

Discrepante.com

Alejandra Rincón

Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

Ximena Rueda

Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

Abstract:

Discrepante.com is a venture created on June 2014 by Isabel Rincón in Colombia. The business model consists of bringing Colombian craftsman and independent artists to buyers through a web platform with the aim to stimulate conscious consumption and to contribute to the construction of a more sustainable production and consumption system.

The main objective of the web platform is to encourage consumers to buy responsibly by providing complete, honest and transparent information about the production process to guarantee that suppliers offer decent treatment to workers, use environmentally friendly materials and, most importantly, provide information on the history of the product (creator's name, materials used, region where it was produced, etc.). By educating consumers and linking them to responsible products, the platform also seeks to support Colombian talented creators. Additionally, a web-base platform seeks to provide a sales channel free of intermediaries for all Colombian independent artists and designers who often do not have a way to sell their products at a fair price. The teaching case aims to discuss the barriers and opportunities that a social enterprise has to face by using the e-commerce as a mechanism to bring consumers and artists closer together. It also serves to discuss the reach and scope of introducing responsible consumption in the context of an emerging market. Finally, the case also illustrates the characteristics and challenges of female entrepreneurs navigating the waters of electronic commerce which is usually dominated by men.

This case study can be used in courses of female entrepreneurship, social responsibility, strategy and green marketing.

The case study is based on three main streams of literature. The first one is the one addressing social entrepreneurship, a term that is often confused with social innovation. In order to study these differences the case uses two main articles: Austin, J., Stevenson, H., & Wei-Skillern, J. (2006). Social and commercial entrepreneurship: Same, different, or both? *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice* and Martin, R. L., & Osberg, S. (2007). Social entrepreneurship: The case for definition. *Stanford Innovation Review* Together these texts help students understand the main differences

between social entrepreneurship and social innovation, as well as identify the traits of a social entrepreneur and the challenges he/she faces.

The case is also grounded on the specific characteristic of female entrepreneurship, particularly in emerging economies. Different chapters from the book edited by Ramadani, V., Gërguri-rashiti, S., & Fayolle, A. (n.d.). *Praise for Female Entrepreneurship in Transition Economies* urge students to critically reflect on the challenges, motivation and importance of being a female entrepreneur in an emerging economy.

Finally, the topic of ethical and responsible consumption, within the wider realm of Corporate Social Responsibility also illuminates the dilemmas put forward by the case, as consumers in emerging markets might express different preferences and behaviors regarding green consumption when compared to their counterparts in matured countries (see for instance: Strizhakova, Yuliya, and Robin A. Coulter. "The "green" side of materialism in emerging BRIC and developed markets: The moderating role of global cultural identity." *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 30.1 (2013): 69-82.)

The methodology used for the writing of the case was based on personal interviews with the entrepreneur, access to the company's financial data and consultations of documents on issues of social innovation, responsible consumption, and female entrepreneurship.

This case study helps students to reflect and understand the differences between social entrepreneurship and traditional entrepreneurship. In addition, they can identify the challenges faced by a social entrepreneur to achieve a correct balance between financial sustainability and the business's social philosophy. The case provides the possibility to examine and discuss the advantages and disadvantages that a woman faces when they create a company in an emerging economy in the context of the digital revolution. As the case offers these different perspectives on the issue of social entrepreneurship in an emerging market, it can be used to address different dilemmas: i) Is it reasonable to try to encourage sustainable consumption in an emerging economy

where other priorities are more pressing? ii) Is e-commerce the best channel to stimulate responsible consumption? Or put in other words: Is mass marketing the right tool for a niche product? ; iii) What are the barriers and opportunities that female entrepreneurs face in an emerging economy? How to take advantage of those circumstances to create and grow a business?

Most cases on introducing sustainability in corporate strategy available today deal with large companies (usually multinationals) in globalized markets (such as Unilever, Nestlé, etc.) or with small companies that operate in mature markets, exploiting a niche. This study case addresses the effort of a small company in the context of an emerging economy to promote conscientious consumption that supports sustainable manufacturing practices and shorter value chains between producers and consumers. This is not a success story of a large corporation with the financial muscle to create a “green makeover”. Quite the opposite, it presents the struggle of a small company trying to sell to consumers who are not explicitly demanding green or ethical products. The case, thus fills a vacuum in the case-study literature on CSR, by focusing in actors, contexts, and instruments largely ignored by most of the literature.

Keywords: Conscious consumption; social entrepreneurship; e-commerce; female entrepreneurs; emerging economies.