



Universidad del Azuay

Faculty of Juridical Sciences

International Studies Career

Analysis of market opportunities and commercialization
of premium Ecuadorian products through the Mucho
Mejor Ecuador Certification

Author:

Daniel Alejandro Molina Granja

Director:

Ximena Catalina Abril Fajardo

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Analysis of market opportunities and commercialization of premium Ecuadorian products through the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Certification

Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyze the market opportunities for Ecuadorian products through the Mucho Mejor Ecuador certification. To meet the objectives set, an analysis of the local market was carried out through consumer surveys and interviews with producers, to identify the recognition of the certification. After the analysis, several conclusions were reached, including generating interest from local producers in becoming part of the Mucho Mejor Ecuador repository, strengthening the country brand, acquiring recognition of the logo (origin and quality) and a pre-feasibility plan for the export of premium Ecuadorian products.

Key words: country Brand - internationalization - Mucho Mejor Ecuador - premium products - strengthening

Análisis De Oportunidades De Mercado Y Comercialización De Productos Ecuatorianos Premium A Través De La Certificación Mucho Mejor Ecuador

Resumen

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar las oportunidades de mercado que tienen los productos ecuatorianos, a través de la certificación de Mucho Mejor Ecuador. Para cumplir con los objetivos planteados, se realizó un análisis del mercado local, a través de encuestas a consumidores y entrevistas a productores, con la finalidad de identificar el reconocimiento de la certificación. Posterior al análisis, se llegó a diversas conclusiones, que indican como generar interés de los productores locales en formar parte del repositorio de Mucho Mejor Ecuador, fortalecer la marca país, adquirir reconocimiento del logotipo (origen y calidad) y un plan de prefactibilidad para la exportación de productos ecuatorianos premium.

Palabras clave: internacionalización - fortalecimiento - marca país – Mucho Mejor Ecuador - productos premium

1. Introduction

This empirical research deals with an analysis of opportunities and the market for the export of Premium Ecuadorian products through the Mucho Mejor Ecuador certification. Within the investigation to achieve that Mucho Mejor Ecuador becomes the country brand par excellence, it was analyzed how to generate the interest of national producers, so that they associate with the brand. Within this investigation, the opportunities that exist within the national market have been evaluated, to reach the main objective, which is to reach the international market with the certification of "La Huella" of Mucho Mejor Ecuador.

The purpose of the Ecuadorian "La Huella", proposed and patented by Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador, is to represent national premium products in international export markets. For this, it will be necessary to acquire the approval, initially, of the producers of manufactures or services at the national level. As a consequent step, we will seek to find the best products on the local market, to identify them and recognize them with their fingerprints. Once the premium products have been identified, the imprint will be sought to be accepted in international markets, so that Ecuadorian products are recognized abroad.

This research is important, because it is desired to incorporate "La Huella" of Mucho Mejor Ecuador to be the internationally recognized brand of products made with the best raw materials extracted from national territory, together with the best manufacturing practices and a good industrial development, to more than a correct personnel training. In this way, Ecuador will acquire a comparative advantage over its main commercial competitors, such as Colombia and Peru.

Within the investigation, deficiencies by Mucho Mejor Ecuador, at the brand level, that the producers consider pertinent, have been also identified. This, through interviews, surveys, and market analysis of the competition. In this way, we have been able to analyze the points in which Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador must improve, to fulfill its objective; reach international markets being recognized.

1.1 Objectives

1.1.1 General objective.

Generate interest in Ecuadorian producers who export their products in acquiring the recognition seal of Mucho Mejor Ecuador to become an internationally recognized certification, mainly recognized as Premium Ecuadorian products.

1.1.2 Specific objectives.

1. Bibliographically base the market opportunity and commercialization.
2. Diagnose international market opportunities for the commercialization of premium Ecuadorian products
3. Develop a pre-feasibility study to generate behavior patterns and measures to be taken so that producers can internationalize premium products with the Mucho Mejor Ecuador brand.

1.2 Theoretical framework

Country brands are a tool used by governments and producers of the countries, to increase the knowledge of the country in the international arena. A country can have various benefits if a country brand is consolidated. Among the advantages presented by brands of this type, are the benefits in sectors such as tourism, export of manufactured goods produced in the country, increase in foreign investment and international recognition of the country.

The idea of the "country brand" comes from the term "place branding", which explains that they are processes in which a country, a region or a city carries out international (foreign) political processes through contact with the foreign public. (Govers & Pamment, 2019) In this way, the country interested in expanding its limits and giving knowledge of its productive capacity in the different possible branches, seeks a way to generate international interest.

These types of brands entail an arduous development since they work in several axes. A country brand must have recognition, mainly internal, to generate recognition externally. It is difficult to compete in international markets if

the identity of the brand is not clear, having as a background the political, commercial, social, and cultural aspects involved in creating the identity.

Within the global context, which is constantly growing today; due to the arduous commercial competition presented by the modern market, countries resort to the need to generate identity at the international level. Most of the countries, especially the Latin American ones, which are suppliers, mainly, of raw material; they have immediate competition with neighboring countries, due to their geographical and cultural similarities. (Walls, Castilian, & Darwin, 2019)

Within the framework at the level of Ecuador, there have been multiple brands that have had the initiative to create brands that represent products and services of national origin. A large part of these have been brands that have tried to represent the country at a tourist level, but not at a commercial recognition level. (El Universo, 2022) The strongest brand in this area has been the “Ecuador Ama la Vida” brand, which was initially created as a tourism registration brand and was later registered as a country brand. Due to the lack of clear objectives and proper monitoring of the brand, today, Ecuador Ama la Vida is not recognized.

Concerning certifications, at the national level, there is the regulatory certification of INEN, which is the Ecuadorian Standardization Service. This agency was created to regulate quality processes when producing goods, mostly consumer goods, in the country. The regulatory body aims to offer quality products under the best production standards to improve competitiveness and consumer safety and health. (Gob.Ec, 2022) INEN certification is now recognized in several countries, which facilitates the opening of products to an international market. (Dirección de Comunicación Social, 2022)

One of the problems that Ecuador has, when creating country brands, is the lack of fixed objectives and goals to follow, so that the brands have constant growth and are recognized internationally. Ecuador is a country with potential for growth, due to its wide range of available raw materials, which, together with a trained industry and a correct development plan for the country brand, would generate international relevance and improve its sales at the local level.

At the local territory level, Ecuador is a country that needs to develop its industry, to generate competitive advantages with its closest competitors. In the industrial field, investment and modification are required in the infrastructure area of the various industries. Also, improvement is required in technical aspects, such as the training of personnel and the technological improvements that they entail.

Due to the relevance that is considered the fact of having a country brand, for a nation like Ecuador, several opportunities have been found, which will contribute to the final objective of this research. Because of this, it is desired to work with the Corporation Mucho Mejor Ecuador, this because, taking the right decisions, according to the promotion of interest of producers, vision of the corporation and some corrections in relation to the short- and long-term objectives of the brand, it would meet the sufficient requirements, to become the Ecuadorian country brand. The purpose of the research carried out in this article is to find the feasibility for Mucho Mejor Ecuador to acquire the necessary strength to be the representation of the country brand at an international level.

2. Literature review

2.1 Background.

Since its creation in 2005, the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation has been characterized as a private entity, which has no lucrative objectives, and is financed by its members. Its objectives include supporting the growth of Ecuadorian industry, generating employment, generating consumption of local products, encouraging the growth and improvement of local manufacturing production processes, and exporting these products to international markets.

Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador was established in 2005, under the regulations of Ministerial Agreement 05588, documented and authorized by the Ministry of Commerce, Industrialization, Fisheries and Competitiveness (MICIP). (Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, 2020) Its main motivation was to stop the massive imports of foreign products, improve the quality of national products and export national products to international markets. The pioneer companies in supporting and giving viability to this initiative were:

1. Indurama
2. Cartopel

3. Graiman

4. Pasa

5. Colineal (Guillén, 2011, p. 13).

Currently, Mucho Mejor Ecuador consists of about 540 companies, registered under the "La Huella" logo, which certifies that they are included in the list of Mucho Mejor Ecuador and are considered to meet high quality standards. (Malo, 2021)

To correctly understand the objective of this company, its mission and vision should be analyzed:

Mission: "To promote formal and productive employment through La Huella de Mucho Mejor Ecuador, identifying quality and highlighting the good reputation of our member brands; so that consumers recognize and prefer them thus achieving the welfare of Ecuador." (Mucho Mejor Ecuador)

Vision: "To be recognized as the benchmark consumer brand of quality and national and international business image, leading affiliates from quality to excellence." (Mucho Mejor Ecuador)

Thus, it can be identified that Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador is a company whose objectives include the internationalization of high-quality products (Ecuadorian Premium Products). Within its mission and vision, they specify their desires for the recognition of premium products in national and international markets.

2.2 Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation's current situation:

Today, Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador has registered its "footprint" in 540 brands. Its focus today remains the same as when it started: to generate value and preference for Ecuadorian products in local and international markets. The brands associated with Mucho Mejor Ecuador's footprint are found in various branches, from manufacturing to certifications to sports teams and hospitals. The fact that a brand or project bears the Corporation's seal indicates that it meets the highest quality standards.

In addition to this, its main strength is the diversified recognition according to the cataloging of the company, in accordance with the quality standards that govern within them, which seeks that the associated companies comply with seven axes, which are:

1. Context of the organization
2. Leadership
3. Planning
4. Support
5. Operation
6. Performance evaluation
7. Improvement (TECNOPYMES.EC, 2021)

The criteria for the qualification of these requirements are verified by the Corporation's regulators, who consider the entire production process, from raw material collection to packaging and subsequent marketing of the product.

Based on compliance with the seven axes and quality verification, the companies are classified according to three ranks:

AAA Rank: Complies with all axes of review and has high quality standards.

AA Rank: Complies with most of the axes of review and has high quality standards.

Rank A: Complies with certain axes of review and has a medium quality standard.

According to the criteria, the brands that benefit most from the standardization catalogued by Mucho Mejor Ecuador are the companies in the AAA range, which comply with all the axes of review and have high quality standards.

Currently, the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation is looking for as many companies in the AAA range as possible to join and carry its logo, thus, both parties will benefit. The corporation is in a constant search for the improvement of production processes and recognition of companies that provide services.

2.3 Projection of Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador.

The company, with more than fifteen years in the market, has new objectives year after year, always looking for the welfare and improvement of the Ecuadorian industry. In the short term, the Corporation's goal is to join Ecuadorian brands that meet AAA quality standards to strengthen the brand and help other brands to stand out in the domestic market and, subsequently, in the international market.

In the short term, the objective is to strengthen the brand in the commercial sphere. This, with the objective of being the first and main option at the time of consumer choice, compared to other brands that do not have the recognition of "the footprint". In this way, Mucho Mejor Ecuador would become much more recognized locally, acquiring a greater number of consumers and, therefore, greater acceptance of producers and their companies.

Among the long-term objectives, the corporation intends to improve the technical and manufacturing production processes at the local level. With this, it plans to be able to compete against international brands, which are recognized for their excellent quality. Industrial development within the Ecuadorian market and the subsequent improvement of its products is a process that will take time. It requires investment in areas such as structure, technology, personnel training, and others.

The main long-term objective of Mucho Mejor Ecuador is to develop products that comply with international quality certifications. In this way, Ecuadorian manufactured exports will benefit. In addition to the objective of this project, the Corporation seeks to internationalize premium Ecuadorian products bearing the Mucho Mejor Ecuador "footprint" certification seal (Appendix A). As planned, the certification will help the products to be better marketed, especially in international markets, which will be able to recognize the Ecuadorian footprint as a certification of good production practices and products of the highest quality.

3. Methodology

Extensive research of bibliographic material was carried out, through the exploratory and descriptive method (Appendix B) (Flores, 2021), within databases of high academic recognition, such as ISI and SCOPUS, among others, introducing the category research in international business. Together with the project "Development program for SMEs in the textile sector to strengthen their capacity to export to the EU and reduce the effects generated by the COVID-19 pandemic" (Mucho Mejor Ecuador, 2021), it will allow for a feasibility and viability analysis to encourage producers to have their products certified by Mucho Mejor Ecuador, according to the standards that categorize them as premium export products. In other words, the initial search results were filtered thematically to select only articles published in scientific journals related to the category. A database was formed with titles, abstracts, authors, journals, country, and year of publication of the selected articles, which were subsequently subjected to the study analysis (Appendix C). As part of the filtering process, the initial number of articles was reduced to a sample of 30 articles. In addition, we reviewed, through the observation technique; documents related to news, journals, magazines, editorials, and books from 2017 to 2022.

First, the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation was visited, to obtain adequate and accurate information, which will serve as the basis of this research and will be reflected in the steps to follow for a correct certification, which will then be applied to selected producers, with the purpose that through the study they can meet the indispensable requirements for the products to achieve Premium certification.

This empirical research was carried out through a mixed method, for which the quantitative part was collected through numerical data, quantification of opinions, behaviors, or other defined variables, such as the use of surveys, comparative causal research, and review of data in pages, such as Ecuador in figures, analysis of accounting figures of Mucho Mejor Ecuador, among others, since multiple analyses of previous projects were necessary.

Concerning the qualitative part, we will use the opinions of ten producers, through semi-structured interviews. The sample size for this research has been considered based on a significant portion of the population, the same that will be carried out in terms of ten companies producing products classified as "premium", which will allow reaching the necessary depth for the researched study and avoid bias in the interpretation of the results obtained. For this purpose, the observation method, personal interviews, focus groups, and text analysis, among others, will be applied. A

consumer survey will also be conducted, with a sample size of 80 respondents. This sample size has been taken at convenience, according to the guidelines of the average found in the articles reviewed.

Finally, with the results obtained, a pre-feasibility study was proposed to generate behavioral patterns and measures to be taken so producers can internationalize premium products with the Mucho Mejor Ecuador brand.

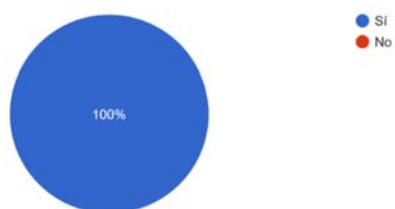
4. Research results

4.1 Consumer survey

Figure 1:

Authorization for the use of information

Este formulario tiene netamente fines académicos, los cuáles serán usados dentro de una investigación empírica. Al llenarlo, usted autoriza al uso los datos de sus respuestas.
82 respuestas

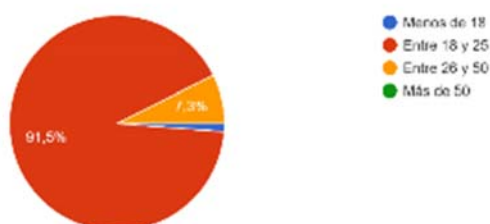


The survey has been applied, according to the studies carried out, in the abstracts of the articles reviewed; it has been evidenced that the authors analyze between 60 and 100 surveys. Due to this, it has been decided for convenience, an average of 80 surveys have been carried out, which will represent 100% of the sample of consumers. As a result, it is obtained that all respondents have authorized the use of the data of their answers for this research for academic purposes.

Figure 2:

Age of the respondents

¿Cuántos años tiene?
62 respuestas

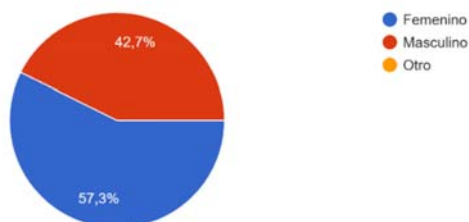


The results show that 91.5% of the respondents belong to the 18 to 25 age group, followed by 7.3%, which corresponds to the 26 to 50 age group. In third place is the under-18 age group, with 1.2%.

Figure 3:

Genre

¿Cuál es su género?
82 respuestas

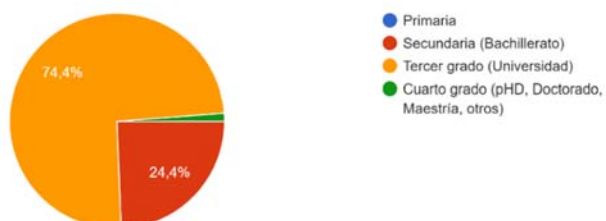


Of the total number of respondents, 57.3% were female, i.e., 47 people. And 42.7% represent the male gender, i.e., 35 people.

Figure 4:

Educational level

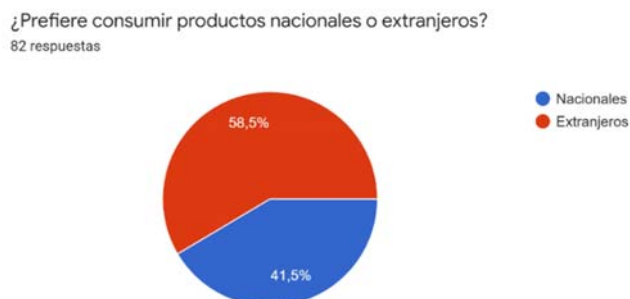
¿Cuál es su nivel de estudios?
82 respuestas



According to the results of the survey, the study indicates that 74.4%, corresponding to 61 people, represent university students. This is followed by 24.4%, which corresponds to 20 people, representing secondary studies. Finally, 1.2%, which shows a person at the level of fourth grade studies.

Figure 5:

Preference of the origin of the product



According to the results, 58.5%, or 48 people, prefer to consume foreign products, compared to 41.5%, or 34 people, who prefer to consume national products.

As the results show, the majority of those surveyed prefer foreign products, which evidences the need to carry out campaigns to strengthen local products to encourage national consumption.

Figure 6:

Mucho Mejor Ecuador brand awareness

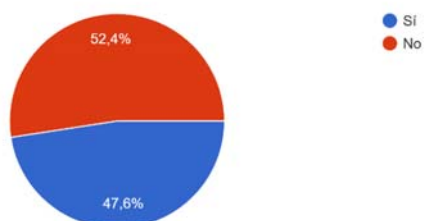


The results of the sixth question indicate that 69.5% of the respondents, representing 57 people, are aware of the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation brand. On the other hand, 30.5% of the sample, which is 25 people, stated that they did not know everything about the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation brand.

Figure 7:

Recognition of certifications

¿Se fija usted en las certificaciones que tiene un producto, al momento de adquirirlo?
82 respuestas



Of those surveyed, 52.4%, which corresponds to 43 people in the sample, do not pay attention to product certification. The difference, which is 39 people, or 47.6%, do look at the certifications that the products have, at the time of purchase.

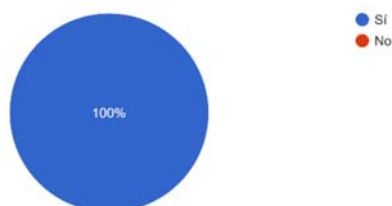
Because of this, through strengthening campaigns, it is necessary to work on the recognition of product certifications. In this case study, a country brand is proposed, and it would be essential for the development of this brand that consumers recognize the certification that the product has been produced with local products and within the country.

4.2 Interview with producers

Figure 8:

Authorization for the use of information

Este formulario tiene netamente fines académicos, los cuáles serán usados dentro de una investigación empírica. Al llenarlo, usted autoriza al uso los datos de sus respuestas.
10 respuestas



According to the reviewed articles, for convenience, a selection of ten production companies was made, as a sample of the semi-structured interviews. This is to obtain objective results, and to identify the pros and cons presented by the Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador.

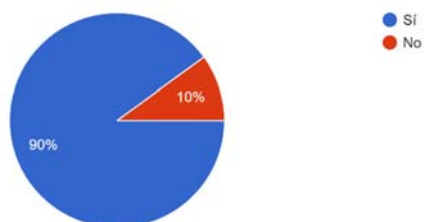
Figure 9:*Business activity*

¿A qué actividad se dedica su empresa?	
10 respuestas	
Fabricación de neumáticos.	
Fabricación de bebidas carbonatadas.	
Centro cerámico.	
Elaboración de embutidos.	
Elaboración de chocolate artesanal.	
Producción de bebidas alcohólicas y no alcohólicas.	
Exportación de flores.	
Diseño gráfico, diseño de productos como agendas, cuadernos, libretas.	
Producción y comercialización de calzado.	
Producción y comercialización de suelas de calzado.	

For better data collection, the companies selected for the interviews are in different branches of production. This, to obtain broader results and not focus on a single branch of local production industries.

Figure 10:*Knowledge about Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador*

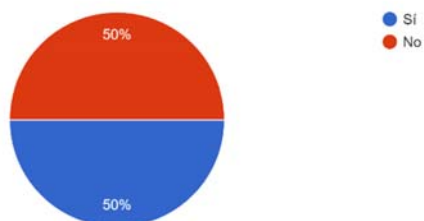
¿Ha oído hablar sobre la Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador?
10 respuestas



Regarding knowledge of the Corporation, only one company surveyed has no knowledge of Mucho Mejor Ecuador. This result is positive because it shows that the brand is known by most of the producers.

Figure 11:*Knowledge of the benefits of association to Mucho Mejor Ecuador*

¿Conoce los beneficios para empresas que otorga Mucho Mejor Ecuador?
10 respuestas

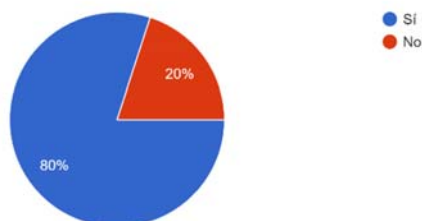


The results of the interviews were not the most encouraging. Half of the companies are not aware of the benefits that the Corporation can provide to their companies. This is evidence of the lack of information available to the companies.

Figure 12:

Attraction of the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation to production companies

¿Cree usted que Mucho Mejor Ecuador beneficia a los productores ecuatorianos?
10 respuestas



This result shows that the producing companies believe that the Corporation benefits local producers, which is a reassuring result because most of the companies believe that they can benefit from a partnership with Mucho Mejor Ecuador.

Figure 13:

Obtaining and holding the Ecuadorian "La Huella" logo

¿Su producto tiene "La Huella" de Mucho Mejor Ecuador? ¿Si? ¿No? ¿Por qué?				
10 respuestas				
No, no he tenido la oportunidad.				
No, no tenemos certificación de Mucho Mejor Ecuador porque tuvimos una mala experiencia cuando intentamos obtener la certificación.				
No, no veo muchos beneficios.				
Si.				
No, pero me parece interesante adquirirlo.				
Una parte de los productos si, porque identifican el origen de sus materias primas como el cacao.				
No, no conocemos los beneficios.				
No, no sé cual es el proceso para obtener "La Huella".				
Si, ya somos socios.				
No, no vemos muchos beneficios.				

This question was asked with the purpose of identifying the companies that have the "footprint" logo on their products and those that do not. In the same way, the results indicate that the companies are not aware of the benefits they could obtain from the association or have not had the opportunity to obtain it. It should be noted that the two companies that do have an association with Mucho Mejor Ecuador belong to the same business group.

Figure 14:

Knowledge about the cost of association



This question was included in the questionnaire to understand the obstacles that the Corporation faces when it is considered by the production companies. In this case, the answers obtained were negative. Eighty percent of those interviewed were unaware of the cost of joining Mucho Mejor Ecuador. On the other hand, the two companies belonging to the same business group are aware of the cost of association.

Figure 15:

Approval rate for partnership

¿Se asociaría a Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador? ¿Sí? ¿No? ¿Por qué?					
10 respuestas					
Dependiendo si es que representa o no un beneficio para mi empresa.					
Sí, me parece que es una empresa que beneficia tanto a los productores como a los consumidores, además valoran el producto ecuatoriano que es lo más importante.					
Sí, ya somos socios.					
No, no conocemos los beneficios.					
Sí, si es que las capacitaciones, talleres y beneficios son convenientes, estaríamos interesados en asociarnos a la Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador.					
Sí, si beneficiaría a la empresa.					
Sí, cuando hayan más ingresos.					
No, debido al costo.					
Sí, si llega a beneficiar a la empresa.					
Sí, si es que la misma es beneficiosa para la empresa.					

The answers to this question are largely positive. The production companies are willing to be part of the repository of production companies associated with Mucho Mejor Ecuador, if they get to know the benefits it could bring to their company. On the other hand, some companies are reluctant to enter an association due to the lack of knowledge of the benefits and the cost.

5. Discussion

5.1 Analysis of results.

The Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation is a company that has helped and continues to provide recognition to small, medium, and large companies. Obtaining Mucho Mejor Ecuador certification allows member companies to improve their production, finishing, and product marketing practices, and to obtain better positioning in the market.

The specific objective of this research project is to generate interest among local producers in order to strengthen the "Ecuadorian footprint" and thus gain recognition, first at the local level and progressively at the global level. Within the qualitative and quantitative analysis, consumer surveys and producer interviews were conducted in order to determine the obstacles that Mucho Mejor Ecuador presents for producers to join the corporation.

Initially, we found a lack of knowledge of factors of vital importance to producers when they want to start negotiations. Mucho Mejor Ecuador does not have a popular repository of the benefits of belonging to the corporation.

On their website they detail the potential benefits that a company could have by allying with them, but the results indicate that companies are not fully aware of the benefits they could obtain. On the other hand, there is a general lack of knowledge about how to be part of the brands associated with Mucho Mejor Ecuador. Producing companies do not have a clear understanding of the process that must be carried out to achieve the "footprint" on their products. Another important point to highlight is the lack of knowledge of the cost of subscribing to the corporation by the companies that produce goods locally.

Within the analysis of the results, it was evident in the responses of the study, the little interest generated to producers by Mucho Mejor Ecuador. The corporation has not correctly generated interest in local companies, due to the lack of information presented to them. The producers do not have the intention of acquiring the identifying logo for their brands, because they are not correctly informed of the potential benefits that Mucho Mejor Ecuador can provide to their businesses. Also, through the results, it was possible to analyze that the producers, who are aware of the subscription cost, believe that it is too high in relation to the potential benefits that the association can bring them.

With respect to the subscription price, at the time of joining Mucho Mejor Ecuador, the producers do not have a concise idea of what the price is, since the price depends on the type of company they want to join, therefore, the price varies according to the situation of the company and the commercial branch in which it is located. Mucho Mejor Ecuador has segmented the companies according to categories, and according to the category, the price is determined.

Regarding the consumer surveys, we found another type of problem, related to the recognition of product certifications, which affects Mucho Mejor Ecuador's "footprint". Most of the people surveyed agree that they know the Mucho Mejor Ecuador brand, but they really do not know the meaning of "the footprint" of the products they purchase. This is since the Corporation has not made the necessary efforts to make clear to consumers the meaning of the recognition through the logo. Another problem encountered by consumers is the preference for foreign products over domestic products. This is a tendency that is found more in young people, due to the lack of strengthening of local brands and the scarce promotion and publicity of these.

5.2 Review of currently relevant literature based on the findings of this research

In recent years, countries that produce goods and services have sought ways to make their products recognized in international markets. As an alternative to this, several producers have generated country image concepts, with the intention of producing country brands. Creating an image of international recognition helps locally produced products to be more widely accepted in international markets, since consumers know the origin of the products. With this, exports of such products are strengthened, acquiring international recognition and acceptance, depending on the quality of the goods.

In Latin America, countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Peru have developed country brands in previous years to strengthen their international image. These countries, at some point, have managed to consolidate the international acceptance of their country brand. Ecuador is also part of the countries that have made attempts to develop a country brand; however, it does not have a consolidated international image. According to Bloom Consulting (Bloom Consulting, 2022), a consulting firm specialized in measuring the performance of country and city brands, Ecuador is ranked 14th in the Americas and 78th in the world rankings. Being in this position, it is behind countries considered market competitors.

After an analysis of the situation of the other countries, it can be determined that Ecuador does not have a fully defined country brand, and this is reflected in its position in the ranking. Vanoni, in his article, in which he compares the country brands of the best consolidated countries, states the following: "[...] according to data from the World Economic Forum, we are far behind Colombia, Chile and Peru in terms of competitiveness, i.e., although the current level of investments made by Ecuador is high, from a strategic point of view, it is not everything". (Vanoni, et. al., 2018) This refers to the fact that Ecuador has not been able to establish a country image, through a country brand, at the international level. This puts it at a disadvantage, with respect to its competitors.

At the export level, Ecuador already has products that are consumed in foreign countries. There are success stories, including brands such as Gütig (mineral water) and Pacari (organic chocolate), which are produced locally and exported to Europe and the United States, among others. This is clear evidence that Ecuador, through local production, can compete with foreign products. Importing countries recognize the quality of these products, and for the same reason, they are preferred. On the other hand, most consumers do not know the place of origin of these products, because they lack an image of the identity of the place of origin.

At this point, it is important to consolidate a country brand, which is recognized internationally by consumers. Ecuador has several premium products, but they are not being exported to international markets due to the lack of support for the recognition of production quality. Most of these products are governed by the INEN standard, which certifies good production practices. People who purchase products of Ecuadorian origin abroad can identify that the manufactured products were produced under the highest quality standards and followed a production process, but they do not identify the origin of the product. The fact that brands that are already being exported need an image of recognition of the origin of the product, positions Mucho Mejor Ecuador as a viable solution to this demand. In this way, the Ecuadorian "footprint" would acquire international recognition through these products, which would acquire an image of recognition of the product's origin.

Having analyzed the possibilities of internationalization of the country brand Mucho Mejor Ecuador, through its logo "the footprint" (Appendix A), it is important to know what should be done to become an internationally recognized brand for premium products manufactured in the national territory. The fact that there is already an entity in charge of standardizing manufacturing production processes (INEN) would help the internationalization process of "the footprint". The fact that INEN certification and Mucho Mejor Ecuador's Ecuadorian footprint certification are associated would generate interest on the part of producers in acquiring the certifications, strengthen local production, and generate opportunities for quality recognition, which would be reflected in a certification that recognizes the origin of the products plus the benefit of knowing that the products were produced with the highest quality indexes.

For future research, it is recommended that research be conducted on strengthening the Mucho Mejor Ecuador certification.

6. Conclusion

With the analysis of the possible solutions to these problems, we can identify that the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation, through the allocation of the "Ecuadorian footprint", has different market opportunities, both local and international. The producing companies are open to obtaining a partnership with the Corporation, if the benefits they would get from it are clear, and they contribute solidly. By incorporating measures that will enable the population, initially local, to become familiar with the Mucho Mejor Ecuador logo, not only as a brand logo but also as an image of quality, the Corporation can expand its frontiers to international markets. Today, Ecuador already has products that are consumed in international markets; therefore, the country brand could partner with these companies in order to be recognized as a logo of excellence of local production in foreign markets.

As a solution to the problems of image recognition, it is feasible that, to strengthen the image of Mucho Mejor Ecuador, especially among the population between 16 and 65 years of age, advertising campaigns in digital media should be carried out. This, with the aim of expanding brand awareness, at the level of the working population. In this way, the brand will become recognized by current and future generations, who are the most common users of virtual platforms. Also, an advertising campaign should be carried out at a general level, with the objective that "the footprint" of Mucho Mejor Ecuador is identified, not only as a logo, but as an image of recognition of quality products, made with the best raw materials and the best industrial techniques, in the country.

As viable solutions to the obstacles of generating interest to companies, a fair directed by Mucho Mejor Ecuador staff is proposed, in which product manufacturing companies are invited, whose brands meet the requirements to be part of the association, to provide them with the relevant information, which producers are unaware of. It is also proposed as a solution that personalized talks be given, depending on the commercial sector in which the company is located, to provide specific information, such as subscription prices, benefits of belonging to the association, internal and external commercial advantages, and other details about the Corporation, to the managers of these companies. In this way, it will be possible to solve the problem of the lack of knowledge of the benefits that companies that become members of Mucho Mejor Ecuador can obtain. As a solution to the lack of knowledge of the real subscription price, it is proposed that a campaign be carried out in conjunction with government authorities to inform companies that produce goods internally of the real cost of subscriptions.

Finally, the association between certifications between Mucho Mejor Ecuador (Huella Ecuatoriana) and the Ecuadorian Institute of Standardization (INEN) is considered relevant. The purpose of this is to generate a stronger certification with greater recognition, both locally and internationally, and to generate interest from local producers. Once the certification that consolidates INEN and the footprint is acquired, the producers will have the initiative to acquire the logo recognizing the quality and origin of the products. Once this is achieved, and through the export of

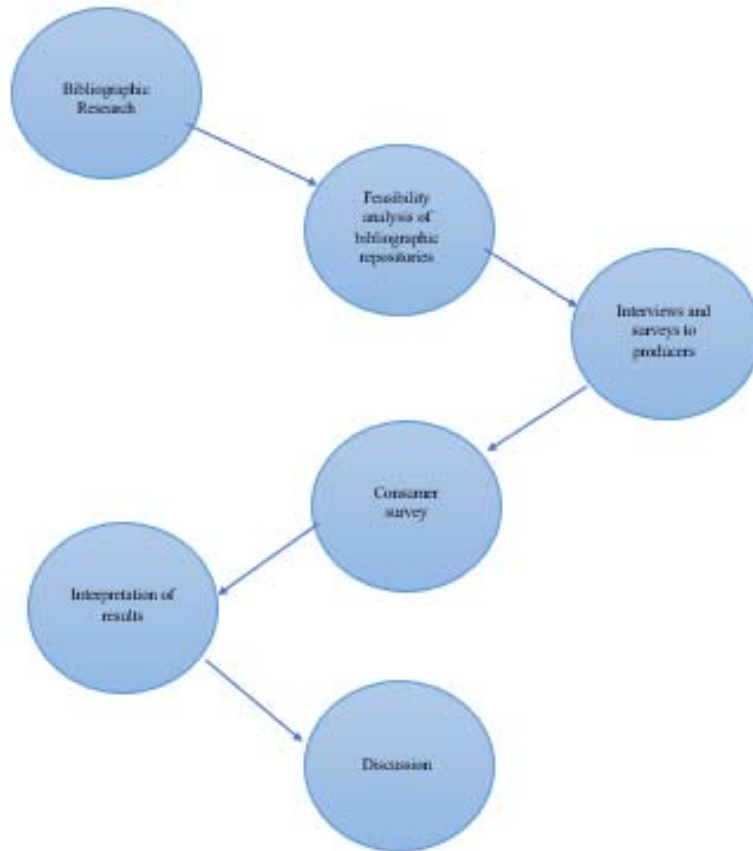
products, it is possible to generate the identification of the certification in international markets, as a country brand, which recognizes the best production standards, locally produced.

7. Appendix

Appendix A: "Huella" (fingerprint) Mucho Mejor Ecuador



Source: Mucho Mejor Ecuador, 2022. Author: Daniel Molina

Appendix B:***Methodology***

Source: Format of the empirical article for Juridical Sciences, 2022. Author: Daniel Molina

Appendix C:

Reviewed papers and articles

Revista Electrónica	Título del artículo	Autor	Año de publicación	link del artículo
SCOPUS	Empire, political economy, and the diffusion of choco	Fattacciu, Irene	2020	https://www.scopus.com
SCOPUS	Is Marine Stewardship Council's ecolabel a rising tide	Lim, K.H., Hu, W	2018	https://www.scopus.com
SCOPUS	Ecuadorian Farmers Facing Coffee and Cocoa Producti	Sepúlveda, W.S.	2018	https://www.scopus.com
SCOPUS	Carbon footprint of premium quality export bananas:	Iriarte, A., Alme	2014	https://www.scopus.com
SCOPUS	Dependency Revisited: Ecuador's (Re)Insertions into	Alarcón, P.	2022	https://www.scopus.com
SCOPUS	Geographical diversification of Ecuadorian mango exp	Luisa Nicole, Q.C	2021	https://www.scopus.com
SCOPUS	Factors which favor the exports of cocoa grains from E	Ureta Santana, D	2021	https://www.scopus.com
SCOPUS	las 41 and its impact on the price per box of ecuadoria	Herrera Freire, A	2021	https://www.scopus.com
SCOPUS	International marketing of ecuadorian banana and ba	Banchón, J.M., A	2021	https://www.scopus.com
SCOPUS	Cleaner Production Implementation in a Cocoa Proces	Diéguez-Santana	2021	https://www.scopus.com
EUMED.NET	"Marcas sectoriales", Revista Caribeña de Ciencias Sod	Irene Ancin A.	2018	https://www.eumed.net
REDALYC	Country Branding and its effect on the consumer in th	Kilduff, Kerry; N	2017	dalyc.org/pdf/2
REDALYC	Um estudo teórico sobre marca-país e sua gestão	Montanari;	2018	dalyc.org/journ
MDPI	Country Brand Equity: The Decision Making of Corpora	Arup Barua; Alex	2020	dpi.com/2071-
Palgrave MacMillan	Place Branding and Public Diplomacy	Robert Govers; J	2019	grave.com/gp/j
REDALYC	Marca país Ecuador: un análisis comparativo entre Col	Giussepe Vanon	2018	dalyc.org/journ

Source: Universidad del Azuay's Library, 2022. Author: Daniel Molina

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