

# The manufacturing sector of the city of Cúcuta (Colombia) facing the socioeconomic crisis with Venezuela

## El sector manufacturero de la ciudad de Cúcuta frente a la crisis socioeconómica con Venezuela

LUNA-PEREIRA, Henry O. <sup>1</sup>  
AVENDAÑO-CASTRO, William R. <sup>2</sup>  
PRADA-NUÑEZ, Raúl <sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

The objective of the article is to analyze the manufacturing sector of the city of Cúcuta in the face of the socioeconomic crisis in Venezuela and the border context. The research is part of the empirical-analytical paradigm and corresponds to a descriptive, non-experimental, transectional quantitative study. A validated questionnaire was used, which was applied to 130 companies. Four variables were analyzed: managerial profile, general characteristics, operating environment and financial management.

**key words:** manufacturing sector, border, trade exchange, socioeconomic crisis

### Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es analizar el sector manufacturero de la ciudad de Cúcuta ante la crisis socioeconómica de Venezuela y el contexto fronterizo. La investigación se enmarca en el paradigma empírico-analítico y corresponde a un estudio cuantitativo no experimental - transeccional de nivel descriptivo. Se utilizó un cuestionario validado, el cual se aplicó a 130 empresas. Se analizaron cuatro variables: perfil gerencial, características generales, entorno de funcionamiento y manejo financiero.

**Palabras clave:** Sector manufacturero, Frontera, Intercambio comercial, Crisis socioeconómica

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## 1. Introduction

Colombia and Venezuela have always faced ups and downs in their relations as a result of political and diplomatic differences, although these have remained despite their disagreement (Ardila, 2005; Bustamante & Sierra, 2005; González & Galeano, 2014; Polo, Serrano & Triana, 2018). Some studies identify five stages within Venezuelan-Colombian relations, which start from decisions on border boundaries in the early nineteenth century to the political relations woven by former presidents Hugo Chávez and Álvaro Uribe Vélez up to 2010 (González & Galeano, 2014: 93). But since 2015, a new stage is being lived, characterized by the total breakdown of relations

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1 PhD in Administrative Sciences. Francisco de Paula Santander University. henryorlandolp@ufps.edu.co

2 PhD in Social and Human Sciences. Francisco de Paula Santander University. williamavendano@ufps.edu.co

3 Master in Data Analysis Engineering, Process Improvement and Decision Making. Francisco de Paula Santander University. raulprada@ufps.edu.co

at a political level, the closure of the border and an unprecedented migratory mobilization towards Colombia (Polo, Serrano & Triana, 2018).

The migration of Venezuelans to Colombia has allowed new territorial dynamics to be generated. Despite the political distancing between governments and the abandonment of cooperation and integration projects, relations between populations continue to exist between one country and another, of course, at a border level. Undoubtedly, the neighbourhood and the shared space, have generated that the department of Norte de Santander and the main cities of Colombia, become receiving territories of the Venezuelan emigrants, which arrive with expectations of labour opportunities and a greater well-being, although others in search of security and protection of their civil and political rights (Fernandez & Orozco, 2018; Heredia & Battistessa, 2019; Bermúdez, Mazuera, Albornoz & Peraza, 2018; Rodríguez & Robayo, 2018).

It is estimated that more than 3.5 million Venezuelans have emigrated, making this phenomenon one of the largest migrations of the 21st century, along with that of Syria, Africa in the Mediterranean and Central America to the United States (García & Restrepo, 2019; Rodríguez & Ramos, 2019). Of this population, 50% of the migratory flow ends in Colombia and another 40% uses the national territory as a transitory passage (Rodríguez & Ramos, 2019). This is only one manifestation of a complex problem that is tending to expand. Indeed, inflation in Venezuela has risen dramatically to 10,000,000%, unemployment is close to 50%, the gross domestic product has been negative for the last 6 years and the economy has contracted by 50% (Heredia & Battistessa, 2019; Rodríguez & Robayo, 2018). Without a doubt, the socialist project of Chavism in Venezuela did not manage - or has not managed - to overcome the country's structural problems at both the economic and social levels, and it seems that the crisis will continue to increase and aggravate (López, 2016).

It is logical that economic and social crises in neighboring countries end up affecting or inciting within the border territories in different dimensions and levels, and even more so when their economy has depended on bilateral trade. If we add to this the exodus of thousands of people to the border area as migrants, the impact is greater in all its dimensions. This is the reality of the most representative border between Colombia and Venezuela comprised of Cúcuta - Villa del Rosario and Ureña - San Antonio (Arteada, Carvajal & Guerrero, 2017; Pabón, Bastos & Mogrovejo, 2016; Bustamante & Sierra, 2005), and like any border marked by migration, is influenced by relational dynamics arising from human behavior itself, the effects of decisions at a political and institutional level, and many other forces (Peyrony & Denert, 2012; Perkmann & Sum, 2002; Blatter, 2004; Perilla, 2011; Di Brienza, 1997).

The city of Cúcuta has about 850,000 inhabitants, and in addition to these there are about 185,000 immigrants from Venezuela. This is a number of men and women with the potential to influence new realities, for example, changing the urban landscape, efficiency of public resources (Rodríguez & Robayo, 2018), security (Castillo et al., 2018), work and labour relations (Fedesarrollo, 2018); Chamber of Commerce of Cúcuta, 2018), the economy (Pabón, Bastos & Mogrovejo, 2016; Sayago, 2016; Chamber of Commerce of Cúcuta, 2018), culture, social relations, imaginaries and representations (Aliaga, Baracaldo, Pinto & Gissi, 2018), among others.

The first effects of the closure of the Colombian-Venezuelan border are felt on the economy and on most of the companies that depended to a lesser or greater degree on bilateral trade. Three years after the closure, there was still a decline in income for some sectors: information and communications (-41%), manufacturing (-36%), professional activities (-35%), trade (-31%), health (-27%), agriculture and livestock (-24%), hotels and restaurants (-23%), among others (Cúcuta Chamber of Commerce, 2018). Today, the effects of the socio-economic crisis continue to have significant effects, although strategies and actions have been advanced from the institutional and governmental level to promote and strengthen the city's representative economic sectors.

One of these sectors corresponds to manufacturing, which had about 5 thousand companies at the end of 2019, most of them being micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (Jaimes, Rojas & Luzardo, 2017). Of this total, 1,493 belonged to the subsector of clothing and garments, and 1,065 to the subsector of footwear and leather. Considering that the Venezuelan crisis goes beyond the closure of the border, this study seeks to analyze the manufacturing sector of the city of Cúcuta in the face of the socio-economic crisis in Venezuela, and with it, to contribute to the knowledge that has been built around the relations between the Venezuelan socio-economic crisis and the impact on the border.

Enterprises and entrepreneurs in the area of clothing and footwear, must face various challenges and external constraints imposed by constant change and crisis (Burbano, 2017; Cardenas, Cristancho, Sayago & Ureña, 2017; Acevedo and Albornoz, 2019). Some of the main deficiencies are in the area of innovation and adoption of technologies, development of human talent capacities, access to new markets, redefinition of the value chain, among others, which are determining factors in a global market (Romero, Monroy & Ramírez, 2017). Clearly, all this requires new rationalities and a more holistic vision that allows them to adapt and strengthen their productivity, innovation, competitiveness and market penetration.

## 2. Methodology

It corresponds to an investigation framed in the empirical-analytical paradigm and the quantitative approach. At the same time, it is a non-experimental-transectional study with a descriptive level, considered that there was no control over the variables under analysis (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2014).

The population was determined by companies in two sub-sectors of the manufacturing industry in the city of Cúcuta in Norte de Santander (Colombia): on one hand, clothing and garments, and on the other, leather and footwear. Of the first group, there are 1493 companies, and of the second, 1065 productive units, for a total of 2558.

The sample -not probabilistic-, and selected through a simple random sampling, was determined from the application of a statistical formula with the following characteristics:

$$n = \frac{N * Z^2 * P * Q}{(e^2 * (N - 1)) + (Z^2 * P * Q)} \quad (1)$$

Where:

Probability of success:  $P = 0.85$

Probability of failure:  $Q = 0.15$

Population size:  $N = 2558$

Error margin:  $e = 0.06$

On the basis of the above parameters, the investigation sample corresponded to 130 companies, distributed as follows: 78 companies in the clothing and garments subsector, and 54 companies in the leather and footwear subsector.

A questionnaire was applied to the selected sample, in which the management profile of the company, characteristics of the company, operating environment and financial management were inquired. The questionnaire was validated through three techniques: 1. Expert judgement, 2. Pilot test to 10 non-sampled reporting companies in the sector, and 3. Cronbach's Alpha statistical test. The result corresponded to 0.879, which allows inferring the validity and internal consistency of the instrument.

### 3. Results

As indicated in the methodology, a multiple-choice questionnaire was applied to a total of 130 companies in the manufacturing sector in the city of Cúcuta, 78 in the clothing and garments subsector, and 54 in the footwear and leather subsector. The findings are presented considering the four variables analyzed: management profile, company characteristics, operating environment and financial management.

#### 3.1. Management profile of companies in the manufacturing sector

**Table 1**  
Management profile of the company. Distribution by gender

Analysis Dimension	Options	Women percentage	Men percentage	Total (%)
Sector	Leather and footwear	20.1	20.7	40.8
	clothing and garments	29.1	30.1	59.2
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>100</b>
City of origin	Cúcuta	45.3	43.2	88.5
	Other city	2.9	5.6	8.5
	Other country	1.0	2.0	3.0
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>100</b>
Manager's age	15-25 years	3.6	1.0	4.6
	26-35 years	20.3	7.4	27.7
	36-45 years	18.5	13.0	31.5
	46-55 years	5.4	20.0	25.4
	More than 55 years	1.4	9.4	10.8
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>100</b>
Academic training of the manager	Elementary	6.5	2	8.5
	High school	25.3	32.4	57.7
	Technological	11.5	7.7	19.2
	Academic	5.1	8.0	13.1
	Postgraduate	0.8	0	0.8
	Empiric experience	0	0.8	0.8
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: own elaboration

According to Table 1, there is no gender predominance for each of the subsectors analysed. Similarly, there is no evidence of gender predominance by origin of the entrepreneurs, age and level of training. It should be noted that 88.5 per cent of managers are from the city of Cúcuta. About 60% of the entrepreneurs are between 26 and 45 years old, which is young entrepreneurs who enter the manufacturing sector. Similarly, it is relevant that 57.7% only have secondary and middle school education, and that more than 85% of managers have no university education.

#### 3.2. General characteristics of enterprises in the manufacturing sector

Below are some correlations between different dimensions analysed such as type of company, company activity, number of workers, length of service and effects due to the border situation.

**Table 2**  
Company activity according to type of company

Activity	Type of company					Total (%)
	Sole proprietorship (%)	Simplified joint stock company (%)	Private limited company (%)	Public limited company (%)	Family business (%)	
Manufacturing	8.2	5.3	0.0	0.0	6.6	<b>20.0</b>
Marketing	12.5	0.5	0.0	0.8	11.6	<b>25.4</b>
Manufacturing and marketing	23.9	2.7	0.8	0.0	27.2	<b>54.6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>44.6%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>45.4%</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: own elaboration

Table 2 shows the main activity of the company in correlation with the type of company. 54.6% of companies are dedicated to the manufacture and marketing of products, and the other (45.4%), to one of these two activities. The majority of companies are concentrated in the type of single-person and Family Business. Only 10.1% of the participating companies have opted for a company form, with the Simplified Joint Stock Company being the most widely used. This is because this type of company has flexible requirements within the commercial legislation.

This data allows some inferences to be made. Companies that arise from corporate forms have greater investment possibilities because they have partners who are willing to inject capital. With this, it is possible to advance strategies and plans, innovate the means of production, machines, processes and products, and face, to a better extent, changes and crises. Because most companies are sole proprietorships and family businesses, they do not have the possibilities and advantages of corporate companies, and therefore, emphasis is placed on strategies focused on partnership and alliances with both companies in the same sector and public entities (Cárdenas, Cristancho, Sayago & Ureña, 2017; Romero, Monroy & Ramirez, 2017).

**Table 3**  
Number of employees in the company according to the length of service

Number of workers	Length of service of the company (years)					Total (%)
	0 - 2 (%)	2 - 4 (%)	4 - 10 (%)	10 - 15 (%)	+ 15 (%)	
1 - 10	17.5	16.7%	23.5%	10.2%	7.5%	<b>75.4%</b>
11 - 50	9.4	8.7%	5.0%	0.0%	0.2%	<b>23.1%</b>
51 - 200	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	<b>0.8%</b>
+ 200	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	<b>0.8%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>26.9%</b>	<b>25.4%</b>	<b>28.5%</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source. Own elaboration

According to Table 3, more than 80% of the companies are less than 10 years old and 52.3% are between 0 and 4 years old. These are young companies, many of which have not yet crossed the time line to become stronger, position themselves and access new markets, including international ones. In Colombia, about 57% of SMEs do not survive the first 5 years and only 20% of companies created reach their third year of life (Montoya, 2018; Franco & Pulido, 2010), and thus the future of participating companies with less than 5 years old is uncertain.

In relation to the number of workers, Table 3 indicates that the length of service of manufacturing companies is a variable that can affect the number of workers. However, the data shows that only 1.6% of the 19.3% of the

total number of companies that are more than 10 years old employ more than 50 workers. In general, companies have less than 50 workers and more than 75% have between 1 and 10 workers.

**Table 4**  
Effects of the border closure and Venezuela's socio-economic crisis

Effect	Options	Percentage
Decrease in workers	Yes	28.5
	No	71.5
Impact on markets	Yes	50,0
	No	50,0
Sales and Net Profits	Increased sales	13,7
	Decreased sales	43.8
	Increase in net profits	10.0
	Decrease in net profits	32.4

Source. Own elaboration

The results in Table 4 show the perceptions of the manufacturing sector entrepreneurs as a result of the closure of the border and the socio-economic crisis of the Venezuelan State. In terms of hiring, only 28.5% of the companies had a decrease in workers or collaborators by an average of 15% of the staff, although the vast majority were not affected in this regard (71.5%). In relation to the markets, half of the businessmen said that they were affected, since one of the traditional destinations of the products of this industry was the Venezuelan market. Similarly, 43.8% report that sales decreased and another 32.4% of the businessmen indicate that net profits decreased. Only 13.7% indicate that sales increased and only 10% show an increase in net profits.

### 3.3. Operating Environment

The destination of the products of 91.5% of the participating companies is the city of Cúcuta and the national market, especially the Atlantic coast. A lower percentage of manufacturing companies export to international markets (6.2%). For the latter, the main markets are Central America, Ecuador and North America (United States and Canada).

Regarding the products of the footwear and leather goods sector, the main product of the companies is in the female line (casual, sports and formal), and only 25.3% corresponds to the male line. And with regard to the products of the clothing and garments subsector, jeans, both in the female and male lines, are the ones with the highest production (63.2%). As for the female and male clothing lines, there is no trend (51.5% and 38.5%, respectively), and the children's line has an important participation (30.8%).

The distribution channels for manufacturing industry products are varied. The main distribution modalities correspond to own points of sale (29.5%), wholesalers (21.4%), e-commerce (20.9%) and direct sales (20.3%). In a few cases, the modality of department stores is used, although it is a good option as is e-commerce.

**Table 5**  
Market, products, distribution channels and financing  
sources of manufacturing companies in Cúcuta

Dimension	Options	Percentage
Destination of the products	Local	46,2
	Regional	2,3
	National	45,4
	International	6,2
Footwear and leather goods line	Male	25.3
	Female	56.6
	Children	16.4
	Security boots	1.7
Clothing line and garments	Jeans - Male and female	63,1
	Female	41,5
	Male	38,5
	Children	30,8
	Uniforms	10,8
	Lingerie - home	9,2
	Vests - caps	4,6
Distribution channels	Own sales points	29,4
	Specialized chains	2,6
	Wholesalers	21,4
	Direct sale	20,3
	E-commerce	20,9
	Specialized catalogs	3,1
	Department stores	2,3
Sources of funding	Own resources	52.5
	Bank credit lines	43.4

Source. Own elaboration

Like the majority of SMEs, the companies in the manufacturing sector obtain their raw materials from local suppliers (50%), and this is due to the credit lines they obtain and the payment times of the bills. However, 44% of the companies have national providers, who offer more competitive prices by quantity or volume. Only 6% of the participating companies state that they obtain raw materials from abroad that are paid for in dollars.

Lastly, the financing of the city's manufacturing industry companies is carried out through two options: own resources and loans to corporate banks. The 52.5% of the companies are located in the first case, and base this type of decisions on the high interest rates, which subtract profitability. On the other hand, 43.5% of entrepreneurs are in the second case, although they have an unfavourable perception of bank loans.

### 3.4. Financial management

Financial management is a determining variable in the strengthening, development and growth of any company, in other words, it is a factor of competitiveness. Therefore, the questionnaire applied to the participating companies investigated this variable. The information collected allows us to infer that only 17.5% of the companies have complied with their income tax returns to date and that 31.7% have delays and non-compliance

with the corresponding returns. It also highlights that 9.8% apply withholding tax at source and only 9.2% affiliate their workers to the General System of Social Security.

Likewise, it is evident that only 10.8% of companies advance and have financial statements supported by accounting programs and the collaboration of a public accounting professional. The rest do not submit financial statements and only keep accounts without the required formalities. This is a problem of SMEs, recorded within the literature and one of the factors that influence the premature life cycle that characterizes them (Sánchez & Giraldo, 2008; Zapata, 2004).

In relation to the strategic horizon, the companies consulted indicate that their main objectives in a period of 5 years are: growth of sales and profits (32%), positioning of the brand at a national (42.8%) or international level (22.8%), technification of the productive processes from machinery and technologies (15%) and obtaining the corresponding quality certification (10.6%).

### **3.5. Discussion of results**

The findings found in this research should be analyzed from a holistic, systemic and contextualized perspective. To that extent, the perspective of the border as an appropriate space of socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental relations, must be immersed within the reading that is made of the results obtained. In the city of Cúcuta there are companies dedicated to various productive sub-sectors, such as footwear - leather and clothing - garments, but these are mostly quite young. It is not yet certain how many will survive the first five years, but given their limitations, it is likely that a significant percentage will not exceed the first five years of life, maintaining the trend of SMEs in Colombia.

The closure of the border is already 5 years old in 2020, and this fact meant drastic changes in most of the companies of the manufacturing sector of the city as indicated in the results, either by losing a market for the commercialization of the products or by being a source of supplies and raw materials. However, five years after the commercial breakdown, even the companies under analysis are not competitive given the multiple errors or failures they have, for example, the low level of innovation in products or processes, inadequate financial and accounting management, or lack of knowledge of labour standards; or the limitations presented as the lack of capital and investment, or the scarce sources of financing.

It seems that the ability to adapt flexibly to change will be influenced by the training of the entrepreneurs and businessmen themselves, since, as was noted, most of them do not have a university education. Other studies even show the correlation between the age of the managers and the effective management of the companies, as well as the training and education of the employees themselves. These variables influence experience, negotiation capacity, the use and adoption of technologies and ICTs, financial management, among others (Escandón & Hurtado, 2012; Estrada, García & Sánchez, 2009; Aragón & Rubio, 2005).

The path of innovation is an opportunity -and perhaps the only way- for all SMEs in the city of Cúcuta, but it suggests a capacity to adapt, take risks and build business models that will enable them to face up to crises, drive the transformation of companies and generate value (Avendaño, 2012). It will also require opportunities and benefits from the public sector, accompaniment and a real strategic plan for this, and in this sense, it has not yet been possible to carry out strategies of such scope. In other words, there is no way out of the impacts that the Venezuelan crisis and the closure of the border have had on the manufacturing sector.

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## **4. Conclusions**

The closure of the border, the socioeconomic crisis in Venezuela and other factors not considered in this investigation have had a negative effect on sales and profits of companies in the manufacturing sector in the city

of Cúcuta. As a border zone, we understand the historical dependence of the neighboring country and the correlation between the welfare of manufacturing companies and the commercial exchange with Venezuela, being this country an important client for the commercialization of the products generated from this sector of production.

However, in order to improve the understanding of the reality and the situation of the companies analysed, it is necessary in a future investigation to consider the degree of impact of factors such as lack of experience, poor management training, inadequate financial and accounting management, poor development of human talent, low level of protection of workers in these companies, among others. To this must be added other external factors such as the absence of capital investment and the lack of public policies to support entrepreneurs.

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