

Quantitative Marketing Research Concerning the Opinion, Attitudes and Behavior of the Employed Population of Mures County on the Strategic Management of the Companies in which they Developed Activity

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Abstract

In the economic and social context of the last decade, the lack of information about the changes made in customer attitudes and behaviours or in the marketing actions of competitors may lead to increased vulnerability and even the failure of a company. That is why a good market knowledge is required from the perspective of consumer segments and the competitive environment, and such information becomes vital in the design and implementation process of effective marketing plans and strategies.

Therefore, to reduce the risks associated with decision-making approaches, companies must continually study their environment internally and on external, making it necessary to conduct marketing research.

The present research contains a qualitative questionnaire targeted to the opinion, attitudes and behaviour of the employed population of Mures County on the strategic management of the companies in which they developed activity.

Keywords: strategy, marketing research, analysis, managers, employees, opinions.

JEL classification: D70, L10, L20, M51

1. Introduction

Strategic management is a set of decisions and actions that underlie the foundation and implementation of a company's strategies and plans in order to achieve organizational goals. The need to integrate it into a business is determined by the managers' need to answer questions such as: "What is the position of the firm on the market?", "Where should it go?", and "What changes take place in the business environment and in what rhythm produced them?" "What measures should be taken to create necessary prerequisites for achieving the objectives and goals? "In this context, marketing research becomes indispensable, generating essential information for business decision makers.

Quantitative research has the role of defining and characterizing quantitatively, precisely, the relevant aspects identified by qualitative methods.

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In the field of strategic management applied at the level of an enterprise, they play an essential role in its analysis from the perspective of the three dimensions, namely: human, economic and organizational, generating vital information for optimizing the business and positioning the firm correctly within the market.

2. Research methodology

For the collection of data, the survey method was applied online using a questionnaire of 40 questions between November and December 2016. The reasons behind the decision to choose this method were mainly the low costs, relatively short time of response, ease in the collection and processing of primary data, and the possibility of answering a series of questions on issues more difficult to address, as a result of the lack of direct contact with the subjects.

3. Assumptions and objectives of marketing research

The assumptions underlying the design of quantitative research can be synthesized as follows:

A. General assumptions:

- Most employees consider that the goals of the firms are only formulated by their managers;
- Most of the occupied population in Mures County considers that until now, the companies in which they are operating undertook in a small extent to capitalize on market opportunities;
- Most employees appreciate the extent to which products / services offered by companies meet customer needs on a high level;
- Most employees consider that company policies and strategies are set in relation to the predictable trends of their environment (internally and externally).

B. Statistical assumptions; these are the result of transposing the aspects studied into a series of assumptions about the parameters of the population surveyed:

1. $H_0: \pi = 50\%$ [In a proportion of 50%, the companies from Mures County have taken measures to minimize the impact of threats (from the external environment) on the organization].

$H_1: \pi < 50\%$ [Less than 50% of the companies in Mures County have taken measures to minimize the impact of threats (from the external environment) on the organization].

2. $H_0: \pi = 50\%$ (In a proportion of 50%, the companies in Mures County practice a system of motivation of their own staff).

$H_1: \pi > 50\%$ (More than 50% of the companies in Mures County practice a motivation system for their own staff).

3. H0: The perception of the extent to which the company is concerned about creating a balanced portfolio of resource-generating activities necessary for business development does not depend on the gender of the subjects.

H1: The perception of the extent to which the company is concerned about creating a balanced portfolio of resource-generating activities that are necessary for business development depends on the gender of the subjects.

In terms of research objectives, these concerned:

- Employees opinions from Mures County regarding the economic dimension of the strategic management applied at the level of the company in which they operate;
- Attitudes and opinions of the employees in Mures County regarding the human dimension of the strategic management applied at the level of the company in which they operate;
- The opinions and behaviours of the employees in Mures County regarding the organizational dimension of the strategic management applied at the company level;
- Opinions of employees from Mures County regarding the overall activity of the company in which they operate;
- Characterization of the population surveyed.

4. The population studied and establishing the sample

In the demarches to determine the population surveyed, we took into consideration the group of persons relevant for this research, namely the employed population in Mures County, this being the sampling frame of the respondents, analysed from the perspective of their opinions, attitudes and behaviour regarding the strategic management of the companies in which they operate.

The size of the surveyed population is 225,500 persons employed (Mures County Department of Statistics, 2015), from which the sample was made, using the simple random sampling method (the non-return variant). Thus, starting from the number of employees of each company based in Mures County, 384 subjects were selected based on random computer generated numbers (Excel, Ran between function).

The representativeness of the sample is ensured by the sample size ($n = 384$), the sampling method that provides accurate results and provides significant advantages in terms of operations, but also for ensuring the accuracy of the results with a confidence level of 95%, the error being allowed of $\pm 5\%$.

5. The content and structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire contains 40 questions, formulated in close correlation with the research objectives. Correspondence between the questions of the questionnaire and the main and specific objectives of the research is presented in below table.

Table 1

Research objectives and questionnaire questions associated with them

The main objectives of the research	Questions in the questionnaire	Specific objectives of research
1. Employees opinions from Mures County regarding the economic dimension of the strategic management applied at the level of the company in which they operate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the organization relate to threats and opportunities specific to its external environment? <i>(questions 1-5)</i> 2. How periodically does the company's resources balance is made? <i>(question 6)</i> 3. To what extent is the company concerned about creating a balanced portfolio of resource-generating activities necessary for business development? <i>(question 7)</i> 4. What are the implications of the company's mission statement? <i>(questions 8 and 9)</i> 5. What are the implications of formulating the company's objectives? <i>(questions 10 and 11)</i> 6. What is the procedure for establishing the company's activities for the next period? <i>(questions 13 – 15)</i> 7. How policies and strategies are established and evaluated? <i>(questions 16 and 21)</i> 8. How action plans are established and evaluated at the company level? <i>(questions 17 – 20)</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determining how the organization relates to threats and opportunities specific to its external environment. 2. Determining the periodicity of achieving the company's resources balance. 3. Determining the extent to which the firm is concerned with creating a balanced portfolio of resource-generating activities to business development. 4. Identify the implications of the firm's mission statement. 5. Identifying the implications of the company's objectives formulation. 6. Establishing the stages and people involved in setting up the company's activities for the next period. 7. Determining how business policies and strategies are established and evaluated. 8. Determining how business action plans are established and evaluated.
2. Attitudes and opinions of the employees in Mures County regarding the human dimension of the strategic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent products / services offered by the company meet customer needs? <i>(question 12)</i> 2. To what extent is the company's management 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying the extent to which products / services offered by the company meet customer needs. 2. Determining the extent to which the company's management is

The main objectives of the research	Questions in the questionnaire	Specific objectives of research
management applied at the level of the company in which they operate	concerned with assessing the impact of the main categories of stakeholders? (<i>question 22</i>)	concerned with assessing the impact of the main categories of stakeholders.
3. The opinions and behaviors of the employees in Mures County regarding the organizational dimension of the strategic management applied at the company level	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How are coordinated activities within the company? (<i>question 23</i>) 2. How is the type of information system within the company? (<i>question 24</i>) 3. What is the level of employee participation in decision-making within the firm? (<i>question 25</i>) 4. In what consists the process of assessing the work of the company's staff? (<i>question 26</i>) 5. How is the staff motivated within the company? (<i>questions 27 and 28</i>) 6. What are the factors that influenced the decision of the respondents to engage in the company they are currently operating? (<i>question 29</i>) 7. To what extent the company's management has fulfilled its obligations towards employees when hiring them? (<i>question 30</i>) 8. What is the amount of salary that employees would be given in relation to the quality of the work they performed? (<i>question 31</i>) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determining how helps coordinate activities within the company. 2. Identifying the type of information system within the firm. 3. Determining the extent to which employees participate in decision-making within the firm. 4. Identifying how the firm's staff activity is being evaluated. 5. Identification of measures on company staff motivation. 6. Identifying the factors that influenced respondents' decision to engage in the company they are currently operating. 7. Determining the extent to which the management of the firm has fulfilled its obligations towards employees when hiring them. 8. Identifying the amount of salary the employees would be given them in relation to the quality of the work they performed.
4. Opinions of employees from Mures County regarding the overall activity of the company in which they operate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the main measures required to improve the company's activity? (<i>question 32</i>) 2. How will the company evolve over the next 5 years? (<i>question 33</i>) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying the main measures required to improve the company's activity. 2. Determining how the company will evolve over the next 5 years.
5. Characterization of the population surveyed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the main characteristics of respondents? (<i>questions 34 – 40</i>) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grouping respondents by sex, age, origin, net monthly income, last school graduated, current employment status in the company they operate.

As can be seen from the table above, the questionnaire contains simple questions in the first part, which have the role of accommodating the subject with the topic approached in the research. In the middle of the questionnaire are complex questions, interwoven with the easy ones to avoid the subjects' refusal to respond. Questions for identifying subjects were placed at the end of the questionnaire, allowing respondents to be characterized in relation to a number of socio-economic criteria.

6. Synthesis of quantitative marketing research results

The processing of the data obtained after the completion of the 384 questionnaires was done using the SPSS statistical program. Analysis and interpretation of the data took into account the main objectives of marketing research.

The characteristics of the sample are as follows:

- The percentage of male respondents is 57% and the share of female respondents is 43%;
- 17.4% of respondents are between 18-29 years, 27.1% are between 30-39 years old, 27.6% are between 40-49 years, and 27.9% have 50 years and over 50 years;
- 58.3% of respondents live in urban areas, while 41.7% live in rural areas;
- In terms of net monthly income, the highest weights correspond to the income categories between 1.001 - 1.500 lei, respectively between 1.501 - 2.000 lei;
- Most of the respondents graduated from a faculty (43.0%) and a master's degree (36.2%) and only a small percentage (2.1%) completed the studies of a vocational school;
- Regarding the occupational status of the respondents, 75.3% of them are employed full-time, indefinitely, 13.3% have a full-time but fixed-term contract. Relatively low weights of the interviewed subjects are employed on a part-time basis, for an indefinite period (6.8%), respectively for a fixed period;
- 53.6% of the respondents are employed, with an execution function (TESA), and 27.1% have a leading position.

6.1. Respondents' opinions on the economic dimension of strategic management applied at the level of the companies in Mures County

According to the interviewed employees, the main threats (from the external environment of the company) facing the organizations are the following: increase of competitors' power (42.4%), entry of new competitors (37.7%), The adoption of restrictive laws or normative acts with an unfavourable impact on the activity of the company (33.2%), the economic instability on national and / or

international level (30.9%), the profound fluctuations of the business environment (27, 2%).

Only 54.9% of the respondents indicated that, to date, measures have been taken to minimize the impact of threats (from the external environment) on the organization. Following the hypothesis testing related to this aspect, we accepted the research assumption that the percentage of firms in Mures County that have taken measures to minimize the impact of threats (from the external environment) on the organization is more than 50%, thus accepting H0.

Regarding the measures actually taken by the organizations in Mures County, they focused mainly on: increasing the customer portfolio, by expanding on new markets (57.7%), ensuring a high level of product quality, in order to reduce the effects of the presence of substitution on the market (46.5%), the identification of new suppliers with an optimal price-quality ratio for the firm (35.7%), the implementation of customer loyalty programs, in order to maintain the market share in the context of the emergence of new competitors (31.5%).

Regarding the opportunities (from the external environment of the company) that can be exploited by the organizations, the respondents indicated the following: the possibility of concluding alliances, agreements, etc. Advantageous for the company (45.8%), the existence on new markets of the demand for the existing products / services of the company (40.5%), the demand for new products / services on the existing or new markets (34.1%) , rapid market growth (28.0%), stagnation or regression of competing firms (13.8%).

Asked about the extent to which the organization has so far undertaken actions to capitalize on market opportunities, two-thirds of subjects have indicated values between 1 - to a very small extent and 3 - not to a small extent / to a large extent, respectively 33.3% opted for the variants: 4 - to a very large extent (19.2%) and 5 - to a very large extent (14.1%).

After testing the differences between environments, it was found that the assessment of the extent to which the organization has so far undertaken actions to capitalize on the market opportunities does not differ in relation to the gender of the respondents.

The results of the research also show that, according to the majority of the respondents, the evaluation of the firm's resources (financial, material, human) is carried out at least once a month or at least once every three months.

When asked about the extent to which the company is working to create a balanced portfolio of activities generating resources for business development, just over one third of respondents indicated an average level (3 - or little / no great extent), while With a quarter of them opting for the upper levels of the scale, namely: 4 - to a large extent, 5 to a very large extent.

Based on this hypothesis, we accepted the research hypothesis that the perception of the extent to which the firm is concerned with creating a balanced portfolio of resource-generating activities that are necessary for business development depends on the gender of respondents, thus accepting H0.

Of the surveyed employees, 61.7% do not know the mission of the company in which they operate, and a small percentage of 1.3% indicated that there is currently no declared mission of the organization. More than a quarter of respondents (26.8%) said the mission of the company they are working in is to deliver products and services at the highest quality standards.

According to interviewees, the mission statement was attended mainly by manager of the company (53.6%) and a team of key decision makers of the company (34.4%).

Regarding the main three objectives of the companies for the next year of activity, the following were distinguished: the increase of the company's profitability (28.1%), the development of the business (26.2%), the increase in the number of clients (21.3%).

In the formulation of the objectives, participated the manager (responded by 54% of the respondents) and the department / office / section directors (47.3% of the subjects indicated). A percentage of 20.4% of respondents opted for "all company employees".

Asked about the existence of the firm establishment procedure activities for the next period, 62% of subjects were offered an affirmative answer while 22.7% chose option "do not know".

Following analysis of χ^2 test, it was found that there are significant differences by age in the working population in terms of their view of the existence within the company that operates a procedure for establishing activities for the next period, but the link between the two variables is of low intensity.

Activities are generally set for less than a year, as indicated by 43.3% of those who answered yes to the previous question. Another significant percentage of employees opted for a period of 1 to 3 years. Only 10.1% mentioned a period longer than 5 years.

In determining the company's activities for the next period are mainly involved heads of departments / offices / departments (response indicated by 62.9% of respondents) and company manager (indicated by 52.4% of subjects). Foreign specialists (outside the company) also have an important role, 39.1% of whom are mentioned.

Of the interviewed employees, 46.9% expressed their agreement, namely 13.5% - the total agreement on the statement that "the company's policies and strategies are determined by their contribution to the achievement of the company's objectives." Also, 19% of the subjects are indifferent to the claim, the rest opting for "disagreement" (16.7%) and "total disagreement" (3.9%).

A percentage of 58.6% of respondents "agree" and 13.5% "in total agreement" with the statement "policies and strategies are set taking into account restrictions on resources (financial, material and human) available in the company ". Another 15.1% opted for the "indifferent" option, while 10.4% disagreed and 2.3% totally disagreed with the statement.

Processing of data relating to the alleged "policies and strategies are set against the likely trend in business environment (internal and external)" showed a rate of 62.8% of respondents who agree or 14.1% who expressed the total agreement. The insignificant percentages of the subjects (4.7% and 2.1%) disagree, respectively totally disagree, while 16.4% opted for the "indifferent" option.

Asked if so far action plans have been developed at the firm level, 63% of the respondents answered affirmatively and 22.2% indicated the "do not know".

Plans are being applied mainly by responsible department heads / offices / sections etc., but only for those specific activities of the departments, variant indicated by 48.5% of those who answered yes to the previous question. Another 30.7% opted for the answer "every single employee" and 20.7% - "the people who drew them up".

The main department involved in determining the financial resources necessary for implementation of action plans is financial - accounting, which is indicated by 75% of respondents. An important role is played by the marketing departments (45.8%), research - development (45.8%), commercial (41.7%), production (40.4%), human resources (32, 1%).

The research also highlighted the fact that at the level of the companies in Mures County, the control focuses on both partial and final results, as indicated by 64.1% of the subjects. A percentage of 24.5% of the respondents opted for the "final result" variant, 8.1% - "on the partial / intermediate outcomes", while 3.4% mentioned that no control of the results.

6.2. Attitudes and opinions of the respondents regarding the human dimension of the strategic management applied at the level of the companies in Mures County

According to the employees of Mures County, the degree to which the products / services of the companies meet the needs of the clients is high (45.3%) and very high (23.7%). A significant percentage of the respondents (23.4%) indicated the "neither low / high".

Regarding the extent to which the management of companies is concerned about the impact assessment of the main categories of stakeholders (suppliers, customers, competitors, unions, investors, local communities, professional associations, etc.) on their activity, 49.7% of the subjects appreciate it being raised. About a quarter of respondents (24.5%) opted for "neither low / high", and 18.8% - "very high".

6.3. Respondents' opinions and behaviour regarding the organizational dimension of strategic management applied at the level of the companies in Mures County

Analysing the coordination of activities within the companies in Mures County, it was found that this approach is based on formal rules and procedures, as well as informal rules, as indicated by more than half of the interviewed employees. One third of the subjects opted for the "using formal rules and procedures".

The company's informational system is mainly oral and written, as indicated by 65.9% of respondents, respectively based on written notes (20.6%) or only orally (13.5%).

In the opinion of 31.3% of the subjects, the level of employee participation in decision-making in the company is neither low nor high, 30.7% considering it high.

Deepening the analysis using the Kolmogorov - Smirnov test, it was noted that no significant differences between assessments subjects under 40 years and those of subjects aged 40 years and between assessments of women and men, on the level of employee participation in decision-making within the firm.

Regarding the process of evaluating the activity of the company's staff, 38% of respondents do not know what it is. Another percentage of 35.9% indicated the "assessment of achievements according to established objectives" and 13.8% opted for "periodical drawing up of activity reports".

Following the test of hypotheses related to this aspect, the null hypothesis (H₀) was accepted, thus guaranteeing with a 95% probability that the percentage of companies in Mures County that practice a motivation system for their own staff is not less than 50% .

The staff motivation system consists of: financial rewards according to performance (73.3% of respondents), access to a series of seminars or training courses (40.8% of respondents), verbal appreciation from the management (37.9% of respondents), optimal working conditions (35.0% of respondents), the possibility of involvement of the staff in the decision making of the company (24.2% of the respondents), various prizes (except for money) 20% of respondents.

Starting from the previously expressed views, the subjects were asked to order according to their importance the factors that depended on their decision to engage in the company they are currently operating. Thus, on the first position is the "occupied job", followed by job security, salary level, company training and improvement opportunities, firm's reputation, firm motivation system and third party recommendations (relatives, friends, employees of the company, etc.).

Asked about the extent to which the management of the firm fulfilled its engagement obligations, the subjects indicated 47.4% of the "largely" option, while 20.1% opted for "very much". However, there is also 24.1% of the respondents who have indicated the variation "neither in small nor in large measure".

Analysing the value of the salary that the respondents would give their selves in relation to the quality of the work done, it was noted that about a quarter of the subjects (24.2%) would want a remuneration of up to 2,000 lei, and another percentage 25.8% would opt for a salary ranging from 2,000 to 2,800 lei. In a ratio of 30.2%, the respondents indicated a value in the range of 2.801 - 4.000 lei, while 9.9% would allocate between 4.000 - 5.000 lei. Another 9.9% thinks that a salary is between 5.001 - 15.000 lei. To determine the statistical significance of the monthly net income level influence on the value of the salary that would give employees and in relation to quality of work was used analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results have shown that the current income of the subjects influences salary level desired by them.

6.4. Respondents' opinions on the overall activity of companies in Mures County

According to the respondents, the main measures required for improving the activity of the company in which they operate are: continuous training and improvement of the employees (56, 1%), improvement of the motivation system of the staff (53, 2%), efficiency of the communication between Departments (41.0%). These are followed by ensuring better working conditions (28.6%), respectively the direction of the company's management towards strategic planning (25.5%).

At the same time, those questioned about the evolution in the next 5 years of the company in which they are currently working, 45.6% of the subjects indicated a positive evolution, a significant percentage of the respondents (30.7%) mentioning that they cannot appreciate the evolution of the organization in the coming period. Another 4.9% of surveyed employees said the company would expand nationally and 4.7% indicated that the organization would stagnate at the current level.

7. Conclusions

Analysing companies from an organizational perspective, it was found that the coordination of activities is based on formal rules and procedures, but also informal rules. Also, the majority of the employees (65.9% of the respondents) specified that the informational system is mainly oral and written, and about 4 out of 10 employees (38%) do not know what the evaluation process is, another 35, 9% indicating that it is aimed at "assessing achievements according to the objectives set". Another conclusion is that most of the respondents have highlighted the existence of a staff motivation system, which consists mainly of: financial rewards according to performance, access to a series of seminars or training courses and verbal appraisals from the management of the firm. 47.4% of the interviewed employees appreciated that the company had fulfilled its commitments to employment to a large extent, 20.1% opted for "very much" and 24.1% for "neither in small nor in great measure ". Analysing the value of the salary that employees would provide in relation to the quality of the work performed, it was found that the majority would want a significantly higher remuneration than the current one.

Another key issue is the lack of a managerial model of decision-making and strategic action for most companies, although the positive consequences of implementing such a model on the performance of an organization are known. Corroborating the lack of this model with the employee's assessments of the company's current 5-year evolution in which it currently works justifies 30.7% of employees who cannot appreciate the organization's evolution in the next period, but also the percentage of those who believe that the company will stagnate at the current level (4.7% of subjects) and will have a negative trend (2.6% of subjects).

At the same time, the employees propose a series of measures necessary to improve the activity of the company in which they work, namely: continuous training and improvement of the employees (56.1% of the subjects); Improving the motivation system of the staff (53.2% of the subjects); Streamlining communication between departments (41.0% of subjects); Providing better working conditions (28.6% of subjects); Company management orientation towards strategic planning (25.5% of subjects).

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