasing this product to a very large groupof distributors; taking a specific material and launching it in a small group, with pre-determined prices, so you can keep the material at a higher price for longer. But when you are talking about the basic material, it is the market price– DistN#09.
Price	Building the product price	In the United States, companies buy the product at the best price and quality, but today they are really focusing on price [...] However, for materials such as marble and quartzite, which have a higher sales value, first I need to prioritize quality, and then price. So, when we are talking about the basics, first it is price and quality; when we are talking about exotic and super-exotic, it is qualityand price - DistA#01. Price, let's break things down [...]. I have been talking about the basic material, [...] it is market price; you don't, you aren't able to build the price anddeterminesthepriceofthe basic material; you have to follow the market price. The price of exotic and super-exotic materials, a new material which you are launching – you determine the price. And this price determination is related to the beauty it has;thedifference it has, [...] there is nothing similar on the market, [...] if it is a new material, which is well-received by the market [...] you can build the price the way you want – DistN#09
Promotion	Promotion policy	.[...] four months pass, and then we consider a certain amount of depreciation of the material; it loses a little of its value. Here, we achieve a margin where we accept that it loses a percentage after four months;and a few months later, it loses another percentage, as if it were making a loss for us – DistA#01.
Place	Strategic positioning	They like practicality in the United States, so usually not only in our granite sector, [...]; you will see that there is an avenue, which has [...] that product niche you are looking for. And stone is the same thing; we had to look for a place close to the depots, to be able to take customers too, because if it is somewhere far away, they won't go. Americansreally like to research, so if I set up a business location far away from the stone region, this would probably produce a very negative result – DistA#01. So, this is part of the chain which has been formed with time. But we are seeing that this chain is being broken. I consider that within the next five years, at the most, the role of distributors will decrease alarmingly. Perhaps there will be another concept; a concept that we have today of the distributor being an intermediary, to earn money, is coming to an end. This distribution may gain another association; not to make money, but perhaps the stone industry will establish some distribution points, but to facilitatetheproduct because there are small stone professionals who will not able to buy a container of stones, so you have to create a sales mechanism (group) to sell, but not in order to make money – DistN#09.

Source: Prepared by the author, basedonthe research conducted.

Competitiveness (CO) factor (F1) represented in this model highlights the level of professional qualification in which entrepreneurs invest, and the perception of competitiveness with their competitors in the international market. This perception highlights the market vision of the international market from the national companies' perspective. Thus, a large investment in professional qualification is considered a determining factorin response to international competitiveness. Thus, data reduction is noted, with a 25.72% loss in total data variance observed in the model (Table 7).

In accordance with Aranha and Zambaldi (2008), the initial self-values presented in Table 7are those obtained from covariance, or correlation matrices, with the goal of obtaining a set of independent, uncorrelated vectors, which explain maximum data variability. Thus, they indicate a variance total caused by each factor. Consequently, the first self-value (F1 = 2.359) always has the highest value.

Therefore, continuing with the statistical analysis, quantile regression with a robust standard error does not need to meet the premises of a lack of multicollinearity, normal residual, heteroscedasticity, and serial autocorrelation and, therefore, tests are not required.

Pseudo-R^2 is a measure similar to the explanatory coefficient of R^2 linear regression, and is defined by the explanatory total of the independent variable or variables over the dependent variable. Thus, pseudo-R^2 is distinguished in the sense that the model evaluates the variation of likelihood when only the constant is considered, and incorporates independent variables.

Therefore, if there were an increase in pseudo-R^2, the model is able to statistically predict the factor in a better way; in other words, it will provide an indication similar to R^2; the explanatory power (pseudo-R^2) of the independent over the dependent variables was 4.5%. In view of this, it is confirmed that there was a statistical significance for the independent variable (V11) "Number of members of staff active at this company or group" with the competitiveness (CO) factor (F1). Therefore, it can be confirmed that a company which employs 51 or more members of staff influences a median reduction in the competitiveness factor score, when compared to one which employs up to 19 members of staff (Table 8).

Consequently, it can also be explained as follows: a company which employs 51 or more members of staff reduces its competitiveness factor score media by 0.88, when compared to one with less than 19 members of staff (reference category). In other words, in this case a company with more than 51 members of staff reduces its competitiveness (CO) factor (F1) median by 0.88 points, when compared to one with less than 19 members of staff.

Hypothesis 1 analyzes the attributes awarded to the competitiveness factor (F1) at companies in line with their size; in other words, companies which have up to 19 direct members of staff and those with 51 or more. Thus, based on the research data, we can affirm that H1 is not validated, since in relation to F1, larger companies (51 or more members of staff) lower the median by 0.88 points in relation to smaller ones (up to 19 members of staff). Consequently, smaller companies are more competitive than larger ones. Consequently, we highlight that the company which employs 51 or more members of staff reduces the competitiveness (F1) factor score by an average of 0.88 points, when compared to one with less than 19 members of staff (reference category). In other words, in the F1 analysis, companies with 51 or more members of staff reduces their competitiveness by an average of 0.88points, when compared to the reference category (Table 8). Therefore, based on the research data, we can confirm that the higher the number of members of staff in a smaller company, the higher its competitiveness in relation to micro and small companies, in accordance with the scenario analyzed.

To summarize, the findings of this research support the references of Chiodi Filho and Chiodi (2009), Vidal, Azevedo and Costa (2014), and Guidi et al., (2018), which confirm the idiosyncratic market tendency of the DSS, with the vast majority appropriate to small and medium-sized companies (PMEs), based on their research data. In theory, this indicates that the higher the number of members of staff, the less competitive the company.

To continue, the TM strategies are concentrated on the real distribution of goods, i.e. the product and price, and less on promotion and place, which highlights the relevance of the inclusion of the marketing mix.

We were able to highlight the evolution of marketing in this research, i.e. on the product-centered principle, gradually focusing on the consumer, and a new vision emerging and dominating the market, on marketing which focuses on consumer-perceived values.

Transactional Marketing Strategies: As put forward by Šonkováand Grabowska (2015), although recent studies have confirmed that there was a change in TM strategy (which dominated in the second half of the 20th century) to relationship marketing, the main global companies still continue to employ these strategies.

The importance of publicity for the sector by exhibiting their products atnational and international stone fairsas one of the main sources of presenting their products is highlighted. However, it is understood that these efforts have been insufficient, when considering market demands. However, Brazil is currently one of the countries which is able to present the largest number of new products to the market and, for this reason, "the world keeps an eye on Brazil for new launches" (DistN#09). Chart 2 summarizes the TM strategies adopted by the interviewees.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is a wide range of criteria to consider when evaluating the competitiveness of the DSSwhen marketing national dimension stones, which includesthecharacteristics ofthe extraction process, geological characteristics of the product, production requirements, organizational structure, current supply and demandand, no less importantly, future consumer market tendencies. Manufacturing capital costs, transport and sales should also be considered, in order to analyze the viability of an undertaking.

With regards to tendencies, we observe that they are primarily concentrated on macroeconomic tendencies; in other words, if the economy responds well to them, it is reasonable to assume that there will be some recovery of the productive chain at the national level. It has been noted that this has been a basic, safe assumption in recent decades.

Thus, global market conditions and competition are the main considerations when preparing a specific business plan for the DSS, which does not shy away from realistic cost and profit forecasts. Therefore, development of viabledimension stones is partially based on a number of factors, e.g., political and economic conditions, and not only the geological conditions characteristic of the product. Consequently, for successful development of new sources of dimension stones and coverings, and to revitalize existing mining, the availability of industrial infrastructure support is required. Thus, a constant and full evaluation of geological and geopolitical conditions, and international tendencies in accordance with the cultureof each country, should be taken into consideration. These are the basic criteria for the solid establishment of continuous DSS development.

However, first and foremost, the immanent need for investment in staff professionalization, and an awareness of what constitutes quality, real costs, long-lasting operations and, equally, long-term commitment to the investment made. Thus, we highlight that the main point is unified in individualized organizational behavior, divorced of collectivity.

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economy responds well to them, it is reasonable to assume that there will be some recovery of the productive chain at the national level. It has been noted that this has been a basic, safe assumption in recent decades.

On the other hand, in the international market, specifically North America, this connection has been breaking down in recent years; in other words, a distance between economic dynamism and its reflection for a higher or lower demand for dimension stones havebeen observed in the international market.

A perception to be considered by the sector is concentratedonthe weakened connection between economic growth versus the demand for dimension stonesshould be observedas a sign for companies in the sector that a profound, fundamental change is proliferating in this competitive dynamic.

Future studies should research both conceptualization of the national product from the importers' perspective, and present studies which detailthereasonsthatlead architects and interior designers to opt for products which replace natural stone.

Thus, future studies should focus on an analysis of the annual reports presented,and their insights with end consumers, in order to strengthen the network of knowledge and loosely woven numbers at the national level.

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