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**MARKETING PLAN FOR THE
INTERNATIONALIZATION OF TOQUILLA
STRAW HATS BY THE COMPANY PAMAR Y
COMPAÑÍA IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Project prior to obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in International
Studies

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To my parents, for being the pillar of my life, for their unconditional love, constant effort, and for teaching me, through their example, the value of honest work and perseverance.

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And to all Ecuadorian artisans, especially those who dedicate their lives to keeping the tradition of the toquilla straw hat alive. This research is also a tribute to their talent, history, and legacy.

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MARKETING PLAN FOR THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF TOQUILLA STRAW HATS BY THE COMPANY PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

ABSTRACT

This research aims to design an international marketing plan for the Cuenca-based company PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, specialized in the handcrafted production of toquilla straw hats, in order to facilitate its entry into the European Union market, particularly in countries such as Germany and France. Despite the cultural recognition of these products, their internationalization faces significant barriers, such as lack of commercial strategies, regulatory adaptation, and brand positioning. The study follows a qualitative and descriptive methodology based on interviews with the company, documentary review, and strategic tools such as PESTEL analysis, SWOT analysis, and consumer profiling. The results present a comprehensive marketing mix plan, cultural positioning, and market entry strategy aligned with values of sustainability, authenticity, and fair trade. This proposal seeks to strengthen the company's competitiveness, promote the international projection of Ecuadorian artisanal heritage, and generate sustainable opportunities for producing communities.

Keywords:

Toquilla straw hats, internationalization, international marketing, sustainability, fair trade, artisanal products.

PLAN DE MARKETING PARA LA INTERNACIONALIZACIÓN DE LOS SOMBREROS DE PAJA TOQUILLA DE LA EMPRESA PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA EN LA UNIÓN EUROPEA

RESUMEN

La presente investigación tiene como objetivo diseñar un plan de marketing internacional para la empresa cuencana PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, especializada en la elaboración artesanal de sombreros de paja toquilla, con el fin de facilitar su inserción en el mercado de la Unión Europea, especialmente en países como Alemania y Francia. A pesar del reconocimiento cultural de estos productos, su internacionalización enfrenta barreras como la falta de estrategias comerciales, adaptación normativa y posicionamiento de marca. El estudio utiliza una metodología cualitativa y descriptiva basada en entrevistas con la empresa, revisión documental y herramientas estratégicas como el análisis PESTEL, FODA y estudio del consumidor. Los resultados proponen un plan integral de marketing-mix, posicionamiento cultural y estrategia de entrada al mercado europeo, alineado con los valores de sostenibilidad, autenticidad y comercio justo. Esta propuesta busca fortalecer la competitividad de la empresa, impulsar la proyección internacional del patrimonio artesanal ecuatoriano y generar oportunidades sostenibles para las comunidades productoras.

Palabras Clave:

Sombreros de paja toquilla, internacionalización, marketing internacional, sostenibilidad, comercio justo, productos artesanales

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	II
ABSTRACT	III
RESUMEN	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS	IV
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	VI
List of tables.....	vi
List of figures.....	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	4
1.1. Fundamental Concepts of International Marketing	4
1.1.1 <i>Internationalization of SMEs</i>	4
1.1.2 <i>International Marketing</i>	5
1.1.3 <i>Cultural Products and Intangible Heritage</i>	7
1.2. Relevant Theories and Models	8
1.2.1 <i>Internationalization of Artisanal and Cultural Products</i>	8
1.2.2 <i>International Marketing of SMEs in the Artisanal Sector</i>	9
1.2.3 <i>Artisanal Products in the European Union</i>	10
1.2.4 <i>Branding Strategies in Luxury Markets</i>	10
1.2.5 <i>Success Cases in the Internationalization of Artisanal Products</i>	11
1.2.6 <i>Sustainability in the Internationalization of Artisanal Products</i>	12
CHAPTER 2 ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS	13
2.1 Analysis of the Current Situation.....	13
2.1.1 <i>Internal Analysis</i>	13
2.1.1.1 <i>Organizational Resources and Capabilities</i>	14
2.1.1.2 <i>Current Marketing Analysis</i>	16
2.1.2 <i>External Analysis</i>	17
2.1.2.1 <i>Product Presence in International Markets</i>	17
2.1.2.2 <i>Product Life Cycle</i>	17
2.2 Analysis of the Environment and Target Market.....	17
2.2.1 <i>Product and Company Diagnosis</i>	17
2.2.2 <i>PESTEL Analysis</i>	19
2.2.3 <i>SWOT Analysis</i>	20
2.2.4 <i>International Consumer Analysis</i>	20
2.2.5 <i>Competitor Analysis</i>	21
2.3 Risk and Opportunity Analysis in Internationalization	22
2.3.1 <i>Political, Economic, and Commercial Risks</i>	23
2.3.2 <i>Operational, Logistical, and Regulatory Risks</i>	24
2.3.3 <i>Market Opportunities</i>	24
CHAPTER 3 DESIGN OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETING PLAN	26
3.1. Definition of Marketing Objectives	26
3.2. Segmentation and Positioning Strategy	27
3.4.1. Segmentation	27

3.4.2. Positioning	28
3.3. Development of Marketing Policies (Marketing Mix – 4Ps)	29
3.3.1. <i>Product Strategy</i>	29
3.3.2. <i>Pricing Strategy</i>	30
3.3.3. <i>Distribution Strategy</i>	30
3.3.4. <i>Promotion Strategy</i>	31
3.4. International Market Entry Strategy	31
3.4.1. <i>Specialized Direct Export</i>	32
3.4.2. <i>Piggyback</i>	32
3.4.3. <i>Participation in Trade Fairs and Commercial Missions</i>	32
3.5. Financial Evaluation and Estimated Budget	33
3.6. Monitoring and Control of the Plan	34
CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	36
4.1. Summary of Findings.....	36
4.2. Feasibility Assessment of the Plan	36
4.3. Implications and Contributions of the Study	37
4.4. Limitations and Challenges of the Study	38
4.5. Recommendations for Plan Implementation.....	38
REFERENCES	40

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

List of tables

Table 1 PESTEL Analysis for PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA	19
Table 2 SWOT Analysis of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA	20
Table 3 Comparison between PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA and its main competitors.....	22
Table 4 Consumer Profile	28
Table 5 Data TradeMap.....	32
Table 6 Estimated budget	34

List of figures

Figure 1 PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, Cultural Identity.....	13
Figure 2 Hat.....	15
Figure 3 Labeling	15
Figure 4 Packaging.....	16

MARKETING PLAN FOR THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF TOQUILLA STRAW HATS BY THE COMPANY PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of artisanal products has become a strategic pathway to promote the economic, social, and cultural development of countries with a rich heritage, such as Ecuador. In this context, toquilla straw hats stand out not only for their design and functionality but also for the profound symbolic value they embody. Their recognition as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO reflects not only their beauty but also the history, traditions, and artisanal craftsmanship of hundreds of Ecuadorian families, especially in regions like Cuenca and Montecristi.

These hats, handcrafted using ancestral techniques, represent a tangible expression of cultural identity. However, despite their international prestige, Ecuadorian artisanal products like toquilla straw hats face significant barriers when entering competitive markets such as those of the European Union. Strict regulations, cultural differences, emerging consumption dynamics, and well-established competition make it essential to develop international marketing strategies that highlight the authentic value of the product, differentiate it in the market, and properly position it before demanding consumers.

In response to this reality, the purpose of this thesis is to design an international marketing plan for the Cuenca-based company PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, which specializes in the artisanal production of toquilla straw hats. The aim is to facilitate its internationalization process in specific markets like France and Germany through a strategic approach, enhancing its competitiveness without losing the artisanal and cultural essence of the product. As a native of Cuenca, I consider it essential to preserve and project to the world the productive and cultural values that are a vital part of our identity. This proposal arises from a personal commitment to provide a concrete tool that connects the work of artisans with global consumers who value sustainability, authenticity, and tradition.

The foundation of this study is a specific problem: while toquilla straw hats enjoy cultural recognition and aesthetic appeal, their presence in international markets remains limited. Ecuadorian SMEs face numerous challenges in establishing themselves globally, including a lack of understanding of European regulations, the absence of strategies tailored to the foreign consumer profile, and a weak presence on digital platforms and commercial

networks. Additionally, there is a pressing need to develop differentiated value propositions that go beyond merely selling the product and create a meaningful, emotional, and symbolic connection with the consumer.

In this context, the research aims to provide PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA with a practical model that allows it to adapt its commercial offering to the demands of the European market, where consumers increasingly value handcrafted, ethical, and sustainable products. The risk of not having a clear internationalization plan could result in missed growth opportunities for the company, as well as the undervaluation of products with the potential to represent Ecuador with dignity abroad.

The general objective is to propose a strategic marketing plan for the internationalization of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA's toquilla straw hats in the European Union, maximizing their competitiveness and adapting their offerings to the cultural, regulatory, and commercial demands of the European market. Based on this general objective, the following specific objectives are defined:

- I Identify the markets within the European Union with the greatest potential for the commercialization of toquilla straw hats, considering geographic, economic, and cultural factors that influence product acceptance.
- Determine the most suitable market entry mode for PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, based on its resources, capabilities, and characteristics, evaluating options such as direct exporting, strategic alliances, or participation in international trade fairs.
- Develop an international marketing mix strategy that includes product adaptation, pricing strategies, selection of distribution channels, and communication tactics aimed at differentiation and cultural positioning of the product.
- Establish an implementation plan that includes timelines, resource allocation, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure an effective and sustainable entry of the company into the European market.

Based on the research objectives outlined above, a central question arises: What international marketing strategies should PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA implement to facilitate its entry into the European Union market, highlighting its cultural value, artisanal authenticity, and ensuring compliance with the sustainability and fair-trade regulations required in this market?

To respond this question, a qualitative and descriptive methodology was chosen, as it is suitable for exploring complex phenomena related to perception, cultural values, and consumption dynamics in international markets. Primary information was gathered through a conversation with Mr. Pablo Munzón, owner of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, held in Cuenca, Ecuador. During this meeting, Mr. Munzón shared his experiences and challenges in the internationalization process of his company, providing a direct perspective on the opportunities and obstacles faced in expanding into European markets. This information was complemented by secondary sources such as trade reports, databases (Trade Map), European legislation on sustainability and fair trade, as well as specialized academic literature.

Analytical tools such as the PESTEL model, SWOT analysis, consumer and competitor studies were used, which made it possible to identify the opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses that PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA must take into account. This methodology, based on the approach proposed by Bernal Torres (2010), enabled the development of a coherent proposal aligned with both the reality of the company and the demands of the international environment.

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to build a bridge between the local and the global, between Ecuadorian artisanal tradition and the demands of an increasingly conscious, ethical, and connected international market. It is hoped that this proposal will not only strengthen a flagship company like PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA but also contribute to highlighting the value of our cultural roots and the potential of our heritage products in international settings.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Fundamental Concepts of International Marketing

1.1.1 Internationalization of SMEs

The internationalization of SMEs represents a complex challenge, especially for companies dedicated to cultural and artisanal products, such as PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA's toquilla straw hats, which aim to expand into the European market. Traditionally, business growth models focused on closed innovation and vertical integration, where companies relied solely on their own internal resources and capabilities to innovate and compete in the global market. The importance of internationalization grows as companies become increasingly integrated into the global economy.

However, by the end of the 20th century, companies began shifting from a closed innovation approach to a new model: open innovation. This method allows businesses to leverage both internal and external sources of knowledge, enabling them to adapt more quickly to the demands of international markets. Additionally, it allows them to respond more agilely to environmental changes and enhance their competitiveness.

The open innovation model, initially adopted by multinational corporations and high-tech SMEs, is now also being embraced by low-tech companies. This approach allows SMEs to overcome resource limitations and access new knowledge. Although initially less common, some low-tech companies have begun to implement this innovation model to adapt to international markets, demonstrating that company size is not a barrier to implementation. For SMEs, innovation networks become a key element in overcoming resource constraints and gaining access to new knowledge, an essential factor for enhancing global competitiveness (Darío et al., 2022).

The internationalization of products such as toquilla straw hats depends not only on a company's internal capacity to innovate, but also on its ability to establish strategic relationships with other actors in the innovation system, such as universities, governments, and other companies in the artisanal sector, that can facilitate market entry and adaptation, particularly in regions like Europe. Furthermore, as noted by authors like Dario, national innovation systems and public policies that promote collaboration and knowledge transfer help reduce growth barriers, providing SMEs with a favorable environment for internationalization and the development of sustainable competitive advantages.

Ecuadorian companies that embark on an internationalization process face various obstacles and barriers when entering new, especially international, markets. This is a process that requires thorough preparation and the identification of the necessary means to overcome such challenges, as it influences both market behavior and consumer responses. For an exporting company, the first step is to comply with the certifications required by international clients. Even if the company lacks a track record in that specific market, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of it prior to entry. Moreover, Ecuadorian exporters must be familiar with the requirements and potential variables that could affect their product when entering a new market (Banchón et al., 2021).

When it comes to the internationalization of SMEs, according to a survey conducted by Banchón et al. (2021) 95% of exporting companies consider product quality, international market coverage, and sales value to be key factors in the internationalization process. It is important to emphasize that the quality of the exported product is an essential characteristic in international markets, based on the experience of Ecuadorian SMEs.

1.1.2 International Marketing

International marketing is understood as the set of strategies and practices designed to identify and satisfy the needs of consumers in different countries, while adapting to the cultural, economic, and legal conditions of each market. Today, the interest of companies in adopting new and improved marketing strategies has increased significantly, strengthening the role of international marketing in connecting organizations with consumers, as well as in promoting their products and services. International marketing is a strategic tool that enables companies to develop their business plans, establish pricing strategies, and promote their product or service offerings in global markets. Unlike domestic marketing, international marketing operates across multiple countries, which requires adaptation to different cultural, economic, and legal environments. However, both share the central objective of meeting customer needs and generating profitability (Hoang Tien Nguyen y Dang Thi Phuong Chi, 2019).

According to Hoang Tien Nguyen y Dang Thi Phuong Chi (2019), international marketing plays a fundamental role in global business strategy, enabling companies to compete effectively in a context of globalization and market expansion. These authors emphasize that improvements in communication and transportation have facilitated access

to new markets, which compels companies to adopt marketing strategies that respond to the specific characteristics of each region in order to increase their global competitiveness.

Petrusevska (2019) emphasizes that global marketing strategies must consider whether to adapt or standardize products and brand messages, depending on the receptiveness and cultural context of the local market and the target market the company aims to reach. This perspective highlights how international marketing requires constant evaluation of trends and preferences in foreign markets to ensure companies can establish an effective connection with consumers across different regions of the world. Moreover, international marketing allows companies to meet consumers' basic needs on a global scale, creating a connection between company and customer while responding to current trends. According to the author, some advantages of international marketing include: reduced costs and inefficiencies in product or service production, the opportunity to transform products to meet the needs of other markets, the creation of new brands and innovative ideas for international markets, and the improvement of infrastructure for proper adaptation to global demand, among others (Petrusevska, 2019).

Likewise, Peprah (2017) explores the cultural influence in global marketing and emphasizes that understanding cultural differences is essential for developing successful international marketing strategies. According to his study, marketing practices must be adapted to respect and align with the values and traditions of the target market, which increases the effectiveness of marketing strategies and enhances brand perception on a global scale. According to Peprah (2017) several factors motivate companies to develop international marketing strategies. These include economic treaties between regions, market expectations and demands, technological development, the need to optimize costs, rising quality standards, advancements in communication and transportation, the dynamism of global economic growth, and the opportunities to leverage strategic advantages in other markets.

Global marketing strategies become a key tool for overcoming these barriers and positioning products in a competitive context. Exporting companies must be familiar with export procedures and the variables that could impact commercialization in a new market (Civelek et al., 2024). In this regard, sectors such as Ecuador's banana industry, which has a strong presence in international markets, serve as a reference for understanding the effective implementation of international marketing strategies and the adaptation of products to specific regulations (Banchón et al., 2021).

SMEs often develop marketing capabilities that differ from conventional practices due to their unique organizational characteristics. These companies are typically characterized by centralized management, low specialization, simple information systems, and intuitive, short-term strategies. Additionally, many face limitations in commercial resources and experience, which can hinder the implementation of international strategies (Jimenez Barrera et al., 2017).

In the context of internationalization, communication and promotion become essential tools. When entering new markets with specific customer profiles, SMEs must creatively interpret and meet the needs of the environment in order to strengthen their value proposition. This involves presenting their artisanal products, such as toquilla straw hats, in a way that highlights both their functionality and their cultural and aesthetic value, thereby increasing their meaning and appeal in the market (García et al., 2017). In this regard, innovation and creativity are key for SMEs to remain competitive and to adapt their products and processes to customer expectations, especially in international markets (Cuevas-Vargas et al., 2020).

However, SMEs also face challenges such as market variability, competition, and the need to reduce costs without compromising their innovative capacity. This situation leads many companies to adopt uncertainty-reduction strategies, such as outsourcing, or to focus on resource optimization in order to improve efficiency without significantly increasing expenses (Cuevas-Vargas et al., 2020). In this way, marketing becomes not only a tool to enhance product value, but also a driver of sustainable and conscious growth that positively impacts economic development, job creation, and social cohesion in an international context (Cuevas-Vargas et al., 2020).

In conclusion, international marketing is essential for the expansion of companies in global markets, as its proper implementation enables them to overcome trade barriers, adapt to cultural demands, and enhance competitiveness. For SMEs, the implementation of international marketing strategies is fundamental, as it facilitates their positioning in foreign markets and contributes to the development of sustainable competitive advantages.

1.1.3 Cultural Products and Intangible Heritage

The market for artisanal products in the European Union has proven to be a relevant and growing sector, driven by consumer preferences for goods that promote cultural authenticity and sustainability. According to a study conducted by World Crafts Council

Europe (2023), his market is valued at approximately 50 billion euros, with high demand for products such as ceramics, textiles, and handmade items, reflecting its impact on the European economy. European consumers tend to make between one and four purchases of these goods annually, showing a growing interest in traditional artisanal techniques and a tendency to support the local economy. This consumer interest reflects a strong cultural and heritage awareness, opening opportunities for artisanal businesses in their internationalization process (World Crafts Council Europe, 2023).

The internationalization of artisanal products depends not only on their cultural appeal but also on how they are positioned in foreign markets. In this context, Teixeira y Ferreira (2019) emphasize that artisanal products can play a key role in enhancing regional tourism competitiveness. Using the case of Madeira, the authors highlight that innovation and internationalization strategies are essential to fully capitalize on the economic and cultural benefits offered by artisanal goods. The study also underscores that collaboration with local entities and the implementation of sustainable business models are crucial to ensuring long-term success in the commercialization of artisanal products.

1.2. Relevant Theories and Models

1.2.1 Internationalization of Artisanal and Cultural Products

The internationalization of artisanal products has become a relevant topic in the context of global trade, where artisanal communities face both challenges and opportunities. According to Rana (2023), ethical fashion can serve as a channel to empower artisans and promote sustainable development within their communities. By focusing on responsible production and valuing artisanal work, ethical fashion brands are proposed not only to help preserve traditional techniques but also to facilitate the inclusion of these products in international markets, ultimately resulting in economic benefits for artisans.

Ethical fashion can be a powerful tool for empowering artisanal communities by integrating them into the value chain of responsible fashion. Rana's (2023) study demonstrates how collaboration between fashion designers, brands, and artisans not only improves the artisans' economic conditions but also helps preserve their cultural traditions. The research highlights that ethical fashion initiatives, by offering fair wages, promoting transparent supply chains, and providing opportunities to learn new skills, can enhance artisans' livelihoods and foster innovation in the global fashion market. Moreover, the study underscores how increasing consumer awareness about sustainability is driving demand for

ethical products, encouraging the industry to commit more deeply to responsible practices. This blend of traditional techniques with modern designs benefits both artisans and the broader development of sustainable economic growth. It also emphasizes the importance of collaboration among designers, governments, and organizations to strengthen and support artisanal communities.

Likewise, the use of modern technologies and innovation in design can be crucial for enhancing the resilience of artisanal communities. Herrera et al., (2018) discuss the impact of Fab Labs in Latin America, where the intersection of contemporary design and traditional craftsmanship enables artisans to adapt to the demands of the global market. The research suggests that access to digital fabrication tools and training in new techniques can create new opportunities for the export of artisanal products, thereby strengthening local economies and fostering a sense of community among artisans.

1.2.2 International Marketing of SMEs in the Artisanal Sector

The internationalization of SMEs in the artisanal sector largely depends on their capacity for innovation and their ability to adapt to the cultural preferences of target markets. Sánchez Medina et al. (2021) analyzed how artisanal SMEs in Mexico face obstacles in their internationalization process, highlighting that innovation in products and processes allows them to differentiate themselves in the global market. Similarly, Ferreira y Calheiros Lobo (2023) emphasize that innovation is essential for the success of SMEs abroad, as it enables them to adapt to the evolving demands of international consumers and fosters competitiveness through differentiation. This approach is supported by Au Yong Oliveira (2023), who argues that companies must develop adaptive strategies that respect the cultural characteristics of each market, optimizing their positioning and acceptance on a global scale.

The internationalization of artisanal products requires marketing strategies that are tailored to the cultural values and expectations of the target market. Companies seeking global expansion must develop a marketing approach that combines standardization and adaptation to maximize product acceptance in foreign markets. In this context, studies by Kotler & Keller (2016) highlight the importance of branding and storytelling in the marketing of products with high cultural value.

Moreover, the cultural authenticity of artisanal products allows SMEs to capture attention in niche markets, where demand for unique and culturally representative goods gives these companies a significant competitive advantage (Baldegger & Wild, 2019). Thus,

although the challenges of internationalization for SMEs in the artisanal sector are numerous, the combination of innovation and cultural adaptation emerges as a comprehensive strategy for achieving success in the global market.

1.2.3 Artisanal Products in the European Union

The article "An Exploration of the Relevance between Sustainable Craft and Service Design Based on a Literature Review Study, (2023)" explores how sustainability in craftsmanship influences consumer purchasing decisions within the European context. It highlights that artisanal products incorporating sustainable practices not only meet the growing demand for ethics and social responsibility but also offer a significant competitive advantage in an increasingly conscious market.

For SMEs seeking to internationalize their products, this implies the need to adapt their offerings and marketing strategies to align with the expectations of European consumers, who highly value authenticity and sustainability in the products they choose to purchase. This approach can not only increase the chances of success in the European Union but also strengthen the cultural identity of artisanal products, such as toquilla straw hats, by linking their history and production to principles of sustainability and social responsibility (Zhang et al., 2023).

1.2.4 Branding Strategies in Luxury Markets

In the context of the internationalization of artisanal products, branding strategies in the luxury market play a crucial role by enabling locally rooted and culturally significant products to position themselves in demanding markets. Waran (2023) suggests that, to compete in luxury markets, brands must emphasize the authenticity and cultural value of their products as key differentiators. This approach is especially relevant for PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA and its toquilla straw hats, as highlighting cultural heritage and artisanal craftsmanship can create a competitive advantage in the European market. In such a context, where consumers seek authenticity and exclusivity, products like toquilla straw hats can capture a niche market that values both the story and the quality behind each piece.

Moreover, Venkates Waran (2023) argues that cultural adaptation and brand storytelling are essential elements for gaining appeal in international luxury markets, as European consumers value sustainability and social commitment reflected in heritage products. This principle is highly applicable to the internationalization strategy for toquilla

straw hats, as their marketing should emphasize not only functionality and aesthetics but also their connection to Ecuadorian heritage and the sustainability of their production. In this regard, an effective branding strategy that integrates cultural elements can enhance the perceived value of the product, helping it stand out in a market saturated with global luxury options (Venkates Waran, 2023).

1.2.5 Success Cases in the Internationalization of Artisanal Products

A notable example of successful internationalization of artisanal products comes from the region of Galapa in Colombia, where local communities have implemented international marketing strategies that combine the preservation of traditional techniques with adaptation to international quality standards. The study on Galapa highlights how crafts, particularly palm hats, have successfully entered international markets thanks to innovations in production processes and the implementation of marketing strategies that emphasize authenticity and cultural value (Lechuga Cardozo et al., 2020).

These strategies have not only increased the competitiveness of the products in foreign markets but have also generated economic benefits for artisanal communities, promoting a model of sustainable development. The case of Galapa demonstrates how SMEs can leverage their cultural identity as a key differentiator in international markets, an important lesson for the internationalization strategy of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA's toquilla straw hats. In this regard, applying the lessons from the Galapa case to the expansion strategy toward the European Union could be crucial, as the connection to cultural heritage and sustainable practices becomes a valuable asset for attracting European consumers who are conscious of sustainability and cultural value (Lechuga Cardozo et al., 2020).

The internationalization of artisanal products from Latin America to the European Union presents a significant challenge, but also great opportunities when properly leveraged. One exemplary success case is documented by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in its study on export pioneers. This report analyzes transformative experiences, such as those of the blueberry and avocado sectors in Argentina and Mexico, highlighting how innovation, market understanding, and adaptation to international regulations can be key to export success. Although the study does not focus exclusively on handicrafts, it provides valuable lessons on internationalization strategies that are applicable to any product with cultural identity (Furano, 2011).

Another significant example of successful internationalization of culturally-identified products is the case of Pacari Chocolate, a Cuenca-based company that has positioned itself in international markets through a business model grounded in sustainability and fair trade. Founded by Santiago Peralta and Carla Barboto, Pacari has won more than 400 international awards thanks to its focus on organic and biodynamic chocolate production, emphasizing traceability and the quality of Ecuadorian cacao. Its differentiation strategy has been key to its expansion into demanding markets such as the European Union and the United States, where consumers increasingly value ethical and sustainable production. Pacari's success demonstrates that the combination of innovation, quality, and social responsibility can generate a significant impact in the internationalization of culturally identified products. It offers valuable lessons for the export strategy of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA's toquilla straw hats (Poncini, 2024).

1.2.6 Sustainability in the Internationalization of Artisanal Products

Sustainability has emerged as a crucial factor in the value chain of artisanal products, especially in the context of internationalization toward conscious and demanding markets such as those in Europe. Nur et al. (2023) analyze the environmental impacts of the supply chain in artisanal chocolate production in Indonesia, using a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) methodology to evaluate critical stages in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, eutrophication, and depletion of abiotic resources. This approach highlights how reducing environmental impact in stages such as harvesting and processing can enhance the sustainability of the final product and, consequently, its acceptance in sustainability-focused markets.

Additionally, Prados et al. (2022) conducted a bibliometric analysis reviewing the conceptual evolution of sustainability in the artisanal sector, identifying how this practice responds not only to ethical demands but also to economic and cultural criteria. Their research reveals that both consumers and communities increasingly value sustainable products that respect the environment and promote local economic development, an aspect that is crucial for the competitiveness of artisanal SMEs in the international market.

CHAPTER 2

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

2.1 Analysis of the Current Situation

2.1.1 Internal Analysis

2.1.1.1 Company History Overview

PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA is a Cuenca-based company with over three decades of experience. According to Mr. Pablo Munzón, the current legal representative, the company was founded in 1985 in the Lazareto neighborhood, Bellavista sector, although its legal incorporation was formalized in 1994. The founder, Mr. Humberto Jara, had previously worked in well-known local companies in the sector, such as Dorfzaun and Serrano Hat, both highly regarded in the city, where he gained valuable experience in hat pressing and finishing. With that foundation and an initial team of ten people, he decided to launch his own venture.

Since then, the company has remained a family-run enterprise, passing down its knowledge through generations. Its artisanal approach, the quality of its finishes, and the exclusivity of its designs have allowed it to establish itself as a regional cultural reference. Currently, PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA produces toquilla straw hats, handcrafted bags, and berets, targeting both local clients and international buyers. In fact, it has already exported to countries such as France and Panama, setting an important precedent for its internationalization potential.

Figure 1
PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, Cultural Identity



2.1.1.1 Organizational Resources and Capabilities

- **Human Resources**

The company has a team of approximately 20 workers. Many of them have experience in various stages of the artisanal process, from design to pressing. This ensures that each product maintains a high standard of quality and authenticity.

- **Productive Capacity**

PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA produces more than 3,000 hats per month, in addition to other items such as bags and berets. Production is adapted to the demand of both national and international clients.

- **Technology**

The process remains entirely artisanal, although some traditional tools adapted to facilitate production have been incorporated. This combination of tradition and innovation preserves the unique character of the product.

- **International Marketing**

Currently, the company does not have a specialized international marketing department, nor has it developed specific strategies to position itself abroad. This represents one of the main opportunities for improvement on its path toward internationalization.

- **Financial Resources**

PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA operates with its own resources, although it has occasionally accessed external financing. Its financial situation is stable, with a medium level of resources that allows it to operate independently, though with certain limitations for large-scale projects.

- **Logistical Capacity**

During the pandemic, they faced several logistical challenges but have managed to overcome them. Today, the company ships through local carriers or specialized companies, depending on each client or order volume.

- **Use of Internet and Internal Organization**

The company has a presence on social media, but its use is not focused on e-commerce. This channel is not yet an active part of its commercial strategy, although it represents a path with great potential for the future.

- **Product Presentation**

As previously described, PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA maintains an artisanal and sustainable approach in its toquilla straw hats, which is reflected in their presentation and

labeling. These attributes, addressed in the internal analysis, are differentiating elements in the company's projection toward international markets.

Figure 2
Hat



Note: Its artisanal design and the quality of the finishes, representative of traditional Ecuadorian craftsmanship, stand out.

Figure 3
Labeling



Note: The labeling highlights the authenticity and cultural origin of the hat.

Figure 4
Packaging



Note: The packaging reflects a sustainable presentation, with visual elements that reinforce the product's identity.

2.1.1.2 Current Marketing Analysis

- **Distribution**

They use two main channels: direct sales to individual consumers (especially at local fairs or events) and sales to exporters, who purchase large volumes for international commercialization. Currently, they have coverage in both the national market and some international markets.

- **Promotion**

Their communication strategy is limited. They occasionally participate in fairs and maintain basic activity on social media. They also use direct marketing with their regular clients. The messages they convey focus on quality, artisanal value, and the tradition behind their products.

- **Target Audience**

1. Local consumers who value exclusive products.
2. Exporters interested in bulk purchasing.
3. International distributors seeking products with cultural value.

2.1.2 External Analysis

2.1.2.1 Product Presence in International Markets

The toquilla straw hats produced by PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA have reached countries such as France and Panama. Although their presence is still limited, there is a growing appreciation for sustainable artisanal products in the European Union, representing a clear opportunity for expansion. The international recognition of the product, marketed globally as the “Panama Hat”, provides both a symbolic and commercial advantage to the Ecuadorian product (Noboa Jiménez et al., 2012).

In addition to commercial interest, toquilla straw hats have been recognized for their cultural and artisanal value, which has attracted growing attention from international consumers seeking products with identity and sustainability. The designation of the traditional weaving of toquilla straw hats as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2012 has further strengthened their global positioning, turning them not only into a fashion item but also into a symbol of Ecuadorian heritage. This recognition has served as a key differentiator compared to other similar artisanal products in the international market, allowing Ecuadorian producers to access markets that value authenticity, history, and ethical production in each of their products (Noboa Jiménez et al., 2012).

2.1.2.2 Product Life Cycle

Currently, toquilla straw hats are in the maturity phase of their product life cycle at the international level. They are recognized in many cases as luxury items with an established and culturally appreciative clientele. The term “Panama Hat,” although historically inaccurate, has contributed to their global positioning following their exposure during the construction of the Panama Canal and the visit of Theodore Roosevelt (Arrocha Morán, 2015).

2.2 Analysis of the Environment and Target Market

2.2.1 Product and Company Diagnosis

PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA is a Cuenca-based company founded in 1985 in the Lazareto neighborhood, with over three decades of experience in the artisanal production of toquilla straw hats. This long-standing trajectory has enabled the company to preserve traditional weaving and pressing techniques passed down through generations, positioning it as a regional benchmark in artisanal production.

The company's main product, the toquilla straw hat, possesses a series of attributes that make it a cultural good with high potential in international markets. It is handmade from natural fibers and represents a tradition recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Takahashi & Cha, 2016). This symbolic value provides it with a differentiated positioning, especially in niche markets that appreciate authenticity, sustainability, and exclusivity.

However, despite its strong cultural identity and artisanal expertise, the diagnosis reveals significant structural challenges. The company does not have a specialized international marketing team, nor has it developed a proper digital commercial strategy for the internationalization and globalization of the business. Its promotion relies on occasional fairs, limited use of social media, and direct relationships with exporters, which has led to a lack of awareness of the company and its most emblematic product, the "toquilla straw hat." This approach has restricted its commercial reach and reduced its ability to build a strong global brand (Lechuga Cardozo et al., 2020).

In terms of productive capacity, the company manufactures approximately 3,000 units per month, which allows it to fulfill medium-scale orders in both the local and international markets. However, it has not yet incorporated digital sales tools (e-commerce), which represents a clear opportunity to improve its access to European markets, where online commerce has grown significantly (Comisión Europea, 2024).

Despite these limitations, PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA possesses significant strengths: a well-established artisanal tradition within the company and a product with recognized international cultural value. These conditions make it a viable candidate for internationalization, provided it adopts a strategy focused on branding, certifications, fair trade, and digital presence.

In this regard, a strategic vision is required that aligns the product's strengths with current European consumer demands, particularly in areas related to sustainability, authenticity, and social responsibility (Forbes, 2023). In doing so, the company can enhance its international competitiveness and expand its positioning in demanding and culturally receptive markets such as those of the European Union.

2.2.2 PESTEL Analysis

Table 1
PESTEL Analysis for PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA

Factor	Description of the Factor
Politics	Ecuador has maintained a Multipart Trade Agreement with the European Union since 2017, which facilitates the export of products such as toquilla straw hats by eliminating tariffs and granting preferential access to the European market. This agreement ensures legal stability, promotes cooperation, and protects products with geographical indications, thereby strengthening the position of the hat as an Ecuadorian cultural product. Additionally, it establishes commitments in social, labor, and environmental matters that condition long-term preferential access (Acción Ecológica, 2015; Van Steen & Saurenbach, 2017).
Economic	Ecuador's economic stability and post-pandemic recovery, reflected in GDP growth and the increase in non-oil exports, create a favorable environment for the internationalization of products such as toquilla straw hats. On the other hand, the European Union maintains high purchasing power, especially in Northern and Western European countries, which presents an opportunity for luxury artisanal products. The EU's economic policies focused on sustainability and support for value-added products reinforce this trend. However, international logistics costs and fluctuations in the euro-dollar exchange rate must be considered as risk factors (Banco Central del Ecuador, 2023; Consejo Económico y Social de España, 2018; Deloitte, 2024).
Social	In Europe, there is a growing preference for sustainable, artisanal, and locally sourced products. According to recent studies, more than 70% of consumers value these attributes when making purchasing decisions. This trend is even stronger among Millennials, 61% of whom are willing to pay a higher price for eco-friendly and socially responsible products. This consumer behavior represents a key opportunity for the internationalization of toquilla straw hats, as they are artisanal products made from natural materials, with a strong cultural identity and low environmental impact (Compomisorse, 2020; Retama, 2023).
Technological	The advancement of e-commerce in the European Union has created a highly digitalized environment, where 75% of citizens aged 16 to 74 made online purchases in 2023. This growth presents a clear opportunity for artisanal products such as toquilla straw hats, especially if digital channels are leveraged for their promotion and sale. In addition, the use of social media and digital marketing strategies allows small Ecuadorian producers to connect with European consumers who are interested in authenticity, sustainability, and exclusivity. However, it is essential to consider the current technological regulations in the EU, which aim to ensure fair, safe, and competitive digital commerce. This means adapting to legal and technical requirements to operate effectively in these channels (Comisión Europea, 2024; Consejo de la Unión Europea, 2023; Javier, 2024).
Ecological	The production of toquilla straw hats presents ecological advantages due to its artisanal nature and the use of renewable natural materials. Recent studies show improvements in the treatment processes of the straw, aimed at reducing environmental impact and the use of chemicals, which strengthens its alignment with the demands of the European market. Moreover, the European Union enforces strict regulations regarding the sustainability of imported products, prohibiting the entry of those that fail to meet environmental conservation standards or contain harmful substances. These requirements represent both a challenge and an opportunity for the company to strengthen sustainable practices and certify its production in environmental terms (Juan Anchundia-Rodríguez et al., 2016; Maridueña & Vasquez, 2017; Unión Europea, 2025).
Legal	The European Union establishes strict regulations regarding labeling, packaging, and product safety that must be met by all imports, including artisanal products such as toquilla straw hats. These regulations cover everything from mandatory information on packaging to compliance with technical and commercial standards. Additionally, Regulation (EU) 2023/2411 introduces a harmonized system of geographical indications to protect artisanal and industrial products. This legal framework opens the possibility of registering toquilla straw hats as a product with protected geographical indication, which could strengthen their positioning and authenticity in the European market, while also providing protection against imitations (Comisión Europea, 2023b, 2023a; IDEPA, 2007; Parlamento Europeo y Consejo de la UE, 2023).

Note: Own Elaboration

2.2.3 SWOT Analysis

Table 2
SWOT Analysis of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA

	Negative Aspects	Positive Aspects
Internal Analysis	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of experience in international marketing • Absence of a specialized team for foreign markets. • Limited use of social medias as a sales channel. • Low diversification of distribution channels. • Dependence on direct sales and exporters. 	Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artisanal tradition passes down through more than three generations • High-quality finishes and exclusive designs. • Experiences in the manufacturing of toquilla straw hats. • Monthly production of over 3000 hats, meeting demand.
	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal regulations on artisanal exports • Dependence on the availability of raw material • Direct competition from companies like Homero Ortega 	Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing demand in European markets • Increasing appreciation for artisanal and sustainable products • Increase in social and fashion events that demand these products • Possibility to explore online sales and e-commerce

Note: Own Elaboration

2.2.4 International Consumer Analysis

The international consumer of toquilla straw hats is characterized by an interest in authentic, sustainable, and culturally significant products. In markets such as France and Germany, there is a growing appreciation for items that not only serve an aesthetic or practical function but also represent a story, a tradition, or a local identity.

Various studies indicate that European consumers especially value products certified as sustainable and environmentally responsible practices. According to Forbes (2023), there is a growing trend toward a preference for sustainable, artisanal, and locally sourced products, reflecting a commitment to social and environmental responsibility.

In addition, there is a growing trend toward the consumption of products with a defined geographical origin and an authentic story behind them. The recognition of the traditional weaving of the Ecuadorian toquilla straw hat as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2016 reinforces the symbolic value of the product for this type of consumer (Takahashi & Cha, 2016).

In terms of segmentation, three potential consumer profiles can be identified:

- International end consumers: Individual buyers interested in exclusive artisanal products who value sustainability, design, and cultural authenticity. They typically purchase hats as fashion accessories, summer wear, or symbols of distinction.
- Specialized distributors: Design stores, fashion boutiques, and concept stores looking to include unique products in their catalogs. They value the product's storytelling, artisanal origin, and its ability to stand out from conventional brands.
- Wholesale clients: Exporters, international distributors, or department stores that market Latin American artisanal products. They are interested in volume, consistent quality, and certifications related to fair trade or sustainable production.

2.2.5 Competitor Analysis

For a company to enter a new market, especially one as competitive as the European market, it is essential to understand who they are already there and how they are positioning themselves. In the case of toquilla straw hats, there are several Ecuadorian brands with export experience that have established a presence in the market. Among them, Homero Ortega and Montecuator stand out, as both companies combine tradition with modern sales strategies.

Homero Ortega is one of the most well-known artisanal brands in the country. With over four decades of experience, they have successfully preserved the essence of the toquilla straw hat. An interesting aspect is that, in addition to manufacturing, they also promote cultural tourism through their workshop and museum in Cuenca. This company has done an excellent job building its brand image, targeting a segment that seeks luxury products with history and authenticity. They also operate a virtual store and maintain active social media channels, which has allowed them to reach more customers abroad (Homero Ortega, 2025).

Montecuator, on the other hand, has also managed to position itself in the market, though with a slightly different approach. Its digital presence is strong, with an online store that showcases all its models and allows direct purchasing. Their website heavily emphasizes the artisanal process, the handmade nature of the products, and the cultural identity represented by each hat. This strategy resonates well with European consumers, who increasingly seek sustainable products with a story that support producing communities (Montecuatorhats, 2025).




Both brands share common traits: a long-standing family tradition, an artisanal approach, high quality, and strong marketing management. However, they also serve as a benchmark for PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, as they illustrate both the path to follow and the areas that need improvement. For example, strengthening the brand, establishing a real

digital presence, participating in trade fairs, or forming strategic alliances with international shops or boutiques.

Today, it is not just about selling a good product, but about telling a story, connecting with values such as sustainability and fair trade, and making the consumer feel part of that culture. As Baldegger & Wild (2019), point out, the companies that manage to stand out in these types of markets are those that convey authenticity and cultural value beyond the product itself.

In that sense, PAMAR has great potential. Its history, quality, and artisanal commitment are significant advantages. It simply needs to strengthen these aspects, build a clear brand image, and take advantage of channels such as e-commerce and social media to reach more people and compete on equal footing in demanding markets like France or Germany (Forbes, 2023).

Table 3
Comparison between PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA and its main competitors

Company	Logo	Years of Experience	Digital Presence	International Export	Value Proposition
PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA		Over 30 years	Basic use of social media	Occasional exports	Family tradition, artisanal quality, exclusivity in designs
Homero Ortega		Over 100 years	Active website, active social media	Long-standing presence in European markets	Established brand, cultural tourism, focus on luxury and cultural heritage
Montecuator		Several generations	Modern online store, active social media	Direct online sales and presence in international fairs	Traditional craftsmanship with a contemporary focus, direct sales, visual design

Note: Own elaboration. Images obtained from: <https://www.facebook.com/pamarcuenca/> , <https://homeroortega.com> , <https://montecuatorhats.com>

2.3 Risk and Opportunity Analysis in Internationalization

Internationalizing an artisanal product like the toquilla straw hat can open major opportunities for a company like PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, but it also involves facing several risks. Therefore, it is essential to identify both the potential obstacles and the advantages offered by the international market in order to make more informed decisions and design an appropriate strategy.

Below are the main risks and opportunities associated with entering demanding markets such as France and Germany, taking into account political, economic, logistical, regulatory, and social aspects that may influence the success of the process.

2.3.1 Political, Economic, and Commercial Risks

When a company like PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA decides to take its products abroad, one of the first steps is to thoroughly analyze the political and economic environment, both in the country of origin and the destination. Although Ecuador currently has a trade agreement with the European Union that allows products to be exported without paying tariffs, this does not mean that everything is guaranteed in the long term.

These types of agreements, such as the Multipart Trade Agreement with the European Union, open important doors, especially for small producers. However, they also carry certain risks. For instance, if there are political changes in Ecuador or in any of the European countries, the conditions of the agreement could be affected. Even at the time of the agreement's signing, la Van Steen & Saurenbach (2017) warned that it is crucial for companies to be prepared, as the benefits can only be sustained if internal capabilities are strengthened to compete in demanding markets.

On the other hand, there are economic risks. The exchange rate between the dollar and the euro can work either in favor or against the exporter. If the euro drops significantly, Ecuadorian products become more expensive for European buyers, which could negatively impact sales. According to the Trade Agreement Handbook, this is something companies must keep in mind when setting prices or profit margins (Unión Europea, 2025).

It's also important to consider what might happen in countries like France or Germany. Although they are strong economies, they are not immune to crises. If a recession occurs or inflation rises, consumers may begin to cut back on spending for non-essential products, such as artisanal hats. In this regard, Acción Ecológica (2015) points out that products with cultural value do have a place, but a strong effort is needed in how they are presented and connected with the audience.

Finally, there is the issue of competition. Companies like Homero Ortega and Montecuator have already made significant progress in international markets. PAMAR will not only compete on price, but also on storytelling, design, brand image, and sustainability. If it fails to differentiate itself, it runs the risk of falling behind, even if the product is of high quality.

2.3.2 Operational, Logistical, and Regulatory Risks

In addition to political and economic factors, internationalization involves operational, logistical, and regulatory risks that must be carefully considered by companies like PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA. These aspects can have a direct impact on the company's ability to meet the requirements of the European market and sustain stable commercial growth.

First, there is the risk related to production capacity. Although the company produces over 3,000 units per month, an increase in demand upon entering markets such as France or Germany could place pressure on delivery times, product quality, and the supply of raw materials. Since production is manual and artisanal, the ability to scale quickly is limited if organized processes and trained personnel are not in place.

In the logistics field, exporting artisanal products such as toquilla straw hats requires detailed planning regarding packaging, international transportation, insurance, customs management, and shipment traceability. Any error at this stage can lead to delays or even financial losses. Additionally, logistics costs can represent a significant percentage of the final product price, especially for shipments to European countries.

From a regulatory standpoint, the European Union requires compliance with technical, sanitary, labeling, and sustainability standards. According to the EU–Ecuador Trade Agreement Handbook (EEAS, 2017), products entering these markets must adhere to strict regulations related to consumer safety, product origin, and environmental impact. In this regard, although toquilla straw hats are made from natural materials, it is essential to have documentation that supports their traceability and sustainability (Van Steen & Saurenbach, 2017).

2.3.3 Market Opportunities

While internationalization entails certain risks, it also represents a strategic opportunity for the growth of companies like PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA. International demand for authentic, sustainable, and culturally valuable products has increased significantly in recent years, especially in European markets such as France and Germany, where consumers increasingly value the origin and social impact of what they purchase.

One of the main opportunities for the company is the cultural recognition of the product. Toquilla straw hats were declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2012, which provides them with a highly valuable symbolic endorsement in the eyes of foreign consumers. This type of distinction not only strengthens the product's

identity but also allows it to be positioned as a prestigious and traditional artisanal piece, with a narrative that resonates with audiences seeking products with history (Takahashi & Cha, 2016).

Another important advantage is the global trend toward sustainable consumption. Various studies have indicated that European consumers are willing to pay more for ethical products that are environmentally friendly and have a positive impact on producer communities. In this regard, toquilla straw hats, being handmade with natural materials, perfectly align with this trend. According to Forbes (2023), more than 70% of European consumers consider sustainability a decisive factor in their purchasing decisions.

In addition, the existence of the Multipart Trade Agreement between Ecuador and the European Union represents a competitive advantage. This treaty eliminates tariffs for products such as toquilla straw hats, allowing them to enter the European market without tax surcharges that would affect their final price. As noted in the Trade Agreement Handbook (EEAS, 2017), this legal framework facilitates bilateral trade and encourages the participation of exporting SMEs (Comisión Europea, 2023).

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETING PLAN

3.1. Definition of Marketing Objectives

When beginning an internationalization process, it is essential to establish clear and realistic marketing objectives that guide each step of the commercial strategy. In the case of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, whose toquilla straw hats hold high cultural and artisanal value, these objectives should reflect both the aim to position the product in European markets and the desire to project its Ecuadorian identity globally.

According to Llamazares (2016), international marketing objectives should be formulated using the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) to serve as a strategic guide and allow for the evaluation of results over time. This perspective is supported by other authors who emphasize the importance of setting goals tied to product acceptance in culturally diverse markets (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Petrussevska, 2019).

In addition, authors such as Barrientos Felipa (2011) emphasize that international marketing objectives should stem from a deep understanding of the competitive environment, the product's identity, and the company's capabilities. This is especially important for artisanal products like toquilla straw hats, which must not only compete commercially but also stand out for their symbolic value and sustainability.

With this in mind, the following marketing objectives are proposed for PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA within the context of an international marketing plan:

1. Achieve the commercial placement of toquilla straw hats in at least two fashion boutiques or concept stores in Germany and France during the first year. This objective aims to establish a solid presence in physical stores known for their focus on ethical fashion and culturally rooted products.
2. Increase brand visibility on European digital channels, reaching at least 50,000 segmented users through social media campaigns, marketplaces, and value-driven content during the first year of implementation. According to Gomez Karpenko et al. (2024), digital marketing has become an effective tool for SMEs seeking to expand into international markets without large budgets.
3. Differentiate the product through its cultural and sustainable value, by using adapted labels, authentic narratives about its craftsmanship, and certifications supporting its ethical and artisanal origin. As Peprah (2017) highlights, understanding the European

consumer's culture allows for emotional connection with the target audience and enhances perceived value.

4. Establish strategic partnerships with European distributors using the Piggyback model, leveraging the commercial networks of companies already positioned in the market. This reduces costs and facilitates market entry. According to Berbel Pineda et al. (2012), this entry method helps lower risks and benefits from the local partners' know-how.

The above objectives are built upon the opportunities offered by countries such as Germany and France, where consumers increasingly value authenticity, sustainability, and fair trade (Comisión Europea, 2024; Forbes, 2023). Furthermore, they enable a company like PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, with more than three decades of artisanal tradition, to strengthen its presence in markets where the product must not only be sold but also tell a story.

3.2. Segmentation and Positioning Strategy

For an international marketing strategy to be effective, it is essential that the company clearly understands whom it is targeting and how it wants its product to be perceived in the new market. In the case of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, the challenge is not only to market toquilla straw hats but to position them as cultural, sustainable, and exclusive items before an increasingly demanding and conscious European consumer.

3.4.1. Segmentation

Segmentation allows the identification of homogeneous groups of consumers with similar characteristics, making it easier to personalize marketing strategies and optimize resources Gomez Karpenko et al. (2024). In the case of artisanal products such as toquilla straw hats, it is essential to apply a multiple segmentation approach that combines geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral criteria.

Based on recent studies, the European market, especially in countries like Germany and France, shows a growing interest in sustainable, fair trade, and culturally rooted products (Forbes, 2023; World Crafts Council Europe, 2023) This profile mainly corresponds to:

Middle- and upper-class consumers with purchasing power,

Ethical fashion enthusiasts and seekers of exclusive products,

Cultural tourists who value authentic souvenirs,

Consumers sensitive to sustainability and artisanal quality, particularly Millennials and Generation Z.

Berbel Pineda et al. (2012) emphasize that the correct choice of market segment directly influences the viability of an internationalization strategy, as it allows efforts to be focused on the niches most receptive to the product.

Table 4
Consumer Profile

	Segment	Key Characteristics	Ideal Channels	Key Message
1	Upper-middle-class consumers	High purchasing power, value exclusivity and artisanal design	Luxury boutiques, concept stores, international fairs	Premium design with Ecuadorian heritage
2	Ethical fashion enthusiasts	Interest in sustainable, fair-trade products from brands with a purpose	Specialized e-commerce, use and sales via social media, influencers	Ethical fashion, handmade by artisans
3	Cultural tourists	Seek unique products that represent local cultures	Stores in tourist areas, airports, cultural gift shops	A piece of culture in every hat
4	Eco-conscious youth interested in artisanal products	Prefer eco-friendly, handmade products with a positive social impact	Instagram, TikTok, Facebook Marketplace, other sustainable marketplaces	Make a difference with responsible style

Note: Own Elaboration

3.4.2. Positioning

Once the target audience has been identified, it is essential to define how the product should be perceived by that audience. Positioning refers to the place a brand or product occupies in the consumer's mind in relation to the competition (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

For PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA, the proposed positioning focuses on artisanal authenticity, cultural value, and sustainable commitment. In other words, the goal is for the European consumer to associate toquilla straw hats not only with fashion, but with Ecuadorian identity, ethical craftsmanship, and cultural heritage.

This approach aligns with the ideas presented by Gomez Karpenko et al. (2024), who state that effective positioning in international markets must build a coherent and differentiated narrative, especially when working with cultural products. Furthermore, studies such as those by Calle García et al. (2023) highlight that the use of symbolic values such as “handmade,” “cultural heritage,” or “sustainable” can be a powerful differentiator compared to brands that compete solely on price.

According to the research by Valentin Puma et al. (2023), companies that develop their positioning based on a brand narrative that is authentic and closely aligned with consumer values achieve greater customer loyalty and reduced vulnerability to competition. In the case of toquilla straw hats, this narrative can be supported by the UNESCO designation, the traditional weaving techniques, and the sustainability of the raw materials used.

3.3. Development of Marketing Policies (Marketing Mix – 4Ps)

The design of the marketing mix for the internationalization of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA's toquilla straw hats is based on adapting each component of the product to meet the expectations of the European consumer, while preserving its cultural and artisanal essence. According to international marketing recommendations, an effective strategy must ensure consistency across the 4Ps, maintaining the product's identity without losing competitiveness in the global market (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Llamazares, 2016).

3.3.1. Product Strategy

The toquilla straw hat is not just a fashion accessory; it is a piece that carries the history, craftsmanship, and tradition of generations of Ecuadorian artisans. Therefore, the product strategy must preserve the authenticity of its design and artisanal process, while incorporating elements that reinforce its cultural value in the European market (Forbes, 2023; Peprah, 2017).

Based on the product, there are several recommendations to follow:

- Regarding labeling, it is recommended to enhance its communicative function by using QR codes that redirect consumers to short videos about the history of the hat, its artisanal production process, or interviews with the artisans. This innovation would strengthen the emotional connection with the European customer and enrich the brand's storytelling.
- In terms of packaging, it is suggested to consider a system of reusable or collectible packaging with designs inspired by Ecuadorian cultural motifs. This approach not only enhances the product's perception as premium but can also encourage repeat purchases and create differentiation from competitors.
- It is also recommended to develop limited seasonal collections (spring–summer, fall–winter), adapting colors or styles to European market trends without losing the essence of the product. This would allow PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA to innovate within its artisanal line and remain relevant to a demanding audience.
- Finally, obtaining fair trade and sustainability certifications remains key to gaining the trust of European consumers, especially in niche markets that prioritize the social and environmental impact of their purchases.

This product approach responds to the need to differentiate in a market where consumers deeply value sustainability, exclusivity, and storytelling (Peprah, 2017; World Crafts Council Europe, 2023).

3.3.2. Pricing Strategy

The pricing strategy will align with a perceived value approach, positioning the toquilla straw hat as a premium product. In this regard, a psychological pricing scheme will be applied, one that conveys exclusivity without becoming inaccessible.

- For boutiques and concept stores in France and Germany, the suggested retail price should range between €80 and €150 per unit, depending on the level of design detail, additional materials, and edition.
- In digital channels, a transparent pricing policy will be maintained, accompanied by messaging that justifies the value (handmade, social impact, sustainability).
- A tiered pricing strategy will be considered for wholesalers, with progressive discounts based on order volume.

This pricing model is based on the principle that the price should reflect the consumer's perceived cultural and symbolic value of the product (Civelek et al., 2024; Llamazares, 2016).

3.3.3. Distribution Strategy

The distribution channel will be hybrid, combining specialized physical outlets and digital platforms. This combination will allow the company to reach both traditional buyers and new digital consumers.

- Ethical fashion boutiques and concept stores will be the priority channel in cities such as Berlin, Paris, and Amsterdam, through strategic partnerships and cultural events.
- Sustainable marketplaces like Etsy or El Green Stylé, which specialize in artisanal and eco-conscious products.
- A dedicated website with international direct sales and a secure payment gateway.
- Distributors under a piggyback model, leveraging the logistics network of European companies already marketing Latin American artisanal products.

The combination of direct distribution and strategic partnerships helps reduce risks and increase market penetration in complex regions such as Europe (Berbel Pineda et al., 2012).

3.3.4. Promotion Strategy

Promotion will be based on creating an authentic, visual, and emotional narrative. It's not just about "selling a hat," but about telling the story behind every woven fiber.

- Digital campaigns on social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook) with influencers who promote ethical fashion and responsible consumption.
- Visual storytelling through short videos showcasing the artisanal process, the artisans' stories, and the cultural connection of the product.
- Participation in international fairs focused on crafts, fashion, and sustainability, such as Maison&Objet (France) or Ethical Fashion Show (Germany).
- Collaborations with cultural organizations and groups that promote Latin American identity and fair trade.

This approach aims to create an emotional connection with the consumer, reinforcing the symbolic value of the product and positioning it as a conscious and purposeful choice (Calle García et al., 2023; Peprah, 2017).

3.4. International Market Entry Strategy

PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA's entry into the European market requires a structured strategy that balances risk, investment, and growth potential. According to data from the International Trade Center (ITC), countries such as France and Germany rank among the leading importers of Latin American artisanal products, which supports their selection as target markets (*International Trade Center*, 2024).

Likewise, the Trade Map platform shows a steady increase in demand for sustainable cultural products in these destinations, as illustrated in Table 5 with the growing importation of toquilla straw hats, identified under the Harmonized System code (6504). Based on this data, the company can adopt a growing focus on traceability, fair trade, and originality in design (*Trade Map*, 2025).

Table 5
Data TradeMap

	Year	Germany (USD)	France (USD)
1	2020	1051	902
2	2021	1151	809
3	2022	1804	1216
4	2023	2727	1439
5	2024	1818	685

Note: Own Elaboration

In this context, a mixed entry strategy is proposed, combining direct channels, commercial partnerships, and a strong digital presence.

3.4.1. Specialized Direct Export

Direct export is a suitable path for companies with controlled production and differentiated products. This model allows PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA to maintain control over its offering, establish close relationships with distributors, and build a brand with its own identity. Given that it is an artisanal product with cultural value, direct relationships with specialized boutiques focused on ethical fashion are essential (Llamazares, 2016).

3.4.2. Piggyback

The piggyback model involves using the distribution network of an already established European company to market PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA's products. This reduces logistical and financial risk, especially during the initial years of internationalization. Importers of Latin American handicrafts or ethical distributors could serve as key partners, allowing PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA to enter the market without having its own infrastructure (Berbel Pineda et al., 2012; Llamazares, 2016).

3.4.3. Participation in Trade Fairs and Commercial Missions

Participating in international trade fairs such as Maison&Objet in Paris or Berlin Fashion Week allows toquilla straw hats to gain visibility among buyers, distributors, and specialized media. These fairs are renowned for their focus on sustainable products, independent design, and ethical fashion (*Berlin Fashion Week “ Official Page, 2024; Maison&Objet – Paris Design Trade Fair, 2024*).

In addition, support programs such as those offered by ProEcuador or FEDEXPOR provide technical assistance, legal advice, and connections with commercial networks,

facilitating participation in trade missions and business matchmaking events3.4.4. Presencia digital internacional de la empresa.

The consolidation of a digital strategy is essential. Currently, 75% of European consumers between the ages of 16 and 74 shop online, with sustainable platforms representing a growing trend (Comisión Europea, 2024).

To address this, the following is recommended:

- A bilingual website with an online store, featuring the history of the hat, artisan testimonials, and the production process.
- Selling products on sustainable marketplaces such as Etsy, Weecos, and El Green Stylé, which bring together responsible brands with social impact (*El Green Stylé - Ethical Marketplace*, 2024; *Sustainable Products on Etsy*, 2024; *Weecos - Sustainable Fashion Marketplace*, 2024).
- Developing a content strategy on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where ethical fashion and conscious consumption have a strong presence (Gomez Karpenko et al., 2024).

3.5. Financial Evaluation and Estimated Budget

To ensure the viability of the proposed international marketing plan, it is essential to conduct a preliminary estimate of the costs associated with its implementation. Although specific values may vary depending on external factors such as exchange rates, logistical agreements, and local suppliers, a basic cost structure can be established to project the required level of investment

Among the main cost categories to consider are:

- Design and production of new labels and sustainable packaging, adapted to the European market and aligned with values of sustainability and authenticity.
- International certifications, such as fair trade or sustainable production, required to access ethical consumer niches in Europe.
- Digital marketing campaigns, especially on social media, e-commerce platforms, and collaborations with ethical fashion influencers.
- Participation in international trade fairs such as Maison&Objet (France) or Berlin Fashion Week (Germany), including transportation, registration, promotional materials, and travel expenses (*Berlin Fashion Week “ Official Page*, 2024; *Maison&Objet – Paris Design Trade Fair*, 2024).

- Adaptation of the company's website and creation of an international payment gateway to facilitate online sales from Europe.
- International logistics, covering packaging, transport insurance, customs documentation, and shipping costs to destination countries.

The initial budget for the first year of implementation is estimated to cover both promotional activities and the basic operating expenses required to establish a presence in the European market. This budget may be adjusted based on the results obtained during the pilot phase of the plan, prioritizing actions that yield the highest return in terms of brand positioning and sales.

Below is an estimated budget for the implementation of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA's international marketing plan. It is important to note that these values are approximate and may vary depending on factors such as exchange rates, specific suppliers, strategic partnerships, and current logistical conditions.

Table 6
Estimated budget

Expenses	Estimated Cost
Additional Production for Export (100 units)	5000
Participation in International Trade Fair (Maison&Objet or Similar)	4500
Export Logistics Costs (Shipping, Insurance, Documentation)	2800
Development of Bilingual Website with Online Store	1500
Digital Marketing Campaigns (Social Media, Influencers)	2000
Packaging Design and Improvement (Eco-Friendly, Certified)	1200
International Trademark Registration and Legal Documentation	1000
Commercial Consulting and Training	1000
Estimated Total	19000

Note: Own Elaboration

This preliminary evaluation will provide the company with a clear financial estimate to guide the necessary investments, while also allowing for adjustments to the strategy based on available resources and emerging opportunities in the European market. Financial evaluation, therefore, is not limited to assessing whether costs are manageable, but also aims to ensure that the investment contributes to the long-term sustainability of PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA's internationalization process (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

3.6. Monitoring and Control of the Plan

To ensure the success of the international marketing plan, it is necessary to establish measurement controls that allow for the evaluation of results and the implementation of adjustments throughout its execution (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The following key performance indicators are proposed to monitor the performance of this marketing plan for PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA (Llamazares, 2016):

- Posicionamiento de marca: Revisar el número de seguidores, interacciones y alcance en redes sociales y página web; apariciones en medios digitales internacionales.
- Ventas internacionales: Mantener un control sobre el volumen de ventas mensuales y comparación por país destino.
- Retorno de inversión (ROI): En este punto la empresa deberá revisar la relación entre el gasto en campañas y el incremento en ventas o contactos comerciales generados.
- Satisfacción del cliente: Revisar las valoraciones en plataformas de venta, comentarios en redes sociales y encuestas breves postventa (Hoang Tien Nguyen & Dang Thi Phuong Chi, 2019).
- Número de alianzas estratégicas: Realizar informes sobre la cantidad de nuevos distribuidores, *boutiques* o *concept stores* que integren los productos de PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA (Llamazares, 2016).

The measurement of these indicators should be carried out monthly during the first six months of implementation and then quarterly. This will provide timely information to support decision-making based on real results (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

It is recommended that the company hold internal quarterly evaluation meetings to review progress on each indicator, identify potential deviations, and define continuous improvement strategies.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Summary of Findings

Throughout this research, it was possible to confirm something that had been anticipated from the beginning: the toquilla straw hats produced by PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA have enormous potential to cross borders. Not only because of their artisanal quality, but also due to the history, tradition, and cultural value they represent. Their recognition as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity further reinforces this identity, which is of great interest to the European market (Takahashi & Cha, 2016).

However, several important challenges were also identified. The company still lacks a clear commercial strategy for foreign markets, its digital presence is limited, and it has not yet established a direct connection with international consumers. These elements, while solvable, may hinder its internationalization process if not addressed in a timely manner (Lechuga Cardozo et al., 2020).

On the positive side, PAMAR has a solid foundation: experience, family tradition, artisanal production capacity, and an authentic offering. The environmental analysis revealed that in countries like France and Germany there is a growing trend toward responsible consumption, where sustainable products with history and a distinct cultural identity are highly valued (World Crafts Council Europe, 2023).

With these elements on the table, an international marketing plan tailored to the company was developed. This plan sets clear goals, includes positioning strategies that resonate with the European consumer, an adapted marketing mix, and a market entry route that combines direct export with strategic partnerships (Llamazares, 2016).

Additionally, it incorporates monitoring mechanisms and a projected financial evaluation that provide the company with a realistic roadmap. Most importantly, the plan is viable and respects the essence of what PAMAR represents. Internationalization is no longer just a dream, but a process that can begin with concrete, strategic, and well-thought-out steps.

4.2. Feasibility Assessment of the Plan

The proposed marketing plan is not just a well-structured idea, but a strategy that can be implemented with the current resources and capabilities of the company. Throughout the analysis, PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA's strengths, such as its artisanal expertise, consistent

production, and commitment to quality, were considered, providing a solid foundation to compete in demanding markets like Europe (Takahashi & Cha, 2016).

From a financial standpoint, an estimated budget was proposed for the first year of implementation, covering costs related to promotion, certifications, sustainable packaging, digital marketing, and international logistics. While it is a significant investment, it is not unattainable, especially if institutional support is sought or if the plan is managed in a phased manner (Llamazares, 2016).

Moreover, the proposed market entry model, combining direct export with strategic partnerships (piggyback model), helps reduce risks and leverage already established commercial networks. This approach allows the company to avoid bearing the full burden of internationalization alone, opting instead for a collaborative process with less initial pressure (Berbel Pineda et al., 2012).

The current European context also plays in PAMAR's favor. There is high demand for authentic, sustainable products with a positive social impact. PAMAR already meets these criteria. What remains is to present it appropriately, with a clear strategy and a powerful narrative behind it (Comisión Europea, 2024).

Ultimately, the plan is viable. This does not mean the path will be easy, but it is achievable if followed step by step, with a clear vision and coherent decisions. The key will be to stay true to the essence of the brand, adapt to the demands of the international market, and never lose sight of the fact that behind each hat lies a story, a family, and a tradition worth sharing with the world.

4.3. Implications and Contributions of the Study

This study not only proposes a plan for an artisan company from Cuenca to internationalize its products, but it also demonstrates that artisanal SMEs can compete in global markets when they rely on their identity and well-designed strategies.

One of the main contributions of this research is that it highlights the value of the toquilla straw hat not just as a fashion item, but as a cultural asset capable of opening doors in highly demanding contexts such as the European market. Through the analysis and the plan developed, it becomes evident that tradition can become a commercial strength when combined with modern international marketing tools (Peprah, 2017).

4.4. Limitations and Challenges of the Study

As with any realistic project, this study also presents some limitations that must be considered during its implementation. Acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the value of the proposed plan; rather, it allows for anticipation of potential obstacles and the development of context-specific solutions for an artisanal company like PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA.

One of the main limitations was the lack of access to detailed financial information from the company, which prevented a deep economic analysis with exact figures. For this reason, the financial evaluation presented was based on referential estimates and conservative assumptions (Cholque Pilco, 2019).

In addition, one of the most significant challenges will be executing the plan in a dynamic and competitive environment. Internationalization requires adapting to new regulations, consumer cultures, and distribution channels, which may represent a barrier for companies like PAMAR, which currently lack previous experience in foreign trade (Llamazares, 2016).

4.5. Recommendations for Plan Implementation

To ensure that the proposed international marketing plan goes beyond a good intention and becomes a concrete reality, its implementation must be based on well-thought-out strategic decisions, ongoing commitment, and a progressive approach. Below are some key recommendations for its execution:

1. Start with a pilot phase in a single European country. Ideally, begin in a market with greater cultural or logistical affinities, such as France, which already has a historical connection with toquilla straw hats. This will allow the company to test the model on a small scale, correct errors, and measure results without assuming significant risks from the outset (Valentin Puma et al., 2023).
2. Seek strategic partnerships with local distributors. This may include concept stores, sustainable boutiques, or ethical e-commerce platforms. These partnerships will facilitate market entry and help the product reach the end consumer more quickly and with greater credibility (Llamazares, 2016).
3. Strengthen the brand's digital identity. It is essential to develop a multilingual website, establish a strong presence on social media, and create content marketing

focused on the hat's story and cultural value. This narrative must be consistent, emotional, and tailored to the European consumer profile (Kotler & Keller, 2016)

4. Pursue international certifications. Certifications such as fair trade, sustainable production, or artisanal quality not only open doors but also build credibility and trust among conscious consumers. This process can begin in parallel with initial commercialization, prioritizing the most accessible or recognized certifications in the target market (Sánchez Medina et al., 2021).
5. Train the internal team. Internationalization requires a shift in mindset and a basic understanding of foreign trade. Training the sales, production, and marketing teams on topics such as logistics, regulations, and European consumer culture will be key to ensuring the entire company moves forward in the same direction.

These recommendations, when carried out in an organized and progressive manner, will allow PAMAR Y COMPAÑÍA to build a strong international presence without losing its essence and while respecting the natural pace of its growth. What matters is not only to enter the market, but to enter it well, and to stay.

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