



Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

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Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) correspond to a relevant category of the Brazilian economy, not only in the generation of jobs, but also in the diffusion of innovations, characterizing a high heterogeneity. Innovation and productivity techniques, therefore, based on marketing strategies, need to be adapted to their reality visibly different from that of large companies. The objective of this work is to identify the levels of marketing and innovation of MSEs in the city of São Paulo of companies participating in the ALI project during the years 2020 and 2021, analyzing if there was an evolution in the measured scores and identifying what were the main actions taken by the entrepreneurs in favor of increased productivity and business innovation. All companies present in the article obtained improvements in the measured Marketing and Innovation indexes. As highlighted actions, the massive presence on social networks, the implementation of innovative services such as new modes of delivery to the final customer and also the reduction of costs for obtaining raw materials were observed as potentiating the positive result, despite the decrease in consumption in the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key words: Innovation Radar; ALI Project; Entrepreneurship; Sebrae; Local Innovation Agent

1. INTRODUCTION

Brazilian scientific production has been based mostly on the analysis and understanding of large companies, which is justified among its characteristics, greater ability to present guarantees to receive public incentives (Zucoloto & Nogueira, 2016). On the other hand, production on the innovation performance of micro and small enterprises (MSEs) is scarce, especially in comparison with other countries.

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Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

MSEs, however, constitute a relevant category of the Brazilian economy, not only in the generation of jobs, which according to Sebrae (2016), corresponded to 52% of formal jobs, but also in the diffusion of innovations, featuring a high heterogeneity (Infante et al., 2015).

This heterogeneity composes a unique environment of an MSE, showing that they are not large companies in miniature, but that they have an exclusive dynamic of operation (Carson, 1990). Innovation and productivity techniques, therefore, based on marketing strategies, need to be adapted to their reality, since the conventional strategies used by large companies use resources, personnel and finance, constantly unavailable in MSEs (Coelho et al., 2015).

In the context of MSEs, marketing implemented through the daily experiences of entrepreneurs occurs through trial and error or observation and constitutes a great source of learning (Leite et al., 2006). According to Solé (2013), although present in the literature, the results of applying marketing strategies in MSE are still poorly studied, which justifies the present study.

The objective of this work, therefore, is to identify, in the context of MSEs, the initial and final score obtained by measuring the levels of marketing and innovation through the Sebrae Innovation Radar tool, of companies participating in the ALI project in the city of São Paulo. Paulo during the years 2020 and 2021, analyzing whether there was an evolution in the measured scores and identifying what were the main actions taken by entrepreneurs in favor of the company's productivity and innovation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation was structured in five topics, initially approaching management by indicators and strategic planning of entrepreneurs. Subsequently, marketing was also explored in the scenario of micro and small companies through the available academic literature, mainly focused on entrepreneurship and as an innovation strategy in order to promote competitive advantage.

2.1 Management by indicators and strategic planning

Currently, the competitiveness between micro and small companies promotes an incessant search for quality, requiring an improvement of strategies in favor of their subsistence in the market and standing out against the competition.(SEBRAE, 2018). Thus, it is essential that entrepreneurs are prepared for quick and accurate decision-making in order to take advantage of opportunities.

The process of improving strategies involves planning through obtaining reliable information.(Ferreira et al., 2008). For the information used in decision making to be reliable, Fernandes(2004)points out that it is essential for companies to establish parameters, and for the construction of such parameters, Martins and Costa Neto(1998)point out that it is important to improve performance measurement, aiming to plan, control and mainly diagnose the company in relation to its internal evaluations.

The current sophistication involves measuring performance indicators in the most diverse areas of the company, such as billing, innovation, marketing and customer satisfaction, which are fundamental for the development of the business.(Ferreira et al., 2008). The measurement carried out in a formal way, that is, entirely based on the data stored and obtained through a structured process, provides better information for assertive decision-making and the consequent success of the company. On the other hand, Fernandes(2004)points out that a measurement carried out informally, through false information or information of poor quality, may compromise the progress of the business in the coming years.

Indicators, therefore, obtained in a formal way, represent values capable of expressing, in a metric and objective way, the achievement of a company's objectives, and for these to be achieved, they must always be linked to a clear numerical goal, as it is through its interpretation that it will be possible to understand if the company is on the right path predetermined by the previously established objectives(SEBRAE, 2018).

Camargo(2000, p. 28)states that “the indicators need to express credibility and, for that, they must be generated in a judicious way, ensuring the availability of the most relevant data and results in the shortest possible time and at the lowest cost”. Regarding the periodicity of measurements, Ferreira et. al.(2008)reports that it depends on the compatibility of the improvements to be applied and the physical and structural

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

possibilities for measurement, such as the critical points and characteristics of each process, and that the size of the company, as well as other variables must be considered when defining a pattern.

Caulliraux(2001)explains that the structuring of each specific objective of the company is directly related to one or more indicators, which may indicate positive or negative information. Knowing what it indicates and which way to go is important, and Ferreira et. al.(2008)indicates that a first step is to analyze what other companies are doing, which is an excellent way to start.

The definition of specific short, medium and long term goals for a company, aligned with the management of predetermined indicators, makes it possible to obtain a vision of the company in the future and what will be the path to be followed in order to make this scenario effective. During this journey, it is essential to create a strategic plan that, aligned with the indicators, will measure performance, thus contributing to the competitiveness and success of the company over the years.(SEBRAE, 2018).

2.2 Marketing in micro and small companies

Marketing is nothing more than the ability to satisfy human and social needs while being able to generate profit at the same time. Its application is based on understanding consumer behavior(Mothersbaugh et al., 2020). Directly linked to the companies' need to prosper, regardless of the current economic scenario(Kotler & Keller, 2013).

According to Geraldo and Mainardes(2017), several factors have the potential to influence purchasing behavior: the physical characteristics of the environment, the market context and the personal context, associated with cultural, social, personal and psychological factors, including the economy, government and technology(Frederico, 2008). Assertive marketing management that considers the product or service together with the customer's needs is closer to a successful strategy, as already carried out by large companies.(Coelho et al., 2015).

With regard to MSEs, marketing management tends to be informal. Jones and Rowley(2011)point out that this informality is related to the small size of the company and the strong influence of the entrepreneur in decision making.(Morrish, 2011; Elmuti

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

et al., 2012). Due to its specificity, marketing in MSEs is different from that carried out in large companies, as it is an exercise learned in everyday life, and in most cases there is no specific department for it.(Solé, 2013).

This learning process in the implementation of marketing strategies in MSEs can occur through trial and error or even through observation.(Silva et al., 2019). The entrepreneur, as a rule, due to his busy routine, tends to choose action rather than reflect on possible strategies, causing a loss in the sense of discovering new alternatives for his practices and also in the possibility of developing the team in sharing information. about business dynamics(Coelho et al., 2015).

In a pioneering study, Carson(nineteen ninety)divided marketing strategies into four stages for small businesses to survive in the market: reactive marketing, in which the entrepreneur makes use of a network of relationships to attract his first customers; adjustment marketing, which is when the manager starts to adopt spontaneous marketing strategies to increase sales; entrepreneurial marketing, characterized by pivoting and risk; and proactive marketing, which is methodical, controlled and conducted by a specialist hired by the company.

Carson (1990) states that small companies choose the traditional marketing methods that best adapt to the reality of the organization. Thus, just as the company has to adapt to the market, marketing must adapt to the company's capabilities and resources. This limitation of resources and capacity makes the owner-manager perform intuitive and informal actions that fit the organization's resources.(Coelho et al., 2015). The behavior and mindset of the person responsible for the company, in relation to marketing, therefore, is a determining factor for the success of your business.(Oliva et al., 2019; Alqahtani & Uslay, 2020; Sadiku-Dushi & Ramadani, 2020).

2.3 Entrepreneurial Marketing

As a result of this commonplace scenario in MSEs, entrepreneurial marketing emerged, which is related to a more effective assessment of opportunities together with providing more agile strategies in monetization.(Solé, 2013)and also directly and

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

positively impacting the performance and development of MSEs (Rashad, 2018; Alqahtani & Usay, 2020).

As it is also carried out by entrepreneurs, this type of marketing has similar characteristics, such as the orientation to pursue opportunities, prototype them and launch them in the market, generating value for customers through the enjoyment of creativity, relationships, flexibility and innovation. (Hills & Hultman, 2013). According to Morrish (2011) the culture of MSEs is strongly influenced by the attributes and values of its owner, and it is essential that, in addition to knowledge of the product or service offered, the person responsible for the business overcomes the lack of mastery over the implementation of marketing strategies (Gilmore et al., 2012).

A micro or small company has advantages when compared to large organizations, such as flexibility to market needs and focus on opportunities, thus contributing to a closer relationship with the consumer. (Harrigan et al., 2012; Fard & Amiri, 2018). To Stokes (2000), MSEs are focused on innovation, and in their proximity to the consumer, the choice for a more interactive rather than impersonal marketing is the best way, and can often, according to the author, be the company's only point of sale.

2.4 Social media marketing

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61), "social networks are websites or applications available on the internet that allow users to develop, consume and share content". These platforms have proven useful in creating opportunities for anyone to create personal content, share it, and exchange information between organizations and other individuals.

From a marketing perspective, social networks have provided a conceptualization of social intent, focusing on the dialogue that is created around interactions on digital platforms. (Dwivedi et al., 2015). This dialog helps other social media users get in touch with promotional campaigns or learn from the experiences of others who have come to interact with a marketing campaign. (Vinerean, 2017).

Alawan et al. (2017) examined the need to measure the impact of different social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn on the return on investment

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

in marketing campaigns, due to their enormous potential for reach in the form of promotional activities aimed at reaching target customers. According to Victorio(2021)Facebook in 2020, for example, was close to reaching 3 billion active users on the platform and had revenue of 28 billion dollars, exemplifying the extraordinary potential of social networks.

Social networks can serve as a productive and useful tool for developing organizations or brands by sustaining and maintaining emotional and social relationships with consumers, thus establishing a solid connection with them.(Guha et al., 2018). By creating, posting and sharing different types of content on social platforms, consumers are more likely to engage with brands in online environments, cultivating their level of interactivity and engagement in a deeper relationship with an organization.(Vinerean, 2017).

Berthon et al.(2012)emphasized the emergence of a "social customer" or "creative consumer" who is actively involved in creating and propagating value-added content on their social networks. This new role for consumers facilitated technological development, requiring the emergence of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), a customer relationship management tool(Vinerean, 2017; Guha et al., 2018). About CRM, Trainor et al.(2014, p. 271)identifies as: "a company's competence in generating, integrating and responding to information obtained from customer interactions that are facilitated by social media technologies".

2.5 Entrepreneurship and Innovation

According to Hirsch, Peters and Shepard(2014, p. 29)Entrepreneurship consists of a “process of creating something new with value by dedicating the necessary time and effort, assuming the corresponding financial, psychological and social risks and receiving the consequent rewards of satisfaction and economic and personal independence”, in addition to cooperating with the development social economic.

Entrepreneurship is also essential as an income-generating tool for the population.(AGM de Oliveira et al., 2016). However, according to the GEM – Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, during the year 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil,

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

the country saw an 18.3% reduction in the total entrepreneurship rate, obtaining a value of 31.6% for the adult population that is employed as an established entrepreneur, the lowest level in the last eight years.

On the other hand, the number of start-up entrepreneurs motivated by necessity jumped from 37.5% (2019) to 50.4% (2020), the same level as 18 years ago. Furthermore, 82% of respondents claimed that the motivation to start a business was the solution they found to earn a living because jobs are scarce.(I. de Oliveira & Businari, 2021).

In terms of innovation, Drucker(1998, p. 25)states that innovation is “a specific instrument for entrepreneurs” through which they identify change as an opportunity for new businesses, products or services and, in current concepts, new uses of technology for the production system. As a way of ensuring competitive advantage, organizations are compelled to become increasingly innovative due to the need to deal with the new competitive challenges imposed by globalization.(Torres et al., 2017).

In this way, it is a prerequisite that the manager develops entrepreneurial characteristics in order to add value to his own workforce and also to meet the demands of society.(2006), and since in the Brazilian scenario, in turn, the country has the worst performance in the Global Innovation Index (GII) since the measurement began ten years ago, the situation has proved to be extremely challenging(Righetti, 2021).

3. PROCEDURES METHODOLOGICAL

This article is a quantitative research, applied in nature and descriptive. To measure the data, six companies from Cycle 1 were used, which corresponded to the period between November 2020 and April 2021, and seven companies from Cycle 2, which corresponded to the period from March 2021 to October 2021, totaling 13 companies located in western region of the city of São Paulo. Adherence to the ALI project is free of charge to entrepreneurs, and their participation is fully subsidized by Sebrae. For data collection, the meetings were mostly held online, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

The Innovation Radar tool is a structured questionnaire developed by SEBRAE (2020) with a total of 18 questions, and was presented to entrepreneurs twice, in the first and last meeting of the cycle, in order to compare the pre and post intervention scenarios of the ALI project. The questionnaire corresponds to 6 dimensions, namely: Management by indicators, operations management, marketing, innovation, digital transformation and sustainable practices.

In this work, the innovation and marketing categories were evaluated, and the answers ranged from 1 to 5 in the possibility of a grade depending on the entrepreneur's response.

To measure innovation, three questions were asked:

- 1 - How does the company innovate in its internal processes to increase productivity and reduce costs?
- 2 - How often are new products, services or business models successfully presented to customers?
- 3 - How does the company seek and analyze information to identify opportunities to innovate?

Regarding Marketing, the following questions were asked:

- 1 - How do you monitor your customers' satisfaction with your products and services?
- 2 - Normally, how does your company determine the price of its products and services?
- 3 - In the last six months, has your company made any type of promotion of its products or services?

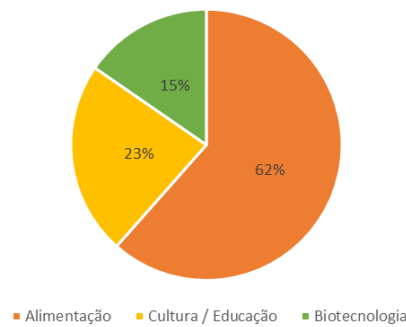
During the process, follow-up meetings were held with the entrepreneurs and based on the Design Thinking methodology (Melo & Abelheira, 2015). The project aimed to create a prototype to solve a problem chosen by the entrepreneur with the potential to impact his productivity.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Of the 13 companies measured, 8 are in the food sector, 3 are in the culture/education sector and 2 are in the biotechnology sector, as shown in Figure 1.

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

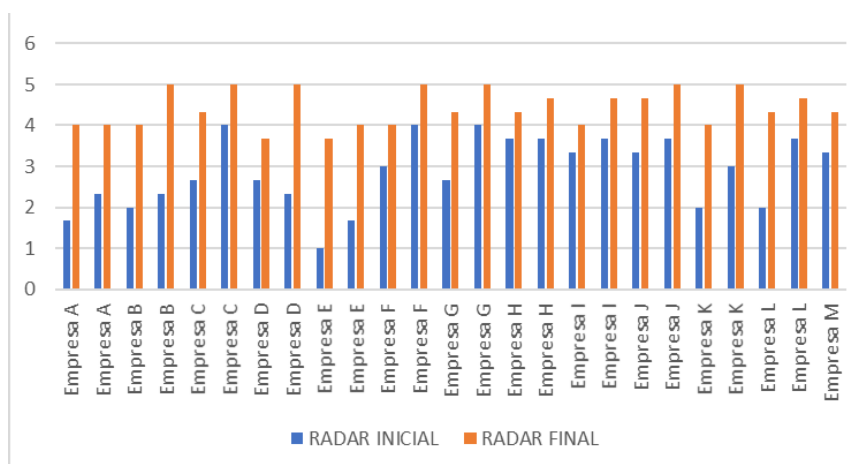
Figure 1. Branches of the companies presented in the article



Source: the author

Regardless of the business segment, all companies measured for the ALI Project obtained a significant improvement in the marketing category, when comparing the initial and final rates, according to Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 - Marketing Radar



Source: the author

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

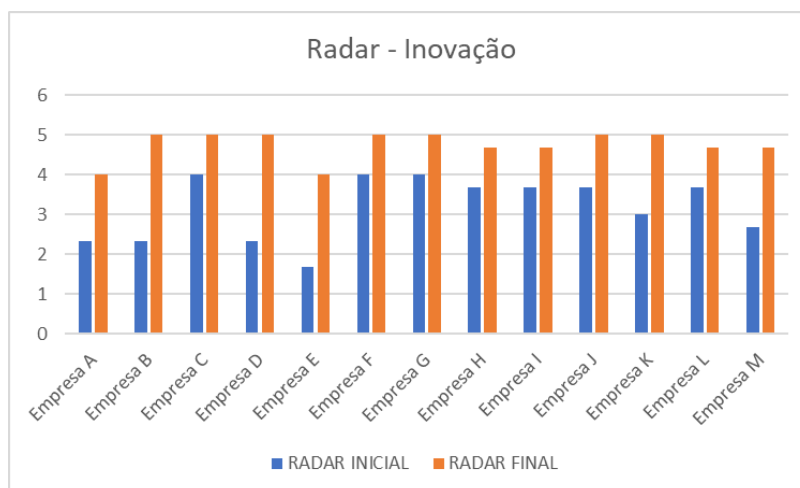
The biggest highlight is Company E, in the educational sector, which scored 1 on Radar for the Marketing category, the lowest of all companies in the initial measurement, and which in the final measurement increased its score to 3.67. In this specific case, the company did not have social networks, which explains the low score on the first meeting, and the increase was due to the creation of social networks such as Instagram and the company's page on Google My Business, as well as postings to publicize work with frequency of at least three times a week.

Another highlight is that of company A, in the biotechnology sector, which also had a significant increase, from 1.67 on the initial radar to 4.0 on the final radar, creating the brand's visual identity and also posting with a frequency of three days per week on social networks about the main services offered, boosting their sales and causing the observed score increase.

All companies represented in Figure 2 carried out marketing strategies guided by the local innovation agent and aimed at improving their market positioning and strategies to identify the target audience. As outstanding actions, there are plans to achieve a massive presence on social networks such as Instagram, Facebook and Whatsapp Business, in addition to the constant dissemination of their respective works to the followers.

Figure 3 - Innovation Radar

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project



Source: the author

For the Radar results in the Innovation category, all companies measured in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 obtained better results after joining the ALI Brasil-Mais Program. The biggest highlight is also Company E in the educational sector, which implemented greater innovation strategies during its journey in the project. There was innovation in processes, such as a new form of communication with the school through social networks and also innovation in products offered, such as the provision of differentiated classes in the after-hours of regular education for children enrolled in the respective teaching place.

In this Innovation perspective, a total of seven companies measured in both cycles obtained the maximum score, 5, during the final measurement process. This means that during the 6 months between the initial measurement and the final measurement, they implemented more than 2 projects aimed at increasing productivity and/or reducing costs; created more than two new products, services or innovative business model recognized and valued by customers per year and used methods and tools to identify opportunities, always interacting with customers and potential customers, and acting in a systematic way in the analysis and validation of all types of opportunities, validating three or more opportunities per year.

Companies A, B, C, G, H, J, K and M belong to the food industry and correspond to restaurants spread across the city of São Paulo. All of them implemented actions to reduce costs to obtain raw materials, such as research in wholesale markets to buy cheaper products and implemented new delivery services for the final consumer, such as

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

outsourcing this step via applications such as Ifood and Uber Eats and also made available the Take Away modality, in which the customer himself can withdraw the product, since at the time of application of the ALI Program, the restaurants were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Through Design Thinking, methodology of the ALI project, it was possible to positively impact the entrepreneurs who participated in cycle 1 and cycle 2. Due to the instability scenario arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, the massive majority of entrepreneurs were insecure about maintenance of its business during the first wave of the pandemic (peak between July and August 2020) and especially during the second wave (peak between March and June 2021) with the exorbitant increase in the number of fatalities.

Despite the difficult scenario, it was worked within the possibilities always thinking about increasing productivity and reducing costs. Following strategies based on Design Thinking, it was possible to prototype new projects that had a direct impact on increasing the productivity of entrepreneurs and caused improvements in the company's Marketing and Innovation scenario, creating a legacy that has the potential to last for years, promoting constant improvements for each MPE attended.

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Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

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Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

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Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

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Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

ABSTRACT

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) correspond to a relevant category of the Brazilian economy, not only in the generation of jobs, but also in the diffusion of innovations, characterizing a high heterogeneity. Innovation and productivity techniques, therefore, based on marketing strategies, need to be adapted to their reality, which is visibly different from that of large companies. The aim of this work is to identify the levels of marketing and innovation of MSEs in the city of São Paulo from companies participating in the ALI project during the years 2020 and 2021, analyzing whether there was evolution in the scores measured and identifying what were the main actions taken by entrepreneurs towards increasing productivity and business innovation. All the companies present in the article obtained improvements in the Marketing and Innovation indexes measured. As highlighted actions, the massive presence in social networks, the implementation of innovative services such as new modes of delivery to the final customer, and also the reduction of costs to obtain raw materials were observed as enhancers of the positive result, despite the decrease in consumption in the country due to the pandemic of COVID-19.

Keywords: Innovation Radar; ALI Project; Entrepreneurship; Sebrae; Local Innovation Agent.

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with the ALI project of SEBRAE

SUMMARY

The micro and small enterprises (MPE) correspond to a relevant category of the Brazilian economy, in the field in the generation of employees, as well as in the diffusion of innovations, characterizing a high heterogeneity. Therefore, innovation and productivity techniques, based on marketing strategies, must adapt to reality, which is visibly different from that of large companies. The objective of this work is to identify the marketing and innovation levels of SMEs in the city of São Paulo of the companies participating in the ALI project during 2020 and 2021, analyzing their evolution in the measures and identifying which ones were the main actions carried out by the entrepreneurs led to the increase in productivity and innovación del negocio. All the companies present in the article obtained improvements in the measured marketing and innovation indexes. As outstanding actions, the massive presence in social networks, the implementation of innovative services such as new delivery modalities to the final customer and also the reduction of costs for the acquisition of raw materials were observed as enhancing the positive result, despite the reduction of consumption in the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Innovation through marketing: experiences in micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo with SEBRAE's ALI project

Keywords:Innovation Radar; ALI project; Entrepreneurial spirit; Sebrae; Local innovation agent.