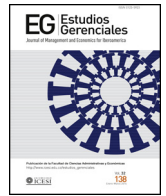




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Article

Evaluation of the perception and application of social responsibility practices in micro, small and medium companies in Barranquilla. An analysis from the theory of Stakeholders

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the degree of comprehension and enforcement of social responsibility (SR) practices in micro, small and medium companies in Barranquilla (Colombia), based on the Stakeholders theory. Using an exploratory factor analysis on 779 companies it was found that the variables with a stronger explanatory influence for socially responsible performance are employees, environment, and community. By contrast, corporate management, value chain, and government/public sector condition the development of SR actions. Particularly, there is a weak perception and lack of will among owners and company managers to undertake comprehensive programs of social responsibility, as well as the formalization of those actions with an impact on the SR.

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Evaluación de la percepción y aplicación de prácticas de responsabilidad social en micro, pequeñas y medianas empresas de Barranquilla. Un análisis desde la teoría de los grupos de interés

RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo es evaluar el grado de percepción y aplicación de prácticas de responsabilidad social (RS) en las micro, pequeñas y medianas empresas de la ciudad de Barranquilla (Colombia), siguiendo la teoría de los Stakeholders. Utilizando un análisis factorial exploratorio en 779 empresas se encontró que las variables con mayor influencia explicativa del desempeño socialmente responsable son empleados, medio ambiente y comunidad. En contraste, dirección corporativa, cadena de valor y gobierno/sector público condicionan el desarrollo de acciones de RS. Particularmente, se encuentra una débil percepción y falta de voluntad entre propietarios y directivas de las empresas para emprender programas integrales de responsabilidad social, así como la formalización de aquellas acciones con incidencia en la RS.

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Avaliação da percepção e aplicação de práticas de responsabilidade social em micro empresas, pequenas e médias empresas em Barranquilla. Uma análise desde a teoria dos grupos de interesse

R E S U M O

O objetivo deste artigo é avaliar o grau de percepção e aplicação das práticas de responsabilidade social nas micro empresas, pequenas e médias empresas da cidade de Barranquilla (Colômbia), seguindo a teoria dos Stakeholders (grupos de interesse). Usando uma análise de fatores exploratórios em 779 empresas, verificou-se que as variáveis com maior influência explicativa do desempenho socialmente responsável são os empregados, o meio ambiente e a comunidade. Em contrapartida, o gerenciamento corporativo, a cadeia de valor e o governo/setor público condicionam o desenvolvimento de ações de responsabilidade social. Particularmente, há uma fraca percepção e falta de vontade entre os proprietários e os gerentes das empresas para realizar programas integrados de responsabilidade social, bem como a formalização das ações que influenciam a responsabilidade social.

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1. Introduction

Despite growing recognition on the importance of implementing social responsibility (SR) practices in enterprises, investigations on the subject in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in developing countries are sparse and less visible (Von & Melé, 2009). Most of the current literature is focused on developed countries, and mainly on large enterprises (Ma, 2012). However, the concern and relevance placed on studying the social scope on smaller enterprises in both developed and developing countries is concentrating more attention in SR specialized literature (Ma, 2012; Welford, 2005).

Globally, the volume of MSMEs¹ and their contribution to economic growth, employment generation and enterprise participation amounts to 33% of GDP, 45% of total employment, and around 90% of the business fabric (Bell, 2015). This economic leadership has awoken a larger interest amongst the academic community, multilateral institutions, business associations, government and society, because of the social implications that these enterprises might have on their social environment. Thus, there are more investigations with different approaches and methods exploring the enforcement of SR practices in MSMEs in developed and developing countries (Adapa & Rindfleisch, 2013; Coppa & Sriramesh, 2013; Demuijnck & Ngnodjom, 2013; Hsu & Cheng, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Russo & Tencati, 2009).

In the context of developing countries, distinctive, fragmented, and ambiguous results (Linh, 2011) characterize research on SR in MSMEs (Jamali, Lund-Thomsen, & Jeppesen, 2015). The restriction of financial resources, commercial priorities, skepticism over the benefits of responsible practices, informal means of communication, centralized power, lack of knowledge about SR amongst directive, constitute some of the causes for the scarce interest in their research (Lepoutre & Heene, 2006; Vásquez & López, 2013; Vives, Corral, & Isusi, 2005).

In the case of Colombia, the limited research on SR in MSMEs has a descriptive reach, similar to studies executed in other developing countries, in which qualitative research of SR is predominant (Lockett, Moon, & Visser, 2006). In particular, Aya and Sriramesh (2014) have carried out a qualitative research on the perception and

practices of RS (Responsabilidad Social) on a sample of Colombian MSMEs and have found in their informal practices, the culture and context that surrounds the genesis of the internal and external SR. Additionally, Sierra and Londoño (2008) propose a theoretic analysis on SR and MSMEs and suggest incorporating socially responsible practices to the traditional entrepreneurial schemes as a strategy that could contribute substantial benefits to enterprises and their Stakeholders. Both studies limit their scope to the descriptive analysis of their results, ratifying the need for literature to advance research that quantify and evaluate socially responsible practices (Gallardo, Sánchez, & Corchuelo, 2013).

In other papers in the same context, León, Castán, and Afcha (2015) found little evidence for the practices of SR, informality and a little relation to the management of business activities in the case of the MSMEs of Sincelejo (Colombia). Likewise, they show a direct relationship between the size of firms and compliance with SR practices, with lower standards for micro and small companies compared to medium-sized companies. In general, several authors acknowledge in the MSMEs of Colombia the distinctive and informal application of SR practices, with shortcomings in the internal and external communication of their SR actions and without any strategic focus (Duque, García, & Azuero, 2014; García, Azuero, & Salas, 2013; Sanclemente, 2015).

In that sense, the purpose of this paper is to contribute to the empirical literature available on the research of SR on MSMEs,² drawing from the measuring of SR practices in the smaller enterprises of the city of Barranquilla.³

In particular, Barranquilla's microenterprises represent the largest sector of the city's businesses at 87.70%; besides, they contribute 23% to the local GDP, a corporate net investment of 30.2%, the stock of registered enterprises is 63%, the employment

² In Colombia, the 905 law from 2004 classifies MSMEs based on their number of employees and on their assets. In terms of the number of employees, microenterprises are those with 10 employees or less, small enterprises have between 11 and 50 employees, and medium enterprises between 51 and 200 employees. According to data from the Confederación Colombiana de Cámaras de Comercio (Confecámaras), in 2015 Colombia had 1372.923 MSMEs, out of which 1273.017 (92.72%) are micro enterprises, 79,926 (5.82%) are small enterprises and 19,980 (1.46%) are medium enterprises.

³ Barranquilla is the city with the highest rate of entrepreneurial activity in the Caribbean Region of Colombia and fifth in the country, according to the "Región Caribe 2012–2013" report from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM). It contributes with the 4.3% of the National GDP and as of June 2016, it has 41,274 MSMEs enrolled in the Cámara de Comercio de Barranquilla. Nationally, it is the fourth city with the largest amount of MSMEs. The city has a population of 1,386,865 habitants and is considered the most important city of the region.

¹ The paper "Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises. Around the World: How Many Are There, and What Affects the Count?" by the World Bank, reveals the existence of 125 millions of formal MSMEs throughout 132 economies in the world; of which, 89 millions exist in developing countries. There are around 31 MSMEs for every 1000 habitants.

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