

USING Q-METHODOLOGY TO DISCOVER AND CAPTURE STAKEHOLDER SUBJECTIVITY

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes Q methodology, a research methodology used to measure a person's communication of their points of view, as a method to identify stakeholder groups while consecutively capturing value proposition subjectivity. The subjectivity of licensed companies of Essential Costa Rica, the Costarrican country brand, was collected by asking them how the country brand has added value to their company. The analysis of factors reveals groups of stakeholders with different sets of opinion. Essential Costa Rica was able to capture important insights from understanding the stakeholder groups and their subjectivity.

INTRODUCTION

Capturing the correct value proposition is key for the development of effective strategies. "The core of any business strategy is the customer value proposition[...]" (Kaplan & Norton, 2000). An effective organizational strategy creates a unique value position (Porter, 1996). Following the concepts of Service Dominant Logic, where value is co-created by collaborating and learning with the consumer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and involved stakeholders (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), to effectively understand what drives value to customers or stakeholders, these should be involved in the process.

Managers have access to frameworks that structure the strategy development process like the Balance Scorecard, Strategy Maps, and Hoshin Kanri. These frameworks have been adapted to receive feedback from stakeholders. Take for example Hoshin Kanri, a top down 7 step strategy development process that has been modified by companies like XEROX and HP to allow for negotiation of the company goals throughout the organization. (Erskine, 2011). Others have proposed using system dynamics to better integrate external actors and integrating the internal organization with the Balance Scorecard (Akkermans & Van Oorschot, 2002). There seems to be a need for the involvement of Stakeholders in strategy development.

Essential Costa Rica is a country brand with "a strategy to position and capitalize on the image of a country on the international market" (Essential, 2019). Companies that want to associate themselves with the country's brand values can acquire a brand license. Essential Costa Rica

licensees' companies as a method to guarantee that the companies that use the country brand represent their values. To provide this guarantee, the country brand has a licensing protocol with a set of guidelines and quality standards. The country brand seeks to internationally promote tourism, exports, and foreign direct investment, by promoting the brand's values. Using Q Methodology, his study collects and analyses the subjectivity of licensed companies to identify stakeholder groups with similar subjective views by asking them how the country brand has added value to their company to acquire input for strategy development.

We propose Q methodology as a means to generate these insights. This is not a replacement to the frameworks previously listed. It is an input to the strategy generation process as a method to identify and collect valuable insights from the organization's stakeholders.

Q METHODOLOGY

Q-Methodology is a quantitative and qualitative research methodology used to measure a person's communication of their points of view (McKeown, 2013). It begins with an issue domain composed of the population of subjective opinions about a research question being studied. This is called the *concourse* and is composed of opinions that can be collected through interviews or other existing sources. The *concourse* is sampled to generate the *Q-Sample*, an approximation of the full commentary available on the research topic (McKeown, 2013).

The persons are selected as they have relevant opinions towards the tested subject (McKeown, 2013). Q-Methodology is a research method where small *P-Sets* are significant (Sandbrook CG, 2013). *P-Sets* of 30 to 50 participants are recommended for studies seeking to determine a range of viewpoints (McKeown, 2013).

The participants then operationalize their subjectivity through a *Q-Sort* (McKeown, 2013). The *Q-sort* is a medium that participants use to rank order the *Q-Sample* according to a condition of instruction responding to a research question. In this study, the condition of instruction ranged from ("It added the least amount of value" to "It added most amount of value").

Q-Sorts are then collected and analyzed by intercorrelating them (McKeown, 2013). Techniques like Principal Component Analysis or Iterated Factor Analysis is used to determine patterns possible patterns in the data. These patterns form factors that group the clusters of opinion. The full analytical process is explained in (McKeown, 2013).

The factor interpretation consists on identifying the consensual meaning in the factor's subjectivity. Rather than interpreting the factors individually, the analysis should be done understanding the contextual meaning of the factor, analyzing patterns and relations between the statements that compose the factors (McKeown, 2013).

METHODS

The Essential CR study was semi virtual, the study dynamics were introduced on site, and the studied individuals were able to interact and ask questions to the researchers during this event. The Essential CR Q-Set was constructed from a concourse fed from a focus group and open-ended questionnaire with individuals who were also present in the group that composed the P-Sample. The statements were relatable to the individuals.

The selection of individuals was done from a group that participated actively in a conference with the objective to present and discuss the place brand strategy. These were individuals who were actively engaged with the brand. The explanation of the study was done on-site, and the participants received a video explanation of and had access to help mechanisms while completing the study.

CONCOURSE AND Q-SET

The concourse was developed by exploring natural sources through focus groups and open ended interviews (McKeown, 2013). The focus group protocol was developed using the value proposition canvas (Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda, Smith, & Papadacos, 2014). This tool seeks to identify the problems or wishes that are addressed with a product or service and determine if they match the expectations of the customers. In the case that there is no coincidence, the tool provides information to analyze and redesign the products and services to meet the needs of customers. Two focus groups were carried out and in which representatives of 16 licensees' companies participated.

As a starting point, there is a need to understand the needs and expectations of the licensees of the country brand. In that sense, the first set of questions seeks to understand customers:

1. Why did you decide to "acquire" the country brand?

2. What needs of your company did you expect to meet or complement by having the country brand?
3. What are the main benefits you expected the brand to provide?
4. Have expectations been met?
5. What benefits have you achieved that you did not expect to get at the beginning of the process?

The second stage consists in identifying the pain points, that is, those problems that affect the process of internationalization of the company for which guide questions such as the following were used:

1. What problems does the company face to achieve greater internationalization?
2. If I had to select a problem that if solved would have a real short-term impact, what would it be?
3. How should this problem be addressed by PROCOMER¹? What resources are necessary?

The third phase consists of identifying activities that can generate value to the licensee:

1. What are the activities that you consider necessary to execute the country brand?
2. What goals (in internationalization) has the company set and how can the country brand contribute to achieving them?
3. What other people should we consider so that we can discuss these issues?

The study was conducted in Spanish and the statements were translated for this article. Appendix 1 shows the translated statement with categories listed for each statement. The Spanish idiomatic meaning might not translate fully into English. The original Spanish statements are referenced in Appendix 2.

¹ A governmental institution in charge of promoting the exportation of Costarrican goods and services throughout the world. Additionally, it is devoted to simplify and facilitate the exportation procedures, generate exportation chains, register exportation statistics of goods, and perform market studies. (PROCOMER, 2019)

P-SET

The P-Set is composed of individuals that work for licensed companies of the country brand. These individuals were interested in the studied subject as they all were participants of a country brand conference to present and discuss the future of the brand. The studied individuals that form the P-Set represent work for companies with different characteristics across the Costarrican territory.

DATA COLLECTION

The methodology was introduced on site to all attending participants, and an email was sent, with video and written explanation of how to conduct the online study. 47 individuals completed the Q-set.

The collection mechanism used was an online Q-Set data collection tool. Licensees interacted with the tool to order the statements, and their answers were collected and stored online.

There was an initial ordering stage, where participants dragged and dropped the statements into three separate boxes (it added the least amount of value, neutral, it added the most amount of value). An illustration of this initial ordering is shown on Figure 1. The second stage consisted of rank ordering the statements in a matrix. The participants use the preordered statements to aid on the rank ordering of the statements in the Q-Sort. An illustration of the final stage is shown on figure 2.

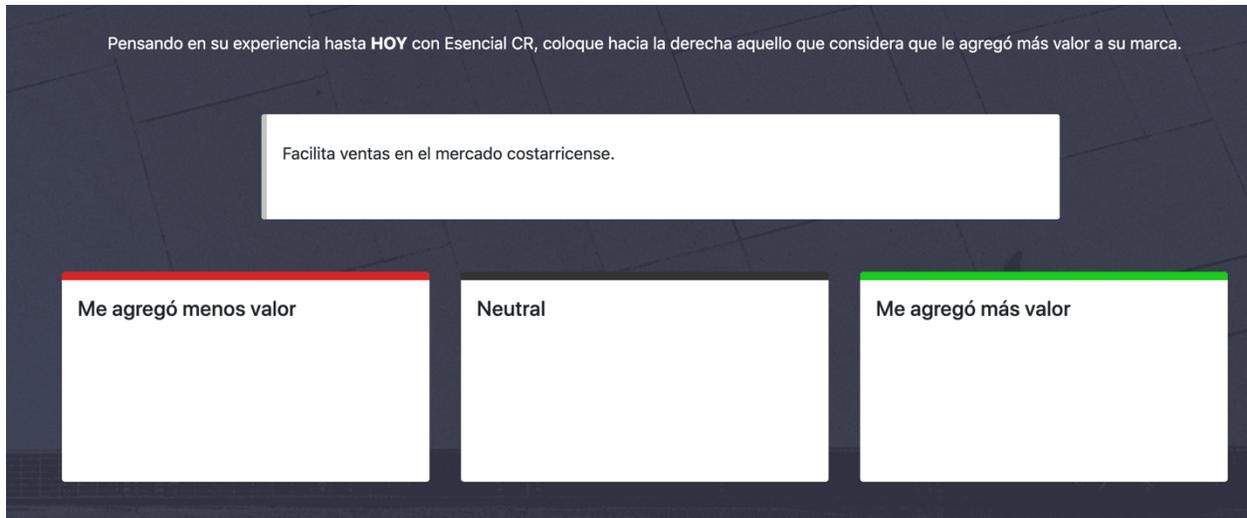


FIGURE 1 INITIAL ORDERING STAGE

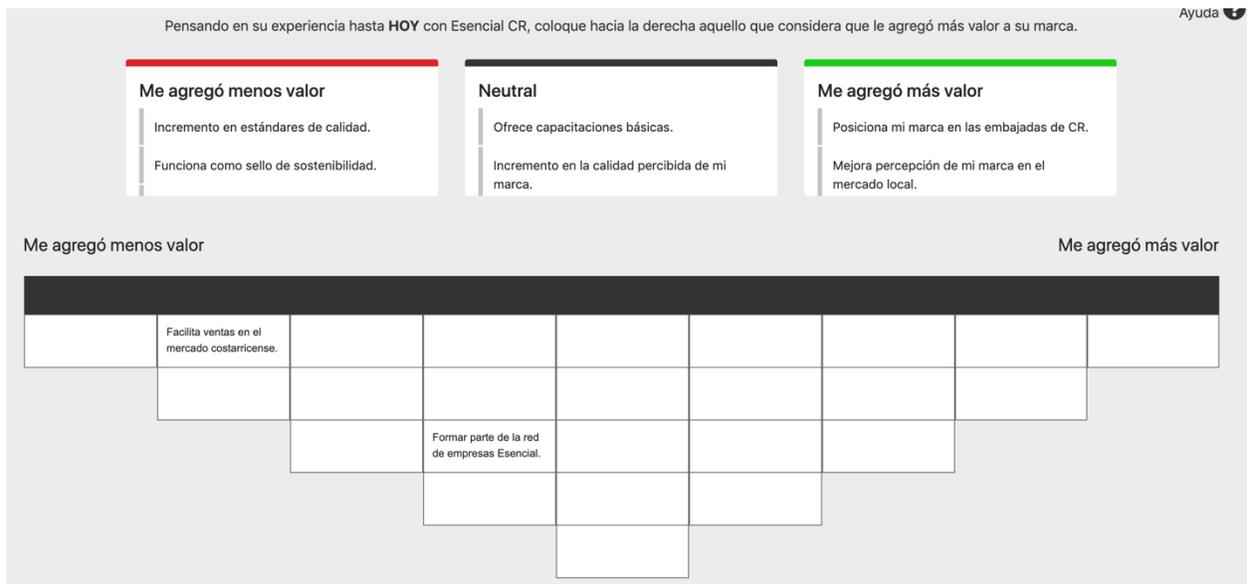


FIGURE 2: Q-SORT

ANALYSIS

The Q sort data was analyzed using Pfactor, a Stata command that performs factor analysis of Q-sorts. (Akhtar-Danesh, 2018a). Iterated principal axes was used for factor analysis and Varimax as a rotation technique (Akhtar-Danesh, 2017). The number of factors was selected by performing a Horn’s test and iterated selection of factors to find interpretable statistically significant solutions (Donner, 2001). For statistical rigor, a Horn’s parallel analysis was used for evaluating the factors to use in the analysis. (Horn, 1965). The results are referenced in Appendix 3.

The selection of factor scores was calculated using Brown’s formula (Brown, 1980). This formula calculates the differences between z-scores. Scores with a difference greater than the cutoff value are considered distinguishing statements. The differences between factor scores for each statement were assessed using Cohen’s effect size (Akhtar-Danesh, 2018b)

Factors of distinguishing statements are identified. Sometimes, these distinctions are diametrically opposite for the same factor. This phenomenon is called bipolarity and was present in this study, where a single factor has both positive and negative significant loadings(Watts & Stenner, 2005).

A Fisher Exact Test was used to determine if there were non-random associations between variables. The demographic binary variables [1 for yes; 0 for no] are the following. A company with these characteristics will be referred by the variable name throughout the paper.

Variable	Description
[exp<25%]	Company that 25% of revenue is derived from exports
[Service]	Service Company
[Large]	Large Company
[GMA]	Company in the Costarrican Great Metropolitan Area

RESULTS

The Horn’s Parallel Analysis identified a total of two significant factors as shown in Appendix 3. A three-factor solution composed of two factors plus one with bipolarity was the adopted solution. Bipolarity was identified in Factor 2 and it was split into Factor 2A and Factor 2B.

FACTOR 1: ESSENTIAL COSTA RICA IMPROVES MY SERVICE

Factor 1 there is a high concentration of [Service] (p<0.05 Fisher’s exact test) as referenced in the statistical tests in Appendix 4. The factor is defined by individuals that believe that Essential Costa Rica adds value through the improvement of quality standards. This is a group of people that have seen value in the betterment of brand perception and see value in forming part of a network that helps improve the image of the company. Below are the statements that Factor 1 believed added the most value (+4, +3).

22. Improvement of quality standards. (+4)

- 16. To get close to PROCOMER. (+3)
- 21. Seal recognition in the Costarrican market. (+3)

On the other hand, they see little less value on sales related customer management aspects of the brand. Below are the statements that Factor 1 believed added the least value (-4, -3).

- 11. Facilitates sales in the Central American market. (-3)
- 25. Facilitates sales in the Costarrican market. (-3)
- 12. Facilitates sales outside the Central American market. (-4)

The statements that Factor 1 sorted as the least value added are all distinguishing statements. This is a group of individuals that believe that image improvement and association add value, and sales facilitation has added the least amount of value. For a list of all statements, their loading and distinguishing status reference Appendix 5.

TABLE 1: DISTINGUISHING STATEMENTS FOR FACTOR 1

Id.	statement	F_1	F_2a	F_2b
16	To get close to PROCOMER.	3	0	-3
17	Form part of Essential’s business network.	2	0	-2
1	Access to free commercial information.	0	-2	-2
9	International fair discounts.	0	-4	-2
3	Promotes collaborative innovation processes.	0	-1	-1
15	To get close to governmental associations.	-1	-2	-3
25	Facilitates sales in the Costarrican market.	-3	3	3
11	Facilitates sales in the central American market.	-3	-1	2
12	Facilitates sales outside the central American market.	-4	-1	1

FACTOR 2: ADDS BALUE TO MY COMPANY THROUGH LOCAL PERCEPTION OF QUALITY

Factor 2 believes that the Essential CR generally improves quality standards and perception, and that it works in facilitating sales in the local market. Factor 2 is bipolar, divided into Factors 2A and 2B. The individuals agree that the Essential CR has added value through customer management, specifically statements 23 and 25, The improvement of the quality perception **(4, 3)** of the brand and facilitation of sales in Costa Rica **(3, 3)**. Factor 2A and 2B agree that Essential CR does not add value through international fair discounts **(-4, -2)** and that this is not a tool to get close to governmental associations **(-2, -3)**.

After splitting the factor, factor 2 was distinguishingly positive on statements (19, and 16) both identity and associativity statements respectively, and distinguishingly negative on statements (11, and 12), both customer management statements. Factor 2B loaded distinguishingly positive on factors (11, and 12), both customer management statements, and distinguishingly negative on factors (16 and 2), both associativity and operative capacity statements respectively.

FACTOR 2A... AND LOCALS VALUE IT

Factor 2A is explained by **[Service]** ($p < 0.05$ Fisher's Exact Test), and **[exp<25%]** ($p < 0.001$ Fisher's Exact Test). The statistical tests are referenced in Appendix 4. 2A believes that Essential Costa Rica added the most value through the improvement of local sales and local quality perception, with the improvement of the perception of the brand in the local market being a distinguishing statement of its own **(+4, +3)**.

23. Improvement of quality perception of my brand. **(4)**

25. Facilitates sales in the Costarrican market. **(3)**

19. It improves the perception of my brand in the local market. **(3)**

2A loads negatively on associativity and operative capacity statements. The negative factors are related to exports and a collateral benefit.

20. It positions my brand in Costarrican embassies. **(-3)**

8. Requisite recognition with other seals. **(-3)**

9. International fair discounts. **(-4)**

FACTOR 2B... AND ACTUAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

The group is composed by only three individuals. given that the group was formed by only 3 people, this is not a statistically significant inference even with statistical tests that allow for small samples. This group coincides with two of the top three statement with 2A. The group that compose this factor believes that the Essential CR has added value through actual improvements in quality standards. This factor is also distinguished positively by the view that Essential CR adds value through the facilitation of sales in and outside the Central American Market (+4, +3).

- 22. Improvement of quality standards. (4)
- 23. Improvement of quality perception of my brand. (3)
- 25. Facilitates sales in the Costarrican market. (3)

On the negative factors on the other hand is where the sorters show some differences. The individuals that compose this factor believe that the least amount of value added was on getting close to governmental associations. This group is distinguished by the belief that least value added to the brand was in getting close to PROCOMER and the aid on received in commercial processes (-4, -3).

- 16. To get close to PROCOMER. (-3)
- 15. To get close to governmental associations. (-3)
- 2. Walks alongside you on commercial processes. (-4)

CONSENSUS STATEMENTS

The consensus table reflects the statements that reflected some level of consensus. There seems to be a concensus that the brand's efforts to improve quality standards through its licensing program was perceived as a valuable activity by the licensees. There seems to be little consensus with the less value-added statements.

Id.	statement	F_1	F_2A	F_2B
22	Improvement of quality standards.	4	2	4

13	Works like a sustainability seal.	1	2	2
5	Association of my brand with social responsibility.	2	1	2
6	Association with Essential's values, which are important for my client.	0	1	1
4	Association of my brand with environmental responsibility.	1	2	1
21	Seal recognition in the Costarrican market.	3	1	1
10	Distinction of origin.	-1	0	0
7	Association of my brand with Tico talent.	0	0	-1

DISCUSSION

The factors from stakeholders grouped by subjectivity and, in some cases, explained by demographic characteristics. Factor 1 believes that Essential Costa Rica has added value to their service by quality improvements, associating with an entity that aids the company with exports and recognition in the local market. Moreover, this group does not perceive value in sales facilitation. This group also perceives value by forming part of Essential's network, this provides them with important benefits, like access to commercial information and other collateral benefits due to association.

Factor 2 is locally oriented and see little value on internationalization related statements. The factor is divided by bipolarity. Factor 2B seems to be composed of companies that seem to believe that they are a far node on the network. The least value added was perceived in the form of Associativity and Operational Capacity statements that shed light that this group feels left out.

Some of the statements that were perceived as the ones that generated the most value were not statements that Essential Costa Rica externalizes to the international brand customers, like statements "To get close to PROCOMER". Moreover, several statements that were fed from the focus groups were focused on the local market, an valuable insight for the country brand organization considering that the target brand customers of the country brand are international.

With Q methodology, Essential Costa Rica was able to identify stakeholder groups with valuable input to generate a value proposition for the brand licensees. Essential Costa Rica was able to

capture important insights, like the value placed towards the local market, a market not contemplated as a brand customer by the country brand. These insights are valuable inputs for the generation of the organization's strategy. This research opens interesting questions on the field of place branding. If place branding customers are external to the place, how should internally focused stakeholders be managed? How should contrasting perceptions of value by different brand dimensions be managed? Implementing Q methodology enabled the identification and understanding of stakeholder needs and shed light to interesting research possibilities.

APPENDIX 1: ENGLISH STATEMENTS

Id.	Category	English Statement
1	Operative Capacity	Access to free commercial information.
2	Operative Capacity	Walks alongside you on commercial processes.
3	Operative Capacity	Promotes collaborative innovation processes.
9	Operative Capacity	International fair discounts.
18	Operative Capacity	It offers specialized training.
22	Operative Capacity	Improvement of quality standards.
24	Operative Capacity	Its offer of basic training.
4	Identity	Association of my brand with environmental responsibility.
5	Identity	Association of my brand with social responsibility.
7	Identity	Association of my brand with Tico ² talent.
10	Identity	Distinction of origin.
19	Identity	It improves the perception of my brand in the local market.

² Tico is slang for Costarrican. The slang was conserved as the statements should be in natural language (McKeown, 2013)

21	Identity	Seal recognition in the Costarrican market.
6	Customer Management	Association with Essential's values, which are important for my client.
11	Customer Management	Facilitates sales in the Central American market.
12	Customer Management	Facilitates sales outside the Central American market.
14	Customer Management	Works like a business card.
23	Customer Management	improvement of quality perception of my brand.
25	Customer Management	Facilitates sales in the Costarrican market.
8	Associativity	Requisite recognition with other seals.
13	Associativity	Works like a sustainability seal.
15	Associativity	To get close to governmental associations.
16	Associativity	To get close to PROCOMER.
17	Associativity	Form part of Essential's business network.
20	Associativity	It positions my brand in Costarrican embassies.

APPENDIX 2: SPANISH TO ENGLISH TRANSLATION

English Statement	Spanish Statement
Access to free commercial information.	Acceso gratis a información comercial.
Walks alongside you on commercial processes.	Acompaña en procesos comerciales.
Promotes collaborative innovation processes.	Fomento de procesos de innovación colaborativa.
International fair discounts.	Descuentos en ferias internacionales.
It offers specialized training.	Ofrece capacitaciones especializadas.
Improvement of quality standards.	Incremento en estándares de calidad.

Its offer of basic training.	Oferta de capacitaciones básicas.
Association of my brand with environmental responsibility.	Asociación de mi marca con la responsabilidad ambiental.
Association of my brand with social responsibility.	Asociación de mi marca con la responsabilidad social.
Association of my brand with Tico talent.	Asociación de mi marca al talento tico.
Distinction of origin.	Distinción de origen.
It improves the perception of my brand in the local market.	Mejora percepción de mi marca en el mercado local.
Seal recognition in the Costarrican market.	Reconocimiento del sello en el mercado tico.
Association with Essential's values, which are important for my client.	Asociación con valores de Esencial, que son importantes para mi cliente.
Facilitates sales in the Central American market.	Facilita ventas en el mercado centroamericano.
Facilitates sales outside the Central American market.	Facilita ventas en el mercado fuera de Centroamérica.
Works like a business card.	Funciona como una tarjeta de presentación.
improvement of quality perception of my brand.	Incremento en la calidad percibida de mi marca.
Facilitates sales in the Costarrican market.	Facilita ventas en el mercado costarricense.
Requisite recognition with other seals.	Convalida requisitos con otros sellos
Works like a sustainability seal.	Funciona como sello de sostenibilidad.
To get close to governmental associations.	Acercamiento a organizaciones gubernamentales.
To get close to PROCOMER.	Acercamiento a PROCOMER.
Form part of Essential's business network.	Formar parte de la red de empresas Esencial.
It positions my brand in Costarrican embassies.	Posiciona mi marca en las embajadas de CR.

APPENDIX 3: HORN'S PARALLEL ANALYSIS

Component or Factor	Adjusted Eigenvalue	Unadjusted Eigenvalue	Estimated Bias
1	4.0636846	9.2082335	5.1445489
2	1.6136953	5.8591296	4.2454343
3	0.13552739	3.8321531	3.6966257
4	0.13031439	3.7476371	3.6173227
5	0.04447476	3.3441202	3.2996454
6	-0.0401799	3.1344798	3.1746597
7	-0.4149172	2.4095566	2.8244739
8	-0.4011822	2.1402327	2.541415
9	-0.4210802	1.7863871	2.2074673
10	-0.5159069	1.6372863	2.1531932

APPENDIX 4: FISHER'S EXACT TESTS

exp 25

Factor	0	1	Total
0	11	4	15
1	8	9	17
2	0	12	12
3	2	1	3
Total	21	26	47

Fisher's exact = 0.000

Large

Factor	0	1	Total
0	6	9	15
1	10	7	17
2	7	5	12
3	3	0	3
Total	26	21	47

Fisher's exact = 0.316

Services

Factor	0	1	Total
0	15	0	15
1	10	7	17
2	7	5	12
3	2	1	3
Total	34	13	47

Fisher's exact = 0.012

GMA

Factor	0	1	Total
0	8	7	15
1	4	13	17
2	2	10	12
3	1	2	3
Total	34	13	47

Fisher's exact = 0.185

APPENDIX 5: STATEMENTS AND FACTORS

StatNo	Statement	Class	zscore1	Factor 1	Dist	zscore2	Factor 2a	Dist 2a	zscore2b	Factor 2b	Consensus
1	Access to free commercial information.	Operative Capacity	0.073	0 *		-0.914	-2		-1.21	-2	
2	Walks alongside you on commercial processes.	Operative Capacity	-0.416	-1		-0.871	-2		-1.79	-4 *	
3	Promotes collaborative innovation processes.	Operative Capacity	0.121	0 *		-0.864	-1		-0.701	-1	
4	Association of my brand with environmental responsibility.	Identity	0.792	1		0.706	2		0.471	1 *	
5	Association of my brand with social responsibility.	Identity	0.916	2		0.291	1		0.592	2 *	
6	Association with Essential's values, which are important for my client	Customer Management	0.383	0		0.65	1		0.432	1 *	
7	Association of my brand with Tico talent.	Identity	5.50E-03	0		0.198	0		-0.243	-1 *	
8	Requisite recognition with other seals.	Associativity	-0.638	-2		-1.14	-3		-0.256	-1	
9	International fair discounts.	Operative Capacity	0.251	0 *		-1.15	-4		-1.25	-2	
10	Distinction of origin.	Identity	-0.161	-1		-3.60E-03	0		1.30E-09	0 *	
11	Facilitates sales in the Central American market.	Customer Management	-2.01	-3 *		-0.838	-1 *		0.755	2 *	
12	Facilitates sales outside the Central American market.	Customer Management	-2.36	-4 *		-0.678	-1 *		0.432	1 *	
13	Works like a sustainability seal.	Associativity	0.474	1		0.844	2		0.646	2 *	
14	Works like a business card.	Customer Management	0.521	1		0.538	1		-0.364	-1 *	
15	To get close to governmental associations.	Associativity	-0.191	-1 *		-1.1	-2		-1.32	-3	
16	To get close to PROCOMER.	Associativity	1.25	3 *		-0.415	0 *		-1.6	-3 *	
17	Form part of Essential's business network.	Associativity	0.905	2 *		-0.509	0		-1.04	-2	
18	It offers specialized training.	Operative Capacity	-0.622	-2		-0.569	-1		0.202	0	
19	It improves the perception of my brand in the local market.	Identity	0.845	2		1.69	3 *		0.337	0	
20	It positions my brand in Costa Rican embassies.	Associativity	-0.579	-1		-1.15	-3		0.337	0 *	
21	Seal recognition in the Costa Rican market.	Identity	1.08	3		0.641	1		0.538	1 *	
22	Improvement of quality standards.	Operative Capacity	1.32	4		1.19	2		1.94	4 *	
23	Improvement of quality perception of my brand.	Customer Management	0.828	1		2.1	4		1.46	3	
24	Its offer of basic training.	Operative Capacity	-1.03	-2		-0.45	0		-0.147	0	
25	Facilitates sales in the Costa Rican market.	Customer Management	-1.76	-3 *		1.79	3		1.79	3	

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