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RESEARCH ARTICLE

STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF LABELS ON THE COMMERCIAL PERFORMANCE OF COOPERATIVES CASE OF A COOPERATIVE IN THE ESSAOUIRA, MOROCCO

S. El Farri¹, Dr. L. El Mesquine² and Dr. L. Oubdi³

1. Research Scholar, Research Laboratory in Entrepreneurship, Finance and Audit (LAREFA), National School of Commerce and Management, IbnZohr Agadir University, Morocco.
2. Professor, Research Laboratory in Entrepreneurship, Finance and Audit (LAREFA), National School of Commerce and Management, IbnZohr Agadir University, Morocco.
3. Professor, Director of the Research Laboratory in Entrepreneurship, Finance and Audit (LAREFA), National School of Commerce and Management, IbnZohr Agadir University, Morocco.

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Abstract

The main objective of each entity is the achievement of profit, so the manager has to look for the best solutions and actions to achieve better performance. Cooperatives, like any organization, are no exception to this rule. Faced with the many problems they face in terms of marketing their products, they need to adopt innovative approaches, particularly the labeling of their products. In the framework of our research, we have focused on the role of labels in the commercial performance of cooperatives, based on data collected from our survey with these social entities.

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Introduction:-

Social innovation is linked to changes in the dynamics of social relations leading to the inclusion and integration of excluded groups and individuals. It has a strong connection with an ethical position of social justice (Pouchain, 2016). Fair trade as an innovative approach to economic development (Nicholls & Opal 2005), is considered a social innovation insofar as it aims to establish a certain equity in commercial exchanges and to promote production methods that respect the environment (Pouchain, 2012). It is a trading partnership based on dialogue, transparency and respect, the aim of which is to achieve greater equity in global trade (Moore, 2004). Its development lies in the involvement of conventional companies applying a fair approach to their products (Pernin&Sénéchal 2008). In addition, so-called "terroir" companies (Rastoin and Vissac-Charles, 1999; Marchesnay, 2001), in particular cooperatives, are increasingly adopting an innovation strategy enabling them to develop their status: moving from "producer of raw materials" to that of "transformer" up to the final product and including marketing. It is important for these entities to adopt certificates attesting to their production and processing procedures, in particular the label.

Maurin et al in 2011 defined the label as: "a special mark, created by a professional syndicate or a parapublic organization, and whose logo is affixed to a product intended for sale, to certify its origin, quality and manufacturing conditions in accordance with pre-established standards in specifications..." (Maurin et al. 2011).

The problem of this article is to determine to what extent the adoption of labels as an innovation allows an improvement in the commercial performance of Moroccan argan cooperatives. Our objective is to measure the

Corresponding Author:- Samira El Farri

Address:- Research Scholar, Research Laboratory in Entrepreneurship, Finance and Audit (LAREFA), National School of Commerce and Management, IbnZohr Agadir University, Morocco.

importance of labels for the development of cooperatives by committing to a fair approach; this importance evaluated in terms of market share, profitability, turnover, cost, selling price.

To achieve this objective, we will conduct a qualitative study with cooperatives in the province of Essouira. Our qualitative collection is mainly based on the collection of data through semi-structured interviews, observation and documentation.

Our study plan will be as follows: first we will start with a brief presentation of the theoretical framework, including the label, innovation and commercial performance. Then we will present our problematic and methodology. Finally, we will analyze the results of our qualitative study and propose some recommendations.

Literature Review:-

We will try to understand the concept of the label before discussing its importance in the marketing of local products.

The label: origin and challenges of creation

The appearance of the food industry and the multiplication of intermediaries between the producer and the consumer constitute a major change in the food production system at the beginning of the 20th century. And so the consumer becomes demanding and concerned about the quality of the products marketed. It is in this context that the law of August 1, 1905 on fraud and falsification in terms of products and services is implemented by a strategy requiring a certain level of quality in terms of origin and production method (Dessaux 2006). This will lead to the creation of official labels allowing the distinction of products thanks to the labels.

In 1935, the official labels of origin and quality were created thanks to the "CAPUS Law" relating to controlled designations of origin (Capus 2019).

These labels aim to promote geographical areas and the sustainable development of territories. This is a specific marking which symbolizes a superior quality of the product on one or more criteria expressed in its specifications. To obtain and maintain its quality emblem, each producer must comply with specifications.

All the steps: creation, implementation, accreditation and control of these labels are governed by the State via accreditation and control bodies.

In Morocco, the identification of local products through the labeling process is one of the main areas of intervention of the Green Morocco Plan launched by King Mohamed VI since 2008 (Ahrouch et al. 2017). It is an essential element to develop, promote and improve the notoriety of a product on the market. Since the activation of Law 25-06 relating to Distinctive Signs of Origin and Quality (SDOQ), 37 products have been labeled: 30 Geographical Indications; 5 Designations of Origin; 2 Agricultural Labels (Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries 2019).

The importance of the label as an innovation in the marketing of local products:

According to D'aveni (1994), innovation is an organizational change through which new products, processes, technologies or structures are adopted. The objective is to improve the efficiency of the organization to adapt to changing markets and modes of competition (Bellon 2002). The literature has often dealt with the elements favoring innovation. There is an association between the marketing of innovative products and process or organizational innovations.

Argan cooperatives as well as companies in the agri-food industry are increasingly interested in strategies for promoting the production of raw materials and brand policies (Anvar 2004). They invest in an essential innovative approach to face many challenges, in particular the penetration of new markets, and the renewal of products. So the challenge for cooperatives is to label and standardize their offers by setting up traceability and food safety procedures. Thus, they promote the implementation of quality approaches allowing them to acquire a competitive advantage on the national and international market. Consequently, the labeling, as an innovation, will allow the cooperative and its members to have a competitive advantage consisting in improving its performance, by offering a range of certified products (improvement of the product) intended for a niche market. , and to negotiate more favorable contracts.

Improving the product will enhance its identity as well as its authenticity, giving it a differentiated and distinguished image, while optimizing its added value. To do this, the argan cooperative can devote more time to the period following the harvest, especially for drying. This favor consists in improving and optimizing the marketing circuit.

By implementing this innovation, in particular labeling and certification, the cooperative can access a more advantageous market in terms of price and arrangement. But access to these markets induces costs related to internal control of the standard and compliance with quality requirements.

Labeling is sometimes presented as a means of development and progress for cooperatives. But the idea is risky since this innovation does not always bear fruit. Furthermore, labeling is not an end in itself, but a means of improving the situation by optimizing income and protecting the environment.

Commercial performance:

Studying the concept of commercial performance cannot be dissociated from the analysis of the concept of performance in general. The concept of performance, often studied both in the literature and in organizational circles, refers to a certain level of organizational excellence. It designates everything that can contribute to improving the value-cost couple and that leads to the maximization of value creation thanks in particular to the commitment of individuals to the achievement of the strategic objectives of the organization (Escaffre 1999). In other words, it indicates the level of achievement of results in relation to the efforts deployed and the resources consumed. Two notions are largely linked to the concept of performance, in this case: “effectiveness” and “efficiency” (Ali Bouacha. 2021). Thus, a high-performance entity can be considered one that reacts better than its competitors in the short, medium and long term (Issor 2017). Business performance is part of the overall business competition. Indeed, commercial performance, also called marketing performance, has a direct link with customer satisfaction. Companies in general and cooperatives in particular must master the factors of commercial performance to maintain their position in the national and international market and to face increasingly fierce competition. Thus, commercial performance refers to the ability of the organization to satisfy and retain its customers while offering good quality goods and services that meet the expectations and desires of consumers. Plauchu and al. (2008) defined commercial performance by being the art of being with the right interlocutor, at the right time with a relevant offer, thus allowing the development of a sustainable and above all profitable business partnership for the organization (Plauchu et al. 2008).

Organizations wishing to achieve good commercial performance, care about the needs and expectations of their customers while taking into consideration the strategy of their competitors as well as evaluating their current performance.

Commercial performance can be measured by quantitative determinants such as: market share, profit/profitability, turnover, cost, selling prices or qualitative such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, perception of quality and reputation of the organization/brand equity, the company's ability to innovate (Furrer and Sudharshan 2003).

For sustainable performance, organizations are led to constantly develop the quality and the means implemented for this objective, in particular, customer satisfaction, after-sales service, continuous improvement of the quality of the offer and the continuous innovation (Lee et al. 2006). Indeed, innovation is a major key success factor for any company in search of performance. All of the above actions help companies deliver value in a highly competitive marketplace. A value that generally translates into an adequate response to customer expectations (Lejeune, Préfontaine, and Ricard 2001).

Empirical Study: Objective And Methodology:-

We will try to present the objectives and the methodology followed to properly conduct our study.

The objective of the study:

The purpose of this article is to measure the importance of labels for the development of the commercial performance of cooperatives by committing to an equitable approach; this importance evaluated in terms of costs, profit and profitability, market share, turnover, and in terms of notoriety (Furrer and Sudharshan 2003). The aim is to assess the effects of labels on the commercial performance of argan cooperatives. To achieve our objective, we carried out an empirical study in the region of Essaouira precisely at the level of the rural commune of Tidzi.

The choice of the study area:

We chose the province of Essaouira to conduct our study. It covers an area of 6335 km². Demographically, the population of the Province of Essaouira is 450,527 inhabitants, or 9.96% of the total population of the Marrakech-Safi region (National Population Census, 2014). Rural people represent 77.6% of the population, against 22.4% who live in urban areas. At the level of this province, the argan tree covers an area of 136,430 ha, or about 20% compared to the national argan plantation (Chriqui et al., 2003).

The study is developed in the rural town of Tidzi under Haha, province of Essaouira. Two criteria were at the origin of the choice of this municipality. The first relates to the area of the forest which is significant (6350 ha). While the second concerns the importance of the cooperative fabric, in particular women's argan cooperatives. Indeed, the creation of cooperatives has contributed to the local development of the region.

The data collection:

We conducted a qualitative study. This study was based on semi-structured interviews. We conducted personal interviews (Daunais, 1992) based on an interview guide with Mrs. Zahra KNABO, the president of the AJDIGUE cooperative, which means the rose in the Berber language, of the Tidzi commune. We based ourselves on the potential indicators listed from our literature review to formulate the questions (De Peretti, Legrand, and Boniface 2013). Thus the study strategy mobilized in the construction of our research object is the case study.

The data analysis method:

To analyze the collected data, we used the case method, developed by Hlady-Rispal (2002), thus the processing of these collected data was carried out as suggested by Bardin (2013) using the content analysis (Bardin 2013) in the desire to discover the importance of the label in the commercial performance of cooperatives. Indeed, the content analysis method is based on three essential stages: pre-analysis (operationalising and systematizing the initial ideas to find a diagram/analysis plan), exploitation of the material (carrying out coding operations in according to the instructions defined beforehand) and finally processing & interpretation (the raw data are processed and interpreted in a meaningful way) (Wanlin 2007).

Analysis of the impact of the label on commercial performance and proposal of recommendations:

The purpose of this part is to try to identify the different divergences or convergences of the data collected in the field with the literature review conducted in order to associate, for each of the aforementioned factors of commercial performance, the theoretical and field contributions.

We will start with a presentation of our case study to move on to the presentation of the results and their interpretation.

Presentation of the Ajddigue cooperative:

The Ajddigue women's cooperative for the production and marketing of argan oil was founded in 1997. It brings together around fifty members. She is considered a pioneer in her region. The cooperative is located in the rural town of Tidzi, 25 km from Essaouira on the road to Agadir. Ajddigue, which means flower in Berber, is recognized for its social responsibility towards the members: literacy and training in the profession of the cooperative.

The cooperative follows a managerial system based on quality and compliance with standards. Possibility of having edible oil, cosmetic products on site, in their premises, on the internet or in large and medium-sized stores.

The argan oil produced by the cooperative is guaranteed, 100% natural and organic (certified by ECOCERT) with superior quality, thanks to an optimal extraction process as well as support for research carried out at the Faculty of Sciences of Rabat. The products are labeled and certified; PGI (Protected Geographical Indication); PDO (Protected Designation of Origin); OA (Organic Agriculture and Eurofeuille) and many others. In addition, the cooperative develops a strategy based essentially on research and the implementation of innovative and responsible actions, despite its limited resources.

It is among the first in the region to have adopted the labeling, as an innovation, of its products and to export them abroad. Something that made it easier to penetrate a new segment of the growth market: the European market (items of interview with the president of the Ajddigue cooperative).

Study of the role of the label on the commercial performance of the Ajddigue cooperative:

To be able to understand the impact of the labels on the commercial performance of the cooperative, we studied the impact of the label on each determinant of the commercial performance, in particular: the cost, the selling price, the turnover, the profitability, market share and brand equity (Furrer and Sudharshan 2003).

The following diagram (fig.1) summarizes the five aforementioned elements. The categories that represent each determinant from the analysis grid were demonstrated by verbatim that were drawn from the analysis of the interviewee's speeches. An interpretation of these results was necessary, based on feedback from scientific writings.

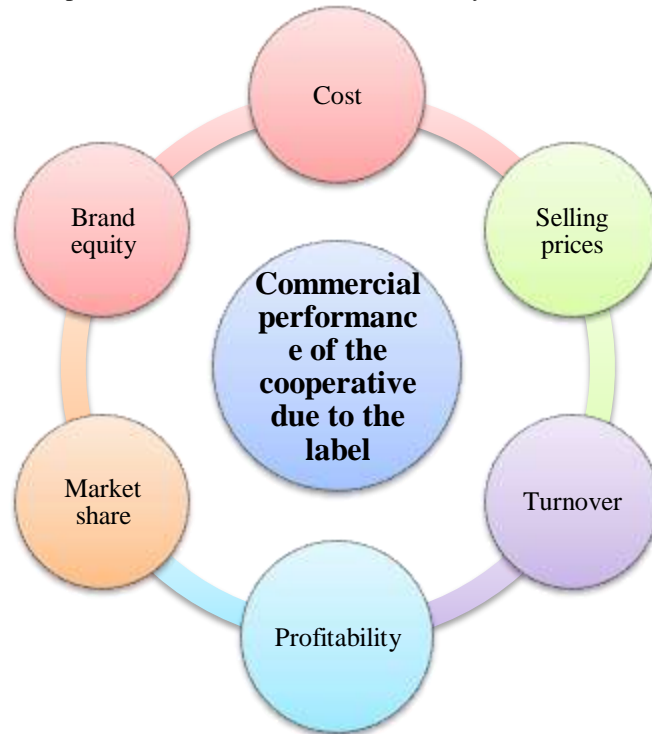


Fig.1: The determinants of the importance of the label for the commercial performance of an organization (author quoted by (Furrer and Sudharshan 2003))

Labeling has a cost:

Certification of products from cooperatives for export remains mandatory and essential. Indeed, the labeling of a certain product brings significant marketing advantages.

Adhering to a label requires compliance with certain requirements defined by the public authorities. In this context, tests and checks are regularly requested. Mason and Sterbenz (1994) perceive the existence of an expensive test of the quality of products on the market. In addition, the specifications are established, taking into consideration the different stages of production, processing and packaging.

Thus, labeling and its controls generate fixed costs for the Ajddigue cooperative; the organic label as well as the fair trade label, for example, generate a fixed cost of approximately 40,000 DHs/year. It turns out that labeling is very expensive and represents a real long-term investment, in particular because of regular checks, tests and audits. According to the director of the cooperative, this leads to great rigor on their part on a daily basis. Indeed, non-compliance with commitments risks having them excluded from the system, which will directly influence the performance and sustainability of the organization (part of the interview with the director).

Selling price:

Labels are considered as purchasing incentives for consumers because they are an indicator and a guarantee of quality. In the fair trade charter, it is underlined that fair trade actors commit themselves to "equity and solidarity in commercial relations", and this is based on "practicing fair prices and methods of financing, allowing everyone to live with dignity from their work" (Pouchain 2012). This exactly reflects the vision of our case study, insofar as the

selling prices are set in a correct and fair way. Indeed, according to the director of the cooperative, the price of a liter of gourmet argan oil varies between 300 and 350 DH on the market, while it goes up to 550 DH at the level of the cooperatives. This variation can be explained by the quality of the two products which is not the same, they are not packaged in the same way and they are not intended for the same target (the argan oil of the cooperatives is intended export in most cases).

The same remark was recorded for cosmetic argan oil. Indeed its high price is justified by its remarkable quality and especially its destination of sale abroad. The price per liter can vary from 300 DH in the souk to 800 DH in the cooperatives.

According to the director of the Ajddigue cooperative, the selling price of argan oils is justified by the high cost of production meeting the requirements of the label. In fact, the Ajddigue cooperative offers a labeled final product: Organic, fair trade, IGP (the raw material can come from a wide geographical area but the processing must be done in a well-defined area), AOP (production & processing in a geographical area), FFL (Fair for life), with a well-considered selling price: a fair selling price. The director of the Ajddigue cooperative says that customers are aware that quality has a price. She adds that their clients trust them. Similarly, Balineau (2010) considers that fair trade products are generally a very good example of trust goods (Balineau and Dufeu 2010). The director of the cooperative emphasizes that their customers are loyal and ready to pay more for a labeled product (Nes and Bilkey, 1993).

Turnover:

Fair trade is generally associated with superior quality (Balineau and Dufeu 2010). This coupling positively influences the increase in sales of fair trade products. Argan remains the flagship product of fair trade, its market remains the largest in terms of volume sold and marketed in Europe after labeling (element of interview with the director of the cooperative, case of our study). In this sense, adds the director, we can consider the label proof of compliance with a quality standard, serving as a commercial argument to better enhance the product and its identity and therefore a considerable increase in turnover. In addition, the label is considered a real marketing support that promotes increased sales following product certification. It develops business opportunities for local products and ensures chances of penetrating the national and international market. In the same way, the label is considered as an innovative factor strengthening the positioning of argan, and moreover all local products, on the world market. In addition, the label is a guarantee to consumers on the quality and originality of the product offered and therefore a real incentive to purchase. Thus, according to the director of the cooperative, the organic label has generated a 100% increase in annual turnover.

Profitability:

The cooperative carries out calculations on the profitability of the investments linked to the labeling program. Indeed, it seeks to understand whether the label will be commercially effective or not before deciding to adopt the labeling approach (Larceneux 2004).

For our case study, participation in the labeling program constitutes an advertising decision (Golan, Kuchler, and Mitchell 2000). Indeed, adding a label or a sign of quality on the packaging of the product makes it possible to generate additional profit insofar as the product has an additional advantage over those of competitors. The director of the cooperative confirmed to us that the turnover has not stopped increasing since the adoption of the labels, especially the organic label. Given the additional benefits generated by the label, the cooperative continues its approach, and learns about new labels, namely the Halal label.

Market share:

The implementation of the labeling strategy for local products within the cooperative has the main objective of penetrating the international market and increasing its competitiveness on the said market. Indeed, for our case study, the labeling consists in differentiating the products of the cooperative, which have an announced quality corresponding to the expectations of the customers, from the other standards. It has embarked on a growing segment: organic.

The main role of adoption of a label by an organization lies in its ability to highlight the proper functioning of a market on a trust good ((Nelson, 1970) cited by (Arjaliès et al. 2013)). Thanks in particular to the label, the consumer can easily evaluate and ensure the quality of the trust goods that the cooperatives offer.

At the end of this adopted innovation, the cooperative was able to develop its client portfolio on a national and international scale, and consequently its market share continues to increase.

Brand equity:

According to Keller, brand equity is “the differential effect of brand awareness on consumer response to brand marketing” (Keller 1993). Indeed, it is a question of making the distinction, in the mind of the consumer, between a product marked by a label and another not marked. In the same vein, Larceneux (2004) asserts that the label is a means of reassurance, which directly influences the purchasing behavior of end customers. According to the same author: “label capital is defined as the set of associations and behaviors on the part of consumers of labeled products which gives a strong, sustained and differentiated advantage compared to unlabeled products” (Larceneux 2004).

For our case study, the adoption of the label was of great importance insofar as it is considered as an advertising option (Golan, Kuchler, and Mitchell 2000). Indeed, the label (rather credible sign) has a considerable capacity to influence consumer perceptions, which generally influences the intention and decision to purchase local products (Erdem and Swait 1998), as stated the director of the Ajddigue cooperative. The label plays a very important role in the perceived quality of the product, the uniqueness of the labeled product and in the esteem entrusted to the cooperative, as a producer of labeled products that are part of the fair trade approach. In the same vein, the director adds that the labels constitute important synthetic information of several dimensions of the quality of their goods which, from the consumer's point of view, is more credible than a simple commercial promise, what is called in Arabic “Iklima”. The labels adopted by the cooperative will also help to establish a positive image in the minds of consumers of environmental consideration, adds the manager. This reputation is based on the match between the values of consumers and those of producers: “the label promotes the esteem granted to the producer” claims the director of the cooperative.

Recommendations And Conclusion:-

The study of the impact of labels on commercial performance is a fundamental question for cooperatives who wonder about the commercial efficiency of labelling. However, the label makes it possible to identify the product and provide information allowing a synthesis of several dimensions of the quality of the product. The potential gains of labeling became achievable as soon as the cooperative, our case study, decided to bear the costs generated by the labeling process. The commercial performance of labeling is measured in terms of: selling price, turnover, profitability, market share and brand equity.

According to the study carried out with this cooperative, we have proposed certain actions:

1. Assistance from the authorities in order to properly control the costs generated by the labeling process;
2. Have the right to access bank credit to cover expenses;
3. Establish a marketing department responsible for promoting the cooperative and its offers nationally and internationally;
4. Promote the quality of argan oil to local consumers as well as on export markets
5. Organize training for sales staff to improve their skills
6. Organize internal training for female members to raise their awareness of the importance of hygiene compliance and to explain to them the foundations and principles of joining a label.
7. At the level of distribution, avoid long circuits as well as intermediaries in order to better control costs as well as to offer the product at a fair and equitable price.
8. On the communication level, make use of direct marketing as well as reinforce their presence and their participation in the various events: fairs and others, to cover varied and different targets.

The implementation of labeling within the cooperative has had positive effects on the promotion of argan oil and all other local products on a global scale. It is a tool for the development of the cooperative, its turnover, its market share and its profitability, while inking a favorable image in the minds of the consumer, ensuring the protection of his interests as well as than respect for his health, insofar as the specifications guarantee him traceability and the production of quality oil, meeting the standards.

However, the results of our study of the impact of labels on commercial performance seem to be limited. We will conduct a study on a larger sample of cooperatives, with the aim of generating more significant results.

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