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**International Marketing Plan for the Entry of
Selva Negra Premium Ecuadorian Chocolate into
the Canadian Market**

**Project Prior to obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in
International Studies**

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**Cuenca – Ecuador
2026**

To my grandmother Patricia, who took care of me from a young age and taught me everything I know about life today,

for her unconditional love and for always giving me the strength I need to face whatever challenges come my way.

Even though she is no longer physically by my side, she will always be my role model, and thanks to her, I

am the woman she would be proud of.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This I would like to thank my parents, Santiago and Ana Karina, for always supporting me in achieving my goals and dreams, and for always offering me their unconditional love and encouragement.

I would like to thank my mentor, Matias Abad, for guiding me through this process with patience and for sharing his knowledge with me. Thank you so much for believing in me and my work.

To the company Selva Negra for believing in this project and allowing me to learn about you.

I thank each of the colleagues I met, who always supported me and with whom I completed this entire process. Thank you for all these years; I will always carry you in my heart: Monserrath, Gabriela, Camila, Samantha, Vanessa, Anabel, Nicolas, Juan Sebastián, and Juan Francisco.

Thank you to all the friends and teachers who were part of this process.

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International Marketing Plan for the Entry of Selva Negra Premium Ecuadorian Chocolate into the Canadian Market

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to develop an international marketing plan for the Ecuadorian chocolate company Selva Negra that incorporates differentiation strategies to facilitate the brand's entry into and positioning within the Canadian market in the premium chocolate segment. The overall objective is to design a plan that defines appropriate strategies for the company's internationalization. Specifically, the study seeks to provide a theoretical foundation for international marketing applied to premium products, diagnose the Canadian market and the company's situation through an analysis of consumer trends, competition, regulatory barriers, and a SWOT analysis, to subsequently design entry and competitive positioning strategies. This research will be conducted using a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory approach supported by a literature review and analysis of the company and target market data. Among the main findings, Canada represents an entry opportunity due to its growing demand for premium chocolates, although it requires differentiated strategies for adaptation, positioning, and regulatory compliance.

Keywords: Brand positioning, Ecuadorian cacao export, internationalization, international marketing, market entry strategy, premium chocolate, sustainability

Plan de Marketing Internacional para el Ingreso del Chocolate Premium Ecuatoriano Selva Negra en el Mercado Canadiense

RESUMEN

Esta investigación tiene como propósito elaborar un plan de marketing internacional para la empresa ecuatoriana de chocolate Selva Negra que contemple estrategias de diferenciación que faciliten el ingreso y el posicionamiento de la marca en el mercado canadiense dentro del segmento de chocolates premium. Como objetivo general se plantea diseñar un plan que defina estrategias adecuadas para su internacionalización. De manera específica se busca fundamentar teóricamente el marketing internacional aplicado a productos premium, diagnosticar el mercado canadiense y la situación de la empresa mediante un análisis de tendencias de consumo, competencia, barreras regulatorias y un análisis FODA para el posterior diseño de estrategias de ingreso y posicionamiento competitivo. Esta investigación se desarrollará bajo un enfoque cualitativo de carácter descriptivo y exploratorio apoyado en revisión documental y análisis de información de la empresa y del mercado objetivo. Entre los principales hallazgos, Canadá representa una oportunidad de ingreso por la creciente demanda de chocolates premium que posee, aunque exige estrategias diferenciadas de adaptación, posicionamiento y cumplimiento normativo.

Palabras clave: Chocolate premium, estrategias de entrada, exportación de cacao ecuatoriano, internacionalización, marketing internacional, sostenibilidad, posicionamiento de marca

INTRODUCTION

This International Marketing Plan outlines the strategy for the Ecuadorian company Selva Negra to enter the international premium chocolate market, with a focus on its first export to Canada. The document provides a comprehensive analysis of the company's current situation, its competitive environment, and global opportunities for products made with fine-aroma cocoa, one of the most highly valued raw materials worldwide. Throughout the plan, you will find a detailed assessment of Selva Negra's internal status, including its resources, capabilities, product portfolio, pricing, distribution, and communication strategies, along with an external analysis based on actual trends in the global chocolate market, consumer behavior, national and international competition, and the corresponding SWOT analysis.

The issue centers on the Ecuadorian economy, which is currently in a developmental phase and faces significant challenges in positioning its value-added products in highly competitive foreign markets. Ecuador's participation in the global premium chocolate market remains limited, as nearly all its exports consist solely of raw materials, which reduces profit margins and limits opportunities to position national brands with their own identity. Consequently, despite its prestige, it faces significant barriers to export, such as regulations, culture, consumption patterns, and existing competition.

The internationalization of artisanal and premium products is important for Ecuador's economic, social, and cultural development. There is high demand in the Canadian market for organic, sustainable, and fair-trade products, making Selva Negra brand chocolates a product of great interest in this sector. However, a lack of understanding of the commercial landscape, cultural barriers, and the technical and logistical requirements of the target country are the factors to be analyzed in order to create an international marketing plan for the successful entry of this brand.

Another significant challenge is the limited presence of Ecuadorian premium chocolate brands in the Canadian market, as there are positioning challenges such as unfamiliarity with regulations and a lack of strategies tailored to Canadian consumers. Therefore, the goal is to internationalize this product and differentiate it from the rest through its purity and high quality. The international marketing plan will identify appropriate entry strategies, distribution channels, and brand and product positioning, all while focusing on Canadian consumer preferences.

The overall objective of the project is to develop an international marketing plan for the company Selva Negra that defines strategies aimed at the entry and competitive positioning of the Ecuadorian premium chocolate brand in the Canadian market.

The following specific objectives arise from the general objective:

- Define the theoretical and conceptual foundations of international marketing applicable to the internationalization of premium products in developed markets.
- Conduct an analysis of the Canadian market and the Selva Negra company, identifying consumer trends, competition, regulatory barriers, and its capacity for internationalization through a SWOT analysis.
- Design an international marketing plan for Selva Negra that establishes strategies for market entry and competitive positioning in the Canadian market.

From the research objectives emerges a research question to be addressed, which is: What international marketing strategies would allow Selva Negra to position itself competitively in the Canadian market, considering trends in sustainability and responsible consumption?

To answer this question, the research adopted a qualitative methodology with a descriptive and exploratory focus, aimed at understanding the internal conditions of the Selva Negra company and the characteristics of the Canadian market in the premium chocolate segment. Primary data was obtained through an interview with Mr. Hernán Carabajo Cajilima, owner of Selva Negra, conducted in Cuenca, Ecuador. In this interview, Mr. Carabajo shared his experiences and challenges regarding the internationalization of his brand into foreign markets. The information obtained was supplemented with secondary sources such as market reports, databases, and academic literature.

Models such as PEST, SWOT analysis, SMART objectives, Gantt charts, consumer studies, and competitor analysis were used to analyze the information. The research determines that the company has a solid product offering: high-quality artisanal chocolates made with Ecuadorian cocoa, recognized for their traceability, sustainability, and unique sensory profile. These characteristics align with current trends in the gourmet market, where consumers value the origin, authenticity, and social responsibility of the products they purchase.

This study aims to help the company expand its customer base to an international market by aligning the product's attributes with the requirements of Canadian consumers.

The following international marketing plan is expected to strengthen the company and provide it with the tools to internationalize its products, helping to position them based on their premium Ecuadorian origin.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND STATE OF THE ART

1.1 International Marketing and Entry Strategies

1.1.1 Concept and Scope of International Marketing

International marketing is defined as the planning and execution of cross-border transactions for mutual satisfaction, adjusting to the cultural, economic, and legal particularities of each region, where marketing techniques are employed in a global environment, considering phenomena such as globalization and trade barriers. International marketing involves making decisions about international market research, target market selection, entry strategies, and product standardization, pricing, distribution, and communication depending on the country. In this case, we will analyze the Canadian market (Keegan and Green, 2008) .

In terms of strategies, international marketing is developed through key decisions that make up the International Marketing Plan, which are: the decision to internationalize, the selection of target markets through concentration or diversification approaches, the choice of entry mode, and the adaptation of the marketing mix in terms of product, price, distribution, and communication. Therefore, international marketing is understood as a comprehensive strategy that seeks not only to take advantage of global opportunities, but also to generate sustainable competitive advantages over international competition (Llamazares Garcia-Lomas, 2016) .

Internationalization is the first strategic decision that must be made within international marketing and consists of analyzing whether or not the company should engage in international marketing activities and, therefore, enter foreign markets. It is mentioned that within the international environment, more companies are opting for the alternative of internationalization. It is also important to mention that there are companies that are already focused on international markets, and these are called born global (Llamazares Garcia-Lomas, 2016) .

According to Hollensen (2011) , the scope of international marketing goes beyond the simple export of products, as it involves adapting the marketing mix to meet the needs and preferences of international consumers, while maintaining brand consistency globally. It also allows companies to identify growth opportunities, manage risks associated with

internationalization, and develop sustainable competitive advantages in dynamic global environments.

Currently, companies are interested in implementing marketing strategies with better results has been growing, reinforcing the role of international marketing in the relationship between companies and their consumers, in addition to promoting their goods and services. International marketing acts as a key tool that allows companies to create their business strategies and promote their products or services internationally (Hoang et al, 2019) .

Unlike marketing, which is defined as the social and administrative process by which companies create value exchange with their customers and establish strong relationships with them through interactions within a single market without the need to expand or seek ways to attract more customers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012); international marketing operates in several countries, which requires adaptation to diverse cultural, economic, competitive, and legal realities. In addition, it constitutes business management techniques that serve to extend the principles of traditional marketing to the sphere of international markets, where companies must adapt to differences that characterize each country.

Its scope is not limited solely to sales abroad, but involves a systematic, circular, and continuous process that integrates the areas of production, finance, R&D, logistics, and human resources, thus considering both controllable and uncontrollable variables. However, both types of marketing share the fundamental goal of satisfying customer needs and generating economic benefits (Silva Guerra, 2021) .

1.1.2 Strategies for Entering International Markets

International market entry strategies are key to international marketing, especially for companies seeking to expand their operations beyond national borders and position their products in foreign markets that demand premium products. Therefore, selecting an appropriate entry strategy is crucial to the success of the internationalization process of the product in this case, Ecuadorian chocolate. The choice of entry mode directly influences the level of control, risk, and commitment of resources that the company assumes in the target market. Entry strategies should be based on product characteristics, company capabilities, and specific conditions in the receiving market. If export strategies, strategic alliances, or direct investment are applied well, the company can minimize risks, take advantage of

commercial opportunities, and achieve sustainable and lasting insertion in the international market (Hollensen, 2011) .

International marketing plays a fundamental role in global business strategy, as it allows companies to identify, analyze, and take advantage of opportunities in increasingly competitive foreign markets. In a context of globalization and expansion of trade, improvements in communication and transportation systems have facilitated access to new markets, reducing geographical barriers and strengthening interconnections between countries. This dynamic forces companies to design and implement international marketing strategies that not only consider the standardization of certain elements, but also integrate processes of adaptation to the cultural, economic, social, and regulatory particularities of each region. In this regard, (Hoang et al; 2019) highlights that the ability to adjust marketing strategies to the specific characteristics of target markets is key to increasing global competitiveness, improving brand positioning, and ensuring long-term sustainable international integration.

Global marketing strategies must consider whether products and brands should be adapted or kept the same, depending on the culture and receptivity of the local market and the target audience the company is considering. This approach highlights the importance of constantly evaluating preferences and trends in international markets so that companies can connect appropriately with customers in different regions of the world. In addition, international marketing facilitates the fulfillment of essential consumer demands internationally, establishing a link between the company and customers that respects contemporary trends. Some advantages of global marketing include: reducing costs and minimizing inefficiencies in the production of the product or service, the possibility of adapting products to meet the needs of other markets, the emergence of new brands and creative approaches for the international arena, and the strengthening of infrastructure to adjust to global demand, among others (Petrusevska, 2019) .

It is very important to understand cultural differences to develop successful international marketing strategies. Marketing strategies must be adjusted to respect and align with the local values and customs of the target market, which increases the effectiveness of marketing strategies and improves the brand image globally. There are several factors that drive companies to develop international marketing strategies, including trade agreements between regions, consumer expectations, market demand, cost optimization, increased

quality standards, and the opportunities offered by a market other than our own with certain strategic advantages (Peprah et al; 2017).

However, there may be challenges such as changes in consumer preferences, increasing competition, new needs to be met in the target market, and the need to reduce operating costs to cover all expenses without altering product quality. These challenges lead companies to apply marketing strategies, such as outsourcing and resource optimization, to improve their efficiency without increasing their expenses excessively. Therefore, in addition to increasing the value of products, marketing promotes sustainable growth for the company, allowing it to develop economically and gain greater acceptance in international markets (Cuevas et al; 2020) .

Internationalization strategies are a key tool for overcoming existing barriers and positioning products in a competitive context. Exporting companies must be familiar with export procedures and the variables that could impact marketing in a new market (Civelek et al; 2024) . International marketing is essential for the expansion of companies in global markets, as its correct implementation allows them to overcome trade barriers, adapt to cultural demands, and improve competitiveness.

1.1.3 Adaptation Strategies in Foreign Markets

Once the product has entered the target market, which in this case is the Canadian market, several strategies must be considered to ensure the product is fully adapted to the market so that there are no problems later and the product is a success in this destination. Adaptation strategies are very important as they allow companies to adjust their supply and demand to the specific conditions of the country, having to consider in advance the cultural, economic, and legal factors, as well as the competition already positioned in the country.

Standardization can only be applied locally or in areas similar to our country, but in the case of internationalizing the product, it must be adapted, since, as is well known, international markets are not homogeneous and have differences in consumption habits, cultural values, preferences, and different regulations that directly influence the subsequent acceptance and integration of the product and brand. Authors such as Paris (2014) point out that adapting the marketing mix, which includes the product, its price, the way it is distributed, and communication, are key tools for reducing commercial risk and increasing the likelihood of the product's success in foreign markets.

Adaptation is key for companies from emerging markets, as they face many more barriers than local companies, such as perceptions of product quality, since some countries are more demanding in this regard. Institutional differences between countries and the varying infrastructure offered by each location are also factors to consider.

Fregidou, Chowdhury, and Hyder (2023) show that companies must adapt their products to the requirements of local importers so that they do not have cultural adaptation problems. Communication must also be modified to build customer trust, relying on social networks that are widely used in the region. Culturally, it is also very important to adapt to facilitate entry and acceptance in the international market. This strategy improves understanding of local consumers and strengthens commercial relationships.

In terms of communication, it is important to consider the digital environment, which in recent years has transformed the relationship between brands and consumers, enhancing the role of Web 2.0 in value creation. In this context, Canadian consumers share and evaluate products through social media and digital reviews, reinforcing the importance of communication strategies based on authenticity, transparency, and social purpose (Berthon et al; 2012) .

Strategic adaptation responds to the need to face dynamic and culturally diverse international environments, since if strategies are not modified, they would be uniform, which would be inefficient. Companies that adapt their strategies are able to respond more quickly to market trends and consumer expectations, strengthening their global competitiveness (İpek, 2020). Therefore, adaptation should not be understood as an absolute opposition to standardization, but as part of a contingent approach that balances efficiency and market sensitivity.

In addition, another adaptation strategy was analyzed in a study on the impact of COVID-19 on farmers (Zambrano et al; 2024) , which shows that agri-food chains that endure over time are characterized by digitization and e-commerce as strategies for adapting to the Canadian market, where these trends have accelerated. This reinforces the importance of implementing an international digital strategy in which brand content, social media, and consumer reviews are essential for building trust with new consumers (Berthon et al; 2012).

Adaptation strategies in foreign markets allow the company to align its value proposition with the specific characteristics of the international environment, thus facilitating the product's entry into the market, building trust with consumers, and achieving

long-term competitive sustainability with existing brands. This would enable the company to consolidate its presence in the Canadian market, which is highly competitive and culturally distinct from the Ecuadorian market.

Specific product adaptation strategies could include communicating the Selva Negra brand, i.e., the message it wishes to convey to its consumers, the certifications obtained by the brand that are very important for the Canadian market, the packaging that must be adapted to the language and perhaps to its culture, achieving the correct positioning of the product by responding to the expectations of quality, sustainability, and responsibility demanded by Canadian consumers, thereby increasing the acceptance of the product and reducing barriers to entry (Petruševska, 2019).

1.2. International Marketing Mix for Premium Products

1.2.1. Product Strategy in International Markets

The international marketing mix allows companies to structure strategies that enable them to compete effectively in foreign markets. This study analyzes a premium Ecuadorian product, and in this case, the marketing mix is even more important since this product not only stands out for being organic and high quality, but also has great symbolic value, seeks to provide a great consumer experience, and is considered to be consciously produced, which also tells a story about the product and the brand. If the marketing mix is applied correctly, it creates superior product value, as well as a unique selling proposition in a market as competitive as Canada (Kotler and Keller, 2012).

Decisions made regarding the marketing mix must always be adapted to the specific conditions of each market, considering various factors such as the country's culture, its economy, different legal requirements, and the competition already positioned with similar products. To enter the market with premium products, they must be adapted to the customer and their preferences, prices must be set based on the value of the product, selective distribution must be achieved where these types of products are most consumed, and, last but not least, appropriate communication must be established so that the brand can position itself (Keegan and Green, 2008).

For Selva Negra premium Ecuadorian chocolate, the proper development of an international marketing mix plan could greatly facilitate its entry and positioning in the

Canadian market, where consumers are very demanding in terms of product quality, the sustainability with which it is manufactured, and the experience it provides, setting it apart from the rest.

The product strategy in international markets focuses on the design, adaptation, and management of the tangible and intangible characteristics that the product offers, with the aim of adequately meeting the expectations of the target market and generating advantages over the competition that are sustainable over time. The product is considered the central element of the marketing mix, as it is the basis on which other strategic decisions are made for the entry of a product into international markets, thus adjusting the product to the regulations, cultural preferences, and quality standards required by the destination country (Kotler and Keller, 2012) .

In the case of premium export products, it is necessary to consider more than just their physical characteristics, integrating elements such as a visible brand with a meaningful and eye-catching logo, the origin, i.e., the storytelling of the product, the packaging, which must also be attractive and eye-catching, and, finally, the certifications required by various countries. Products considered premium and luxury seek to build their value by creating a relationship between quality, brand identity, and the unique experience offered to the consumer. The origin of the product is very important in countries such as Canada, as they seek an authentic product that stands out from the rest (Kapferer, 2011) .

For the product to stand out in the target market, it must have a competitive advantage, defined as a company's ability to create more value for its customers than its competitors, thereby exceeding the cost of producing it. This is achieved through three strategies: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. Product differentiation allows the company to compete beyond price by creating unique attributes that are valued by the consumer (Porter, 1985) .

1.2.2 Price and Perceived Value Strategy

The pricing strategy in international markets must be analyzed before implementation, as it involves setting the value of the product or service being offered, considering various factors such as production costs, existing competition, local demand, exchange rates that vary and fluctuate in different ways, and the regulations established by the receiving country. Creating this strategy is one of the most complicated decisions within the marketing mix, as

it has a direct impact on profitability, positioning, and consumer perception of the product (Tan and Sousa, 2011) .

The price of a product must be analyzed in depth, as it is the only element of the marketing mix that generates income, while the other elements only generate costs. However, if the price is too high, the product will not sell as expected. Conversely, if it is too low, it will not be possible to recoup the investment made to manufacture the product. Therefore, there must be a balance in the price, which should leave a profit margin without being excessive. In the case of premium products, the price also fulfills a symbolic function, acting as an indicator of quality, status, internationalization, and differentiation (Kotler and Keller, 2012) .

On the other hand, pricing for premium products should not only be based on production and import costs but should be based primarily on perceived value to maximize profits and global positioning, which requires a thorough analysis of the market into which the product is to be introduced. Therefore, it should be emphasized that the product is imported and handmade so that the relatively higher prices make sense. Value-based pricing strategies make it easier for consumers to pay for the product, mostly in markets where quality and exclusive products are sold, which influences the purchase decision. However, an inappropriate pricing policy can weaken the product's premium positioning and negatively affect the brand image (Nagle and Müller, 2018) .

In European international markets, additional factors must be considered for the pricing strategy, such as logistics costs, tariffs specific to each location that depend on the trade relationship with the country of origin, the exchange rate used, and the intermediaries involved from origin to destination (Keegan and Green, 2008). Initially, approaches such as penetration should be applied, which consists of prices slightly lower than those of the competition to attract the attention of potential customers, followed by a small price increase for all the product's features to match and then surpass the competition. If the pricing policy is developed correctly, it is a key tool for product positioning, reinforcing the perception of value and differentiating the product from its direct competition.

1.2.3 International Distribution and Communication

Distribution and international communication are strategic elements of the marketing mix and are vitally important for premium products, as they directly influence the consumer

experience and the positive or negative image that the brand will have. Distribution refers to the channels and logistics used to bring a local product to a foreign market, while communication refers to the exchange of cultural messages between countries, which is important for achieving global marketing and connecting with foreign consumers.

Distribution channels must be carefully selected to ensure that the product reaches the right consumer who will appreciate the added value offered by a premium product, at the right time and in the right place. As discussed in the internationalization of a premium product, it is advisable to apply selective or exclusive distribution in order to preserve the perceived value of the product by making it exclusive and preventing it from becoming a mass-market product (Kotler and Keller, 2012).

In international markets, it is very important to choose the right distribution channels, which must in turn be aligned with the product's positioning and all the expectations of Canadian consumers. In the case of premium chocolate, distribution should be focused primarily on stores specializing in organic and gourmet products, and digital channels targeting frequent consumers of these stores should be chosen to maintain the product's exclusivity while preserving its value proposition and appropriate pricing. Proper product distribution strengthens consumer confidence and helps position the brand (Keegan and Green, 2008).

In international communication, the attributes that make the product different from the rest must be continuously highlighted, and there must be a willingness to adapt it to the cultural particularities of the destination country and analyze how to develop the export product so that it is more widely accepted. Premium brands must communicate their identity clearly and consistently, based on the values, history, and authenticity of the Ecuadorian product (Kapferer, 2008).

Communication in the Canadian market should highlight the origin, sustainability, and quality of the cocoa, thus connecting with consumers who value responsible consumption, production, and product traceability. Strategic integration of distribution and an appropriate communication plan will consolidate the product's positioning and facilitate its successful entry into the Canadian market.

1.3 Branding, Positioning, and Value of Origin

1.3.1 International Branding and Brand Management

International branding and brand management are considered strategic elements for companies seeking to enter and position themselves in foreign markets. Branding plays an important role in enabling products to position themselves in demanding markets such as Canada. There is fierce international competition in foreign markets, and brands become intangible assets that allow them to differentiate themselves from existing offerings, generating perceived brand value and building strong relationships with consumers (Keller, 2009). On the other hand, brand management, apart from having a solid identity, must have the ability to adapt it to various cultural, economic, and social contexts in a strategic manner.

Several companies face the challenge between global brand standardization and local adaptation, so they choose to apply a semi-global strategy approach that allows them to maintain brand identity even in international markets. However, adjustments must be made in each destination to respond to the demands of each one. Brand value depends on its authenticity, its perception of quality, and how it is adjusted internationally (Douglas and Craig, 2011).

International branding for premium products that are to be internationalized is very important, as the brand must have attributes that differentiate it from other brands offering similar products. Brands must be distinguished by their origin and production quality. In this case, it differs significantly from others due to the fine aroma, cocoa produced only in Ecuador. In addition, the brand must be sustainable, as this is highly valued by Canadian consumers. Proper brand management allows for the transformation of the product, adding value for its subsequent internationalization. To compete with brands already positioned within the new market, the authenticity and value of the product must be highlighted, as these are differentiating tools. The cultural adaptation of the brand is key to gaining value within the international market by creating a connection with consumers and making the product stand out in a market as competitive as the Canadian one (Venkateswaran et al; 2023) .

From the consumer's perspective, brand value is defined as a concept based on knowledge of their preferences and consumption patterns. As a brand becomes recognized and strong, it generates greater customer loyalty, reducing price sensitivity and making the product acceptable in new markets. Building brand equity is essential to compete in a

developed market such as Canada, where consumers are highly informed and demanding (Keller, 2009) .

Perceived brand globalness indicates that brands considered worldwide tend to generate greater associations with prestige, quality, and status. This has a positive influence on purchase intentions and the value that consumers place on the product. When premium chocolate is internationalized with a good branding strategy, it achieves quality standards while maintaining its identity and differentiation of origin (Steenkamp et al; 2003).

Product authenticity is also very important in brand management, as consumers value the history of the chocolate's origin, its artisanal production, its sustainability, and the consistency between the brand's message and the product it offers (Beverland, 2005) . International branding and strategic management, when used correctly, will allow the trademark to differentiate itself in the Canadian market and build long-term value, as a well-managed brand facilitates entry into foreign markets, reinforces the perception of quality, and consolidates the product competitively on an international level.

1.3.2 Product and Origin Storytelling

Product and origin storytelling are strategies that allow brands to communicate authenticity, build trust, and generate emotional value in an international market that is saturated with options and highly demanding. Good storytelling should include the history of the producers, the manufacturing process, the basic characteristics of the product, and the sustainability and social and environmental responsibility values with which it was manufactured. In this way, the brand will have something unique that will differentiate it from the competition and enable it to set a fair price for its product. It will only be effective if it has been written with complete transparency, authenticity, and consistency (Beverland, 2005) .

They are also a key strategic tool in international branding for premium products seeking to enter foreign markets, such as premium chocolate. It should be noted that perceptions about the country of origin influence the evaluation of the brand and the product. However, it should be noted that consumers do not yet have any experience with the trademark, its production history, or its place of origin, so implementing the right storytelling for the product would completely reduce consumer uncertainty, allowing them to value the product even if they have not tried it. The origin of the brand must be communicated with

complete transparency so that consumers know what product they are consuming, where it comes from exactly, and what safety measures were taken in its manufacture, thus enabling them to evaluate its quality, giving it credibility and making the country of origin recognized for its products (Mandung, 2024).

The story of the product's origin also helps it to position itself in new markets, because if consumers are attracted by the storytelling and the whole process that took place before they got their hands on the product, they will be tempted to try it because it is not a standard, mass-produced product. Storytelling is also a strategy for promoting the quality of Ecuador's raw materials and strengthening the country's brand. Our country is internationally recognized to produce fine aroma cocoa, giving it a competitive advantage over other cocoa-producing countries. If we implement the right storytelling, we can more easily capture the consumer's attention (Tobar and Enríquez, 2025).

The Canadian market is one of the countries where it is much more difficult to attract consumers, as they are well informed about quality and seek ethically manufactured products. Storytelling about origin must highlight elements that are important to these consumers, such as sustainability, traceability, and culture. It is necessary to communicate beyond the origin of the product for consumers to choose the brand.

1.3.3 Brand Positioning in Global Markets

Brand positioning in global markets is the act of placing a product or service in a particular way in the consumer's mind, highlighting the importance of the brand image. Therefore, it is also considered a process of market segmentation and selection. This decision is strategic and cannot be made solely by an advertising agency, as it must consider the advantages and disadvantages of competitors. Brands in the global environment compete to occupy a unique space in the consumer's mind, which requires a clear and differentiated value proposition (Paris, 2014).

A positioning built on solid foundations allows companies to generate competitive advantages in highly demanding and competitive markets. Brand positioning must be built through product identity, what the brand offers, and its differentiation in terms of quality. These factors must be communicated and conveyed to consumers so that they recognize the brand and choose to buy the product (Onalaja and Otokiti, 2021).

The product being analyzed is a premium product, so positioning is even more relevant, as premium products acquire this category through intangible attributes such as authenticity, origin, sustainability of production, and how exclusive the product is. All of this is what sets the brand apart from products with a standard and generalized production process, justifying those premium products, being more exclusive, can be sold at a higher price and have a higher perceived value. In international markets, the positioning of these brands must be reinforced with storytelling that connects the product with the history of its origin and with the demands of Canadian consumers, who in this case are our target market (Milanesi et al; 2020) .

Brand positioning also has a strong influence on trends in Canada toward promoting more conscious and responsible consumption and is considered a strategic tool for competing in a market with demanding consumers. Organic and sustainable products make international consumers in highly developed countries such as Canada value responsible production practices, the environmental impact of the product, and the added value of the product. Brands that seek to make their process sustainable and position themselves as such achieve greater differentiation from the competition and gain international recognition (Coronel et al; 2025) .

The Canadian market values gourmet and quality products, which is an opportunity for the brand to position itself as premium, produced with fine Ecuadorian aroma cocoa and in a sustainable manner. However, positioning must be built clearly and consistently in line with consumer expectations to achieve acceptance and permanence in the Canadian market, differentiating itself from other premium chocolate brands, especially through the superior quality of the product and its commitment to responsible practices.

1.4. Ecuadorian Cocoa and Chocolate Market

1.4.1 International Market for Premium Cocoa and Chocolate

The international market for premium cocoa and chocolate has been transforming in recent years, mainly due to changes in consumer preferences, a greater need for the product to be sustainable, and increased demand for quality products with added value. The international market is dominated by cocoa with high production volumes, standardized and affordable prices, i.e., chocolates from large chains. However, brands of cocoa considered premium have now emerged and are seeking to enter different markets. These are

distinguished by their quality, origin, certifications, and specialized production, which give these chocolates unique characteristics (Cadby and Araki, 2021).

Premium cocoa still represents a small percentage of the total volume of cocoa traded worldwide, but its economic value is higher because its prices are differentiated from chain chocolates due to all its attributes and quality. Premium chocolate prices can be up to 95% higher than those of conventional chocolate, allowing countries of origin to offer the highest quality product with notable differentiation. The product is aimed at consumers in developed markets who seek unique experiences in high-value products; in this case, the chocolate highlights the origin of the cocoa, the cultivation methods, and the processing, which give the product its quality (Cadby and Araki, 2021).

Canadian consumers associate the product with intangible attributes that add value, such as authenticity, exclusivity, and socially responsible manufacturing, which allows brands to differentiate themselves from industrialized products and justify higher prices. The internationalization of high value-added products has become a strategic challenge for small and medium-sized Ecuadorian companies. Premium chocolate made with fine aroma cocoa represents a differentiating opportunity in consumer markets for premium and sustainable products, such as the Canadian market. The Canadian chocolate market has a structure dominated by multinational brands such as Hershey's, Nestlé, and Mondelez, companies with extensive financial resources, global supply chains, robust marketing infrastructure, and a consolidated international presence. However, among specialty brands, there are not many whose products stand out for being organic, healthy, and artisanal (McGrath et al; 2016) .

The international cocoa market seeks to be sustainable and responsible in its consumption. Today, there is growing concern about the working conditions of producers, the environmental impact of cultivation, and equity in the distribution of value within the production chain. Therefore, to access markets such as Canada, it is very important to have direct trade schemes, certifications, and agroforestry practices in place. Canada is known for being a consumer of gourmet, sustainable, and certified products, which is why it is considered a strategic destination for premium Ecuadorian chocolate (Siddiqui et al; 2024) .

Companies from emerging economies can successfully position themselves in developed markets when they leverage various resources such as their origin, quality, and product sustainability. The internationalization of SMEs explains that the psychological

distance, defined as cultural, regulatory, and consumer differences between countries, directly influences the level of adaptation of the marketing mix (Boso et al; 2018).

In highly demanding markets such as Canada, this involves adjusting product variables such as flavor, packaging, language, and additional product information. In terms of product advertising, the additional value of being organic and sustainable should be emphasized. Among its characteristics, it should be noted that the product is foreign, and in terms of price, import costs should be considered, but it should still be affordable within the Canadian market. In terms of distribution, it should be sold in organic markets that sell imported products (Sousa and Lages, 2011) .

1.4.2 Ecuadorian Cocoa in the International Context

Ecuadorian cocoa is important in the international context because it has characteristics that set it apart from the rest, such as being recognized as a fine aroma cocoa, which is highly valued by global markets. Ecuador is currently one of the leading producers of cocoa, both in terms of raw materials and premium chocolates. It stands out for its genetic diversity, complex sensory profiles, and favorable climatic conditions for production. The internationalization process of Ecuadorian chocolate has been led by brands such as Pacari and República del Cacao, which have adopted vertically integrated business models with a sustainable approach and international certifications (Calvo et al; 2021).

In the case of Pacari, it has managed to export to more than 42 countries, generating annual sales of over \$5 million through a strategy focused on the quality of fine aroma cocoa, organic and biodynamic practices, and fair prices for local producers. Furthermore, it has received numerous international awards and is considered the Ecuadorian chocolate maker with the highest global recognition, raising consumer expectations regarding new competitors from the country (Lupton et al; 2018).

República del Cacao, for its part, focuses on the gourmet market and partnerships with hotels, chefs, and high-end stores, positioning itself as a benchmark for Latin American luxury. There are several competitive advantages for Ecuador, which have allowed cocoa to transcend its traditional role as a raw material and become internationalized as a premium manufactured product aimed at consumers who value quality, origin, and sustainability. This positioning has led to Ecuadorian cocoa being considered authentic, traditional, and excellent, creating a positive image in international markets. Ecuadorian brands seeking to

internationalize combine the value of origin with marketing strategies to compete in international markets. Brands from emerging economies such as Ecuador can achieve international recognition when they have distinctive resources such as their origin and cultural identity (Luna Ortiz, 2015).

Latin America, with several producing countries, occupies a strategic position in the international premium cocoa market, standing out for its genetic diversity and the quality of its fine aroma varieties. Ecuador is recognized as one of the world's leading producers of fine and aromatic cocoa, giving it a clear competitive advantage in producing premium chocolates for international markets. Ecuadorian cocoa has unique sensory characteristics that are highly valued in the premium product segment (Cadby and Araki, 2021).

Canadian consumers are showing a growing preference for dark chocolate, which requires a minimum of 35% cocoa solids and, according to local regulations, is made with traceable products, certifications, and ethical production values. However, only a small percentage of chocolate sold worldwide qualifies as fine aroma chocolate, which refers to high-quality, genetically distinct, and carefully cultivated cocoa beans that have a complex and unique flavor profile, such as floral, fruity, or spicy notes. This shows that there are positioning opportunities for Latin American brands with a high content of fine aroma cocoa in the Canadian market (Lupton et al; 2018).

Ecuadorian cocoa represents a strategic opportunity for internationalization in any market, as it allows brands to position themselves based on superior quality, recognized origin, and product authenticity, factors that are highly valued by consumers. The main direct competition for any brand seeking to position itself abroad is represented by Pacari and República del Cacao, both of which have a strong international positioning and are recognized for their quality and their model based on fine aroma cocoa.

1.4.3 Competitiveness and Challenges in the Sector

International competitiveness is a company ability to create more value for its customers than its direct competitors. When internationalizing, a company must increase its competitiveness to enter the foreign market by employing a strategic adaptation that considers factors such as the structure of the target market, its trade regulations, its distribution channels, and consumer preferences. In the global context, companies must face rivals worldwide and, to do so, they must develop brand management skills, assertive

communication with customers, be aware of existing competition, and take care of all logistics. It should be noted that a company's ability to adapt its marketing plan reflects its strategy for competing in the international market (Martinez Valverde, 2017).

Competitiveness in the chocolate sector is determined by a combination of productive, commercial, and strategic factors that influence companies' ability to position themselves in target markets. Producing countries such as Ecuador face a highly competitive environment in which large multinational corporations, established brands, and premium brands constantly compete to differentiate themselves from the rest based on quality, innovation, and sustainability. Competitiveness depends not only on how much is produced, but also on each brand's ability to generate added value for the product (Díaz et al; 2025).

One of the main challenges facing the sector lies in the structure of the cocoa value chain, which has focused primarily on the export of raw materials alone. This is a limitation for the country, as it is known only for exporting raw materials to other countries for chocolate production. Despite the high international demand for premium chocolate, there are several problems, such as price changes, logistics costs, dependence on too many intermediaries, and demands from destination countries for environmental and social certifications. These conditions are leading companies to adopt strategies aimed at differentiation, traceability, obtaining certifications, and strictly following international standards to strengthen their competitiveness (Guaita et al; 2023).

The premium chocolate market in developed countries such as Canada also presents several specific challenges, which in this case are linked to consumer behavior and competition. Consumers value intangible attributes such as the origin of the cocoa, the ethics with which it is produced, sustainability, and brand authenticity, making it more difficult for new brands to enter the market. Therefore, new companies must compete on product quality and create a solid value proposition that meets all consumer expectations (Brown et al; 2020).

1.5 Canadian Consumers, Sustainability, and Certifications

1.5.1 Canadian Consumer Behavior and Preferences

Canadian consumers are characterized as rational buyers who always inform themselves before purchasing a product, ethical and conscious in their consumption, valuing transparency in the supply chain and environmental and social certifications. They also perceive a direct link between their purchasing decisions and the well-being of producing

communities and seek to create sustainable cocoa consumption, reinforcing the need to communicate the producer's story and the origin of the cocoa as a central focus of international marketing. Food purchasing decisions in Canada are based on production methods and sustainability, but the factors that dominate this decision are the price and nutritional value of the product. The origin of the product is important, as Canadian consumers show a preference for products with verifiable and reliable provenance. It is therefore very important to be transparent in the description of the product's origin (Macall et al; 2021).

Understanding consumer preferences is a fundamental element in designing strategies for entering and consolidating foreign markets, as it is necessary to analyze consumers, in this case the Canadian market, to understand their tastes and preferences. Preferences are closely linked to cultural, social, and economic factors, so companies must adapt their offerings to the specific expectations of each market (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 2008).

On the other hand, Canadian consumer preferences show us a growing market segmentation where consumers are price-sensitive and many are willing to pay a higher price for quality, healthy attributes, sustainable production practices, and product differentiation (Smimou, 2014). Consumer behavior shows a disparity between attitudes and actual purchasing decisions, where consumers value organic products but without excessive price increases. Therefore, premium products must justify their value through their quality, origin, and benefits.

In terms of sensory preferences in the cocoa market, Canadian consumers favor chocolates with a high percentage of cocoa and fruity, floral, or spicy notes, which benefits the entry of varieties such as Arriba Nacional cocoa. Research on Latin American organic products confirms that consumers in developed markets, especially Canada and the European Union, associate organic and artisanal products with authentic, high-quality fair trade, creating an attractive niche for Ecuadorian chocolate (Coronel et al; 2025).

In the Canadian market, a correct analysis of consumer behavior is essential to define effective positioning strategies. The willingness to purchase chocolates with a clear origin, superior quality, and sustainability is high if the price is in line with these characteristics.

1.5.2 Premium Product Consumption Trends in Canada

Consumption trends in the Canadian market have evolved in recent years, with sustained growth in demand for premium food products. Canadian consumers are known for always being informed about what they consume and demanding high quality, so they are willing to pay a higher price in exchange for the guarantee that the product is high quality, innovative, provides functional benefits, and has intangible values. Consumers value the origin of the product, responsible production, transparency of product information, and sensory differentiation (Lassoued et al; 2023).

Sustainability and innovation are very important in the consumption of premium products in Canada. Consumers associate the product with environmentally and socially responsible practices, prioritizing the purchase of foods that are certified, made from natural ingredients, and produced using verifiable processes. However, price remains a decisive factor in purchasing, forcing premium brands to justify their value proposition through carefully crafted communication strategies designed to attract consumer attention. Therefore, products that stand out for their sensory quality and sustainability are the ones that manage to position themselves in a market as competitive as Canada's (Hamzaoui-Essoussi and Zahaf, 2012).

Chocolate consumption in the Canadian market is directly linked to the trend toward functional and sustainable products, where consumers seek experiences that combine pleasure, health, and environmental responsibility. Experimental research at points of sale in the country shows that the use of sensory stimuli such as the aroma of chocolate, although a very good strategy for attracting consumer attention, does not necessarily increase sales unless there is a correlation between the stimulus and the product category. This highlights the importance of prioritizing tangible differentiation strategies such as tastings, packaging with storytelling, and visible certifications over sensory tactics with ambiguous results (McGrath et al; 2016).

1.5.3 Sustainability, Fair Trade, and International Certifications

Sustainability is an increasingly relevant factor in international marketing, as consumers in developed markets value products that meet environmental, social, and ethical criteria. Sustainability becomes a brand differentiator, contributing to the building of value and trust in the long term. In the chocolate sector, the social and environmental impacts of

production have led consumers to choose the best option and the one that stands out the most. However, cocoa production today faces environmental challenges such as deforestation, soil degradation, economic vulnerability in the areas where it is grown, and income inequality (Merbah and Benito-Hernández, 2024). Sustainability is considered a strategic requirement for competing in developed markets where consumers are demanding.

Fair trade is considered a mechanism for promoting equitable trading conditions, guaranteed minimum prices throughout the production chain, and, above all, lasting relationships between producers and buyers. Fair trade also improves the income and economic stability of cocoa producers, while seeking to strengthen sustainable agricultural practices. For consumers, fair trade is highly valuable as it reinforces production ethics and the commitment that premium brands seek to uphold, which positively influences purchase intent and consumers' willingness to pay a higher price (Dodds and Holmes, 2020).

International certifications serve as guarantees of quality and safety for consumers and distributors. They also play a fundamental role in validating sustainable and fair-trade practices. These are necessary to overcome technical barriers and generate credibility in the target market (Cateora et al; 2010). In premium segments, buyers look for products with labels that guarantee sustainable practices such as Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, and USDA Organic, which act as signals of trust and justify higher prices (Brown et al; 2020). In the Canadian market, consumers value the presence of these certifications, which are considered to indicate higher product quality and responsible production (Vergeer et al; 2020) .

Comparable experiences in the luxury food industry show that successful companies prioritize control of distribution channels, storytelling about origin , and consumer education (Milanesi et al; 2020). Sustainability and fair-trade certification have been shown to be differentiating factors compared to mass brands already on the market. Collaboration between companies and institutional support such as that provided by ProEcuador are decisive factors in consolidating entry into developed markets such as Canada (Yankovoi et al; 2023). Strategies for entering high-level markets depend on factors such as innovation, logistical capacity, and institutional credibility.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Approach and Type of Research

The research will be conducted using a qualitative approach. The aim is to understand and interpret, on the one hand, the internal conditions of the Ecuadorian premium chocolate company Selva Negra and, on the other, the characteristics and opportunities of the Canadian market in the premium product segment. Mainly, documentary, conceptual, and contextual information will be analyzed to facilitate the interpretation of consumer trends in Canada, existing competition, and strategic factors in developed markets such as Canada (Hernandez Sampieri, 2014).

The study is descriptive and exploratory in nature, aimed at understanding the internal conditions of the Selva Negra company and the characteristics of the Canadian market in the premium chocolate segment. It also seeks to understand consumer behavior, specifically regarding premium products, and the internal conditions of the company. The Selva Negra company does not yet have a presence in the Canadian market, therefore, it is necessary to analyze secondary information, identifying opportunities and analyzing possible strategies for entering a new market.

The descriptive and exploratory qualitative approach is essential for integrating key theoretical foundations for the study, diagnosing the target market, and formulating a strategic marketing plan, allowing it to be designed correctly and adapted to the Canadian market.

2.2 Scope and Design of the Research

The scope of this research is to conduct a strategic analysis aimed at formulating a marketing plan proposal tailored to the Canadian market. This study begins with a review of several theoretical foundations of international marketing that are applicable to premium products, in this case cocoa, and seeks to gather as much information as possible about the Canadian premium chocolate market and, above all, to understand the internal capabilities of the Ecuadorian company Selva Negra in order to be able to carry out the internationalization process.

There are two areas to be analyzed for this research: internal and external. Externally, this research seeks to analyze product consumption trends, competition, existing regulatory barriers, and conditions for accessing the Canadian market. Internally, the company's current situation will be analyzed using a SWOT analysis to identify its strengths, opportunities, challenges, and threats directly related to its international expansion.

However, the practical implementation of the marketing plan and the results after its execution are not considered, so it is simply a proposal with the aim of strategically designing the plan based on documentary information, company information, and a qualitative analysis. The scope of this study is limited solely to the development of a viable and coherent marketing plan based on the Canadian market and Selva Negra's organizational capabilities.

The research design is non-experimental and documentary in nature, as no variables will be manipulated and there will be no direct intervention in the study environment; only the market and the company will be analyzed in their current state. This will be done through the collection, review, and analysis of secondary sources, seeking to implement the conditions of the Canadian premium chocolate market and Selva Negra's internal capabilities. This design allows for the integration of theoretical foundations, a strategic diagnosis, and the formulation of proposals, ensuring that the three specific objectives mentioned above are met and that an international marketing plan is developed.

2.3. Information Sources and Techniques

As techniques and sources of information in this research, information will be collected and analyzed with a qualitative approach based on documentary and bibliographic review, using techniques that allow for understanding the context of international marketing, the characteristics of the Canadian premium chocolate market, and the strategic situation of the analyzed company, Selva Negra, thus achieving a strong theoretical basis for the formulation of a functional marketing plan. This methodology is based mainly on the compilation of academic literature on international marketing, positioning, and consumption of premium and organic products.

To ensure the validity and usefulness of this study, several criteria were established for selecting information based on thematic relevance, timeliness, and the rating of academic articles. Therefore, priority was given to scientific documents published in recognized journals, books by important and influential authors in international marketing, and official

reports on foreign trade, imports, exports, consumption, and premium markets. In addition, regularly updated sources reflecting recent trends in the Canadian market were considered, discarding most information that was not supported by recognized sources or that was not directly related to the specific objectives of this research. This process ensured that the information came from reliable sources and that the data used was accurate.

In terms of document and bibliographic review, an information gathering technique was used through an analysis of academic literature on international marketing, internationalization, and the positioning of premium products in developed markets, establishing the theoretical foundations that underpin this research. Internationally recognized databases were reviewed, such as the Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar information repositories, using a search engine with keywords related to international marketing, premium products, developed markets, and internationalization, which were: International Marketing Strategy. In addition, a structured interview was conducted with Hernan Carabajo, owner of Selva Negra, to identify the company's strengths and weaknesses.

Secondary sources included statistical reports, international trade reports, and official data to analyze the Canadian market and its international cocoa trade. The main sources consulted were Trade Map, FAO, ITC, Global Affairs Canada, Euromonitor, and the Central Bank of Ecuador. These are renowned institutions that provide constantly updated information on export and import volumes, current consumption trends in each country, and trade regulations imposed by the country of origin for product access. The use of these sources enabled us to carry out an external diagnosis of the company and prepare a SWOT analysis that integrates key internal and external factors for the development of the international marketing plan. In addition, sector reports, official databases, and economic and trade indicators will be reviewed.

2.4. Methodological Procedure

The methodological procedure in this research was based on a structured and systematic process involving research stages that sought to respond to specific objectives by obtaining information that was filtered according to criteria that either discarded it or classified it as valuable for the study.

The analysis method used is interpretative and analytical in nature, which are characteristics of the qualitative approach. The research involved the identification, collection, and systematic analysis of information in order to facilitate decision-making (Bernal Torres, 2007). In this specific case, documentary and statistical information related to international marketing, the Canadian market, and the current situation of the Ecuadorian premium chocolate company Selva Negra was verified.

The information acquired was organized according to the three specific objectives set out to see which was relevant to each one. In addition, a solid theoretical foundation was established to understand the market and support the research. The aim is to integrate these foundations into a SWOT analysis, which will form the basis for the formulation of the international marketing plan. All of this helped us to transform secondary data into strategic information for the development of the project.

As already mentioned, the study was divided into stages following the logic of the research process outlined by (Bernal Torres, 2007). The stages were sequential, ensuring that the study was logically coherent. The author points out phases such as studying the current situation, formulating the research design, collecting information, processing and analyzing data, and the results obtained.

Among the phases indicated by the author are: the study of the current situation, formulation of the research design, information gathering, data processing and analysis, and presentation of the final report (Bernal Torres, 2007). The research was initially structured by a review and theoretical foundation of international marketing applied to premium products; by the diagnosis of the Canadian market and the Selva Negra company through the analysis of secondary information; and by the formulation of the international marketing plan based on the results obtained. Each of these stages related the theoretical framework, the state of the art, the internal and external analysis of the company, and the proposed marketing plan.

In terms of information validation criteria, criteria of source reliability, currency, and relevance to the topic of analysis were used. Relevant information was sought that contributes to the topic of international marketing for the entry of premium brands into developed markets, prioritizing academic sources indexed with a prestigious and well-rated journal, official reports, and internationally recognized databases.

Finally, the consistency between the sources consulted was verified by comparing statistical data and the market situation to avoid false information. The correct selection of information ensured that the theoretical basis of this research was solid and that a viable international marketing plan could be properly designed.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Situational Analysis

3.1.1 External Analysis: Macroenvironment

A thorough analysis of the Canadian market is essential to assess the viability of entering the market with Selva Negra, a premium Ecuadorian chocolate. Canada has emerged as a highly attractive market for the export of premium products with high added value, as it boasts strong purchasing power and a high degree of openness toward international products that offer superior quality and traceable origins. Regarding the size of the Canadian market, the chocolate sector in Canada is growing sustainably, driven by increased demand for premium products that stand out from mass-market chocolates. The premium chocolate segment has gained prominence within the industry, as Canadian consumers are willing to pay higher prices for products offering distinctive attributes such as a higher percentage of cocoa in their composition, natural ingredients, and artisanal production processes. Consumption of premium products in the Canadian market is notable, as it demonstrates that product quality and sensory experience are more important than price (Mordor Intelligence, 2026).

Regarding consumer trends in the Canadian market, there has been a growing interest in products that embody sustainability and health values and a production chain that demonstrates full transparency. Organic chocolates produced through fair trade and artisanal methods are highly sought after by Canadian consumers, as they value product traceability, the origin of the cocoa, and responsible practices in its production and supply chain. In this context, Ecuadorian cocoa is internationally recognized as fine-aroma cocoa, which represents a significant competitive advantage, as it allows the product to be positioned in a segment distinct from the rest, demonstrating that it is a high-quality product with an internationally recognized origin and is environmentally sustainable (International Cocoa Organization, 2023).

The competitive structure of the Canadian market in the chocolate sector is largely dominated by international mass-production companies with a strong international presence and brand recognition. These large-scale companies control a significant portion of the market through a wide range of products across different segments; however, none of these are artisanal or premium, which are attributes that appeal to Canadian consumers. In recent

years, the presence of brands specializing in premium and artisanal chocolates has increased; these brands compete with large chains and have the advantage of offering differentiating attributes such as the origin of the cocoa, the quality of the production process, and their ingredients particularly the raw material, which is recognized as distinct from other types of cocoa.

Distribution channels in the Canadian market are primarily supermarkets, specialty gourmet stores, retail chains, and e-commerce platforms. Supermarkets and wholesale stores represent the channel with the highest sales volume, while the others allow for positioning the product with greater added value. The growth of e-commerce has facilitated the entry of new international brands into the Canadian market, allowing various companies to reach end consumers directly through platforms and marketplaces (Statistics Canada, 2025).

Canada is characterized by a market with high standards of quality, sustainability, and transparency, which represents both an opportunity and a challenge for brands from producing countries such as Ecuador. Therefore, the environment is considered largely favorable for the introduction of premium chocolates, characterized by consumers willing to pay for quality, sustainability-oriented trends, and a growing market within the gourmet segment. The presence of international competitors and regulatory requirements pose an obstacle; however, if Selva Negra focuses on proper differentiation based on its origin, the internationally renowned quality of its cocoa, regulatory compliance, and a value-added marketing strategy, this would enable the company to address these challenges, strengthen its competitiveness in the premium segments, and achieve a successful and sustainable entry into the Canadian market.

The global chocolate market continues to grow, driven by increased demand for premium, healthy, organic, and traceable products. In 2024, the global chocolate market was valued at approximately \$136.02 billion, and annual growth of 4–5% is projected through 2030 (Statista Research Department, 2025). Within this market, the premium chocolate segment has grown faster than industrial chocolate, with rates exceeding 6% (Fortune Business Insights, 2023). This reflects key trends such as a preference for natural ingredients, interest in bean-to-bar products, greater emphasis on cocoa origin, and a focus on sustainability. The PEST analysis will examine the macroenvironmental factors that influence the viability of entering the Canadian market with Ecuadorian Selva Negra premium chocolate.

Political and legal factors

The Canadian market is characterized by stable political and legal environments with solid institutions and a regulatory framework that guarantees transparency in all commercial operations, as it is known for its high standards of control over food imports. The food product marketing system is regulated by the Safe Food for Canadians Regulations, which establish mandatory requirements such as import licenses, preventive safety systems ensuring that products comply with safety standards, guaranteeing that foods will not cause harm to consumers when prepared and consumed, being free of physical, chemical, or biological hazards, and product traceability (CFIA, 2026). This is an important factor in gaining consumer confidence and achieving competitiveness with other imported products on the market.

Similarly, strict labeling regulations require all prepackaged foods to include mandatory information in English and French, which would mean adapting packaging for companies exporting to the Canadian market. Since January of this year, Canada has implemented mandatory front-of-package labeling for foods that exceed certain levels of sugar, sodium, and saturated fat, a requirement that directly impacts products such as chocolate and other processed foods (Health Canada, 2026). These strict provisions reflect the Canadian government's priority on consumer safety and health.

Commercially, Canada has agreements that facilitate trade with countries in Latin America, which significantly reduces tariff barriers and provides a favorable environment for premium, high-quality products. Its membership in the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, as well as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the World Trade Organization, reinforces an environment of regulated openness and promotes favorable conditions for the insertion of premium and superior quality products (Government of Canada, 2026).

In terms of the country's political stability, there are low levels of corruption and reliable institutional governance. The independence of regulatory bodies such as the CFIA ensures the correct application of standards, reducing risks associated with unexpected changes in trade or health policies. In addition, environmental sustainability policies are important as they include regulations on recyclable packaging, reduction of single-use plastics, and environmental labeling. These requirements represent a challenge for exporting companies, but at the same time offer opportunities for differentiation for those that integrate responsible practices into their market strategy, promoting a circular economy.

Economic factors

The Canadian market has a developed economy with high per capita income and strong purchasing power, making it an attractive market for premium chocolate due to its sustainable consumption and greater willingness to pay for quality, origin, and differentiators (The World Bank, 2024). The latest projections for the chocolate market in Canada towards 2031 point to growth driven by a preference for premium, sustainable products with higher added value (Mordor Intelligence, 2026).

On the other hand, the international market has seen an increase in cocoa costs and global logistics costs, which has a negative impact on the structure of final prices. This reinforces the importance of creating an entry strategy that combines differentiation of the premium offering with a realistic pricing structure (May and Teixeira, 2024). The Canadian economic environment is solid, but it still requires pricing strategies that are in line with the target segment, thus avoiding competition from established multinationals with more standardized products.

The macroeconomic environment is characterized by monetary stability and low inflation compared to other markets, which supports investment and marketing decisions. However, volatility in international cocoa prices and transportation costs can have a significant impact on operational profitability, requiring companies to develop risk management strategies.

The Canadian market is highly segmented, with consumers willing to pay a premium for differentiated products. The company must position itself correctly to enter premium market segments, competing with other brands by highlighting its quality, origin, and sustainability, rather than attempting to enter a market dominated by multinational chocolate companies that mass-produce undifferentiated products.

Social factors

In terms of sociocultural factors, Canada is considered a multicultural society with consumers who are open to trying international products and who have a keen interest in ethical and sustainable foods. Above all, Canadian consumers are attracted to products that are certified as organic, fair trade, and manufactured using responsible practices (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2024). What Canadian consumers value most is transparency in the product's origin process and that this process is carried out sustainably with fresh and natural

ingredients, which will provide a different sensory experience than that provided by mass-produced chocolates.

Ecuadorian cocoa is internationally recognized for its quality and aromatic profile, which can become a relevant differentiating factor in the Canadian market (International Cocoa Organization, 2023). In premium categories, these elements often influence the purchase decision, especially when the product is positioned as an experience. A premium Ecuadorian chocolate can capitalize on country and origin attributes and build value from a brand story consistent with responsible consumption expectations.

The social and environmental awareness of Canadian consumers is very important in the social context, as they value brands that communicate sustainability and responsibility practices in their manufacturing processes. They have a preference for products with clear traceability and narratives that reinforce the connection with producing communities, generating an emotional bond. Therefore, incorporating cultural elements and national identity into the communication strategy can strengthen the perception of authenticity and differentiation, getting more consumers genuinely interested in the product.

The growing importance of responsible consumption trends in Canada means that consumers are increasingly preferring products with certifications for fair trade, environmental sustainability, and traceability of cocoa origins; as a result, export companies must adapt their market offerings to emphasize not only quality but also the ethical and social attributes of their products.

Sociocultural segmentation in Canada is diverse, as there are consumers who base their purchasing decisions on production transparency and the environmental and social impact of the product, while others who are more traditional base their decisions on the sensory quality of the product and brand recognition. This diversity of consumers means that brands seeking to position themselves must design marketing strategies that are correctly adapted to different consumer profiles, demonstrating that the product is sustainable and that the experience of consuming it is differentiated and unique.

Technological factors

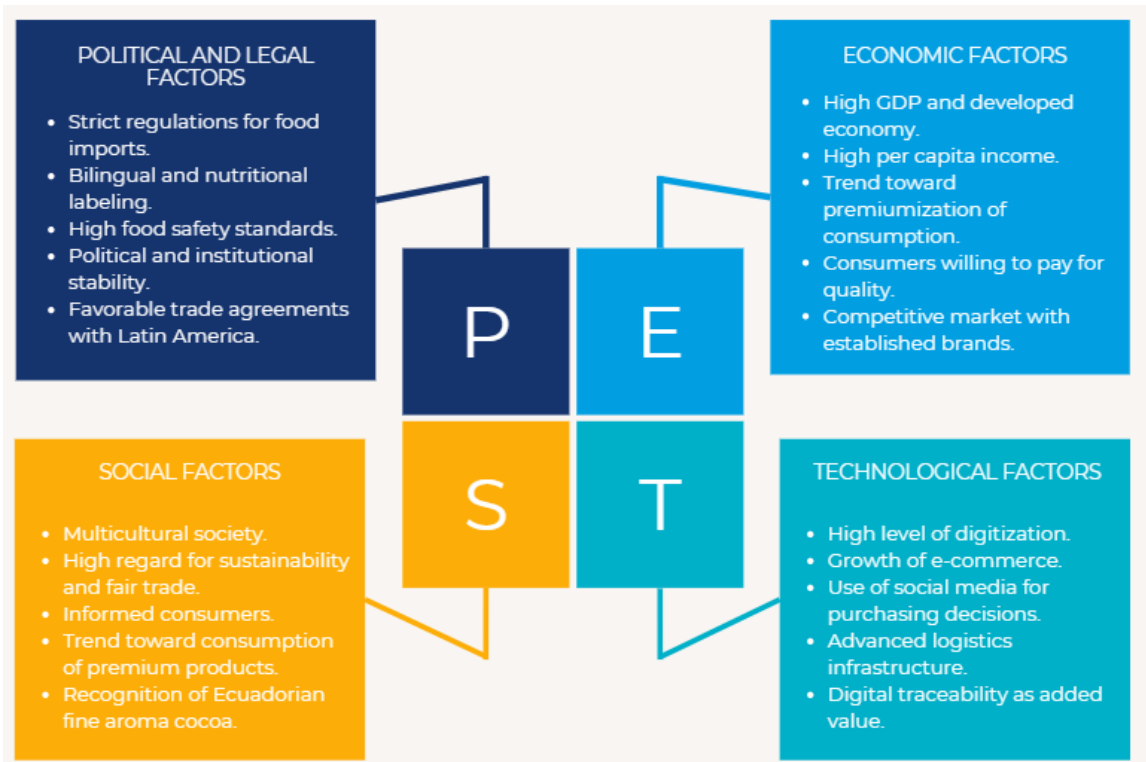
In terms of technology, Canada has a high level of digitization and technological development, especially in e-commerce and digital marketing. The growth of e-commerce facilitates access for international brands to the end consumer without the need for so many intermediaries. In turn, logistical and technological developments allow for efficient product

distribution while maintaining the main quality standards for imported products (Statistics Canada, 2025). Presence on e-commerce platforms, the use of digital marketing tools, and the incorporation of traceability technologies facilitate market access and constitute differentiating factors compared to competitors who still rely on traditional channels. Therefore, technological adaptability must guarantee the competitiveness and sustainability of the value proposition in the Canadian market.

In recent years, mobile devices and digital platforms have become vitally important in our daily lives, transforming the shopping habits of Canadian consumers. The use of e-commerce applications and digital payment systems has created an environment in which convenience and speed are decisive factors in the shopping experience. This is an opportunity for international brands seeking to enter and position themselves in the Canadian market to integrate digital marketing strategies that engage with customers by analyzing their data and consumption patterns (Berthon et al; 2012).

The Canadian market seeks to adopt traceability and quality control technologies to ensure consumer food safety and transparency in supply chains. Therefore, implementing digital systems to track products from their origin to consumption would reinforce confidence in imported products and be a differentiator within the premium segment. In addition, the development of technological logistics infrastructures, automating certain processes such as distribution and transport, would reduce operating costs on a large scale and ensure that products maintain their quality during the import process.

Figure1
PEST Analysis



3.1.2. External Analysis: Microenvironment

The premium chocolate market that Selva Negra aims to enter is characterized by intense competition, with domestic and international companies that have established their reputations through sensory quality, certifications, innovation, and a presence in global markets. In Ecuador, the main direct competitors are brands such as Pacari and República del Cacao, both of which have a strong international presence and are recognized for their quality and their model based on fine-aroma cocoa. Pacari, in particular, has received numerous international awards and is considered the Ecuadorian chocolate maker with the greatest global recognition, which raises consumer expectations regarding new competitors from the country. República del Cacao, for its part, focuses on the gourmet market and partnerships with hotels, chefs, and high-end stores, positioning itself as a benchmark for Latin American luxury.

Internationally, Selva Negra faces large corporations and established brands in the premium segment. Companies such as Nestlé, Hershey's, Mondelez International, Mars, and Lindt & Sprüngli, along with various European brands, dominate most of the gourmet chocolate market in Canada. These companies have extensive financial resources, global

supply chains, a robust marketing infrastructure, and a well-established international presence.

Indirect competition also includes affordable premium commercial brands available in supermarkets, which, while not competing directly on sensory prestige, do occupy space in the channels where Selva Negra plans to enter. Chocolates such as Lindt Excellence, Green & Black's Organic, or Ghirardelli set benchmarks for price and quality against which consumers evaluate new brands. In this competitive environment, Selva Negra's differentiation must focus on its Ecuadorian origin, the quality of its fine-aroma cacao, its artisanal character, and its commitment to sustainability and traceability.

In the Canadian market, potential customers must be analyzed in depth to understand their characteristics and tailor Selva Negra's value proposition to the target consumer, who is characterized by a high level of knowledge about the products they consume, as well as high purchasing power and a preference for premium and differentiated products. Potential customers in the Canadian market belong to urban segments with middle- and high-income levels, who value differentiating attributes such as the quality of organic products, the origin of the cacao, sustainable practices in artisanal production, and fair trade.

Purchasing behavior in the Canadian market is significantly influenced by factors such as product presentation, branding, and the consumer experience. Premium chocolate is not only perceived as a food item but is also viewed as a high-value product that customers highly desire to give as a gift or to enjoy on special occasions. The current use of e-commerce makes it easier for customers to access international brands, which represents an opportunity for the brand to enter the Canadian market through digital strategies for brand positioning and segmentation in the international market.

Selva Negra works with fine-aroma cocoa, and its suppliers are local and national, which directly influences the availability, quality, and cost of inputs for chocolate production. This ensures an adequate supply of raw materials and allows production processes to be optimized, thereby expanding installed capacity to respond to new markets without compromising product quality the most important and distinctive feature of the Selva Negra brand.

The fact that the company relies primarily on local suppliers gives it a significant advantage in directly accessing raw materials, allowing it to exercise more direct control over the quality of inputs to ensure the quality of the final product. However, this reliance

on suppliers can also pose a challenge in the face of fluctuations in supply, variations in cocoa prices, and potential limitations in supply capacity. Internationally, cocoa prices are quite volatile, as climate change can affect its production.

For the product to succeed internationally, suppliers must meet certain quality standards and certifications that support sustainable and responsible practices, such as fair trade and organic certifications. Diversifying suppliers and establishing long-term strategic relationships can help reduce risks and improve supply stability, strengthening the company's ability to compete in demanding international markets like Canada's.

3.1.3. Internal Analysis

Selva Negra is an Ecuadorian chocolate company that was founded in 2023 as a small artisanal workshop in the cocoa-growing region of southern Ecuador. It specializes in crafting premium products using fine-aroma cocoa and is currently at a pivotal stage of growth as it seeks to enter international markets for the first time. Its products combine artisanal techniques with a sustainable, fair-trade approach. Here in Ecuador, it already has a stable customer base, but the goal is to make the leap into international markets. Although Selva Negra does not yet export, its product range is extensive, with flavors that align perfectly with current global consumer trends: artisanal, traceable, ethical, sustainable, and distinctively flavored products.

The company employs staff trained in the production of high-quality products, particularly in artisanal processes related to the processing of fine-aroma cocoa. Its strength lies in the flexibility it possesses in developing innovative products, as the owner has over 20 years of experience in the food industry; consequently, the development and testing of new products is not complicated for the company, and quality standards in production are guaranteed, although this may require strengthening in specialized areas such as foreign trade and international marketing.

In terms of production capacity, Selva Negra has a stable and controlled system for local production, but its capacity is still limited compared to large companies. While there is the potential to increase production by adapting it to growth and demand, there is a limitation when compared to large companies at the national level. The company's production capacity ensures consistency in product quality, but to enter international markets, it is necessary to evaluate its scalability and ability to adapt to higher volumes of demand.

Technologically, Selva Negra combines several traditional chocolate production processes with various technical tools that allow for maintaining quality and traceability in the final product. The incorporation of more advanced technologies into production and quality control processes could greatly enhance the company's competitiveness in highly demanding international markets such as Canada.

In terms of its logistics capabilities, Selva Negra has significant experience in local distribution and brand positioning, having participated in trade shows both in Cuenca and nationwide, as well as in exports within Ecuador, which gives it a significant initial advantage. However, expanding into international markets such as Canada would require the development of more complex logistics strategies to ensure product preservation and timely delivery. Regarding its internal organization, its structure is basic but functional, allowing the company to coordinate production and commercial activities in a timely manner; however, to internationalize it, it is necessary to formalize and expand several processes and implement strategies focused on managing international markets.

The digital tools used by Selva Negra are still quite limited, as its presence on various digital platforms is minimal, relying solely on Facebook and Instagram pages to reach customers. If the company seeks to internationalize, it must strengthen its digital strategy to improve its international positioning, particularly through digital marketing, e-commerce, and brand management in global environments.

Selva Negra has a firm commitment to quality and sustainability and is well-established in the domestic and, above all, local markets. As a medium-sized company with limited resources to tackle multiple markets simultaneously, it is crucial to define a strategic path that maximizes its chances of success by analyzing its internal and external situation to assess its capacity to enter the Canadian market. Its value proposition is based on offering distinctive chocolates that highlight the origin of Ecuadorian cocoa, which is internationally recognized.

Regarding its export experience, the company has not yet been able to export abroad for various reasons; one of them is that there has been no expansion into international markets, nor has the brand been introduced there yet. However, there is a project to expand the brand to international trade shows and introduce it to foreign markets; this project has great potential and the company aims to implement it as soon as possible, as it represents an opportunity for the brand's internationalization.

Regarding Selva Negra's knowledge of foreign markets, the company possesses basic information about them, demonstrating an initial understanding of the dynamics of international trade and global trends in premium chocolate consumption. However, it is absolutely necessary to conduct a more in-depth analysis of Canadian consumers, their preferences, consumption habits, and regulatory requirements in order to design an appropriate and competitive international marketing strategy for the brand's successful entry into the market.

Its adaptability is quite positive, as the company shows great potential to adjust its value proposition in line with the demands of international markets while maintaining product quality and differentiating itself through its origin. Additionally, the company has the capacity to gradually increase production in case international demand rises. This is complemented by its prior experience in exports within the region, which facilitates logistics and regulatory processes when expanding into new international markets. However, it is still necessary to strengthen its adaptability in key areas such as labeling standards which, as mentioned, differ in Canada packaging, and the communication strategies used to capture the attention of Canadian consumers, ensuring proper alignment with regulatory requirements and Canadian consumer expectations.

3.1.4. Product, Price, Place, and Promotion Strategies

Product

In its product analysis, Selva Negra focuses on premium chocolates made exclusively from fine-aroma Ecuadorian cocoa, which gives them a natural distinction highly valued in gourmet markets; the company stands out for its variety of formats, flavors, and artisanal offerings. Its catalog includes dark, white, and flavored chocolate bars with natural fruit extracts such as pineapple, berries, mango, and mint. Additionally, the brand features innovative flavor combinations, such as dark chocolate with a high cocoa content of 80%, which retains its aromas and floral and fruity notes. A new product development is white chocolate with pineapple, one of the most exotic offerings from the brand, in addition to various fruit flavors. All natural and organic ingredients are preserved, ensuring the brand's commitment to health.

Figura 2
Selva Negra Chocolates



Adapted image taken from Instagram @selvanegrachocolate, 2025,
https://www.instagram.com/p/DIzOog7JsxB/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==

What sets the Selva Negra brand apart from other premium chocolates is that, while there are several brands in the domestic market that offer excellent products, each with its own unique characteristics, Selva Negra stands out as a premium and unique chocolate due to its artisanal production, the use of high-quality cocoa, and the incorporation of natural ingredients that set it apart in both flavor and presentation. Furthermore, it offers a wide variety of flavors not found in other brands, various chocolate combinations, and the ability to customize each package with the chocolates it will contain. This significantly reinforces the product's value proposition, which is geared toward providing more exclusive consumer experiences while always striving to meet consumer expectations.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the product is manufactured through a meticulous artisanal process designed to preserve the natural notes of the cocoa. This added

value allows the brand to position itself not only as a food product but as a distinctive experience within the gourmet segment, representing a competitive advantage for its internationalization process. Selva Negra's chocolate offerings feature characteristics aligned with international trends in the premium chocolate market, which is considered a competitive advantage for its internationalization process.

Price

Selva Negra's pricing strategy focuses on offering products at an affordable price within the local market while maintaining a value proposition geared toward the premium segment. The price level of each product offered could be classified as mid-range compared to competitors' prices in the Ecuadorian market, allowing the company to easily maintain its competitiveness and accessibility to its current consumers. The product has several characteristics, such as its superior quality, the origin of the raw material (in this case, cocoa), and its 100% artisanal production. It is considered a premium product with a price commensurate with its characteristics, as the price aligns with its quality, origin, and premium gourmet positioning.

Selva Negra must adapt its prices for different types of markets, as the local price cannot be the same as the international price. Tourists typically pay more for small sizes and packaging featuring Ecuadorian themes, so adapting the product to this need could go hand in hand with a price increase due to the adaptation. As for the national gourmet market, if the product were to enter this segment, it should increase its value and enhance its image.

As for the brand's premium positioning in foreign countries, this has not yet been achieved, even though the product possesses several features that set it apart from other brands, such as innovation in its flavors; however, the current price levels do not accurately reflect the perceived value in international markets. To successfully internationalize the product, it is necessary to adjust the pricing strategy by increasing its value in line with consumer expectations so that the product can compete in the Canadian market through a positioning with a more competitive price range, taking into account external factors such as: export costs, certifications required to export the product, the price level of competitors in Canada, the income level of potential consumers, logistics, tariff, and distribution costs, thereby raising the price of each product.

Therefore, Selva Negra's pricing strategy must evolve from an affordable approach to one based on value, adapting to Canadian market conditions and reinforcing its positioning as a premium Ecuadorian chocolate brand.

Market

The company's distribution channels help identify its market reach and assess its capacity for expansion into international markets. The channels currently used are based on direct sales at local fairs, supported by the company's digital channels for promoting the product primarily Instagram and Facebook through which end customers are contacted directly, allowing for close control over the shopping experience and brand perception.

Selva Negra's distribution is currently concentrated in the local market, with limited national reach and no international scope. This is due to its business model, which focuses on artisanal production and direct sales, making the product quite exclusive, which limits its positioning in broader markets. The goal in the international market would be to achieve product expansion and positioning through premium distributors that allow for the expansion of distribution channels, the introduction of the product into premium or duty-free stores, and the start of using e-commerce platforms, thereby expanding the product's reach and positioning it in international markets.

The expertise of an exporter would be necessary, as there is a lack of experience in exporting, limited experience in international markets, and potential logistical constraints, which could hinder the brand's initial positioning in the Canadian market. Selva Negra has the opportunity to form strategic alliances to seek support from exporters and external financing to drive the internationalization process.

Promotion

Selva Negra's production is based on a semi-automated process that combines modern machinery with artisanal techniques, allowing for a balance between efficiency and premium quality. The company works exclusively with fine-aroma cacao sourced from small-scale producers in southern Ecuador, who use traditional harvesting and fermentation practices that enhance the cacao's aromatic notes. Once the beans are received, Selva Negra carries out an in-house process that includes manual sorting, controlled roasting, dehusking, grinding, extended conching, and precise tempering, ensuring a smooth texture and a clean, powerful flavor. Its production capacity is moderate, as it can easily supply the local market, but to sustain consistent exports, it needs to expand its machinery and optimize space,

particularly in the conching and packaging areas. The company produces small batches to guarantee freshness, which is highly valued in the gourmet segment; however, this same approach means that current volumes are insufficient to fulfill large international orders without prior investment in infrastructure. Additionally, eco-friendly and artisanal packaging takes longer to produce, as some involve manual labor and one-by-one quality checks. The company complies with Good Manufacturing Practices and is in the process of obtaining certifications to facilitate exports. Overall, Selva Negra has a solid, standardized production process capable of ensuring high quality, but it is still at a stage where it needs to scale up its capacity, automate certain steps, and strengthen its logistics chain if it wants to compete sustainably in international markets.

3.1.5. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis of Selva Negra identifies the internal and external factors that influence the company's competitive capacity and its subsequent internationalization process. Using this tool, the company analyzed its internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats in the external environment, in order to develop international marketing strategies that will facilitate the entry of Ecuadorian premium chocolate into the Canadian market.

Table 1
SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of high-quality, aromatic fine cocoa • Artisanal production with a premium focus • Brand image associated with sustainability and fair trade • Certifications • Stable and controlled production capacity 	<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand for premium, organic, and single-origin chocolates • Trends toward sustainable and responsible consumption • Opportunities for partnerships with specialized distributors • Participation in international trade shows to build brand awareness
<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited budget for international marketing • Limited production capacity • Weak digital presence • Reliance on a small number of cocoa suppliers • Lack of international certifications and standards • Lack of adaptation to international markets 	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intense competition from established international brands • Volatility in international cocoa prices • Strict regulations and barriers to entry • Rising logistics and export costs

It can be argued that the company possesses significant strengths, such as the high quality of the Ecuadorian fine-aroma cocoa used in its products including both dark chocolates and fruity white chocolates with a primary focus on product quality, which enables it to compete in the premium segment. Selva Negra's value proposition is based on premium chocolate and flavor differentiation, emphasizing origin, nature, and tradition.

The brand maintains a solid image associated with quality and sustainability, further supported by organic and fair trade certifications that strengthen its credibility with international consumers. In addition, it has stable and well-controlled production capacity, having significantly improved its production processes and new product development since its inception, which ensures consistency in its offerings. Added to this is its prior experience in exports within the region, which facilitates logistics and regulatory processes as it expands into new international markets.

The global market shows growing demand for organic, artisanal, and single-origin chocolates, which directly benefits Selva Negra thanks to its focus on quality and sustainability. Global consumer trends increasingly value certified products and social responsibility, opening doors to high-value gourmet niches; therefore, there are ample opportunities to establish strategic alliances with distributors specializing in premium products, as well as for entering international trade fairs that boost the visibility and positioning of emerging brands with differentiated offerings. The growing interest shown by the international market in fine-aroma cocoa is what has led Selva Negra to present this project and keep it in mind for the internationalization of the product.

As for the identified weaknesses, the company's production capacity is considered quite limited compared to well-known national companies. The brand holds local certifications, but for the internationalization process, it is necessary to obtain international certifications and meet international standards to access new markets a critical requirement since European and American markets demand certain standards, such as the sustainability of raw materials and product origin. Although the company has traceability and complies with various regulations and certifications, these come at a high cost, which currently acts as an impediment or weakness.

Selva Negra faces a limited budget for international marketing campaigns, making it difficult to compete in terms of visibility with global brands. Its digital presence is limited, affecting its reach and recognition in key markets. Furthermore, its current portfolio lacks

diversification for foreign markets, which limits its ability to adapt to the specific preferences of international consumers. The company has limited resources, but it is worth noting that it is experiencing steady growth, which is strategically focused on strengthening the brand if it is to stand out nationally and internationally.

There are significant threats, such as strong competition from established international brands and regulatory requirements, which represent barriers to entry into the international market. The company competes in an international environment dominated by established brands that are highly positioned in the premium segment, which increases the need for differentiation and effective communication. Fluctuations in the global price of cocoa pose a direct risk to production costs. Additionally, many markets impose strict regulations, health controls, and tariff barriers that can complicate and increase the cost of bringing the product to market. Added to this is global economic instability, which tends to reduce consumption of gourmet products, particularly affecting brands in the process of expansion such as Selva Negra.

Regarding the SWOT analysis, it is shown that Selva Negra must adopt a strategy based on differentiation, leveraging its Ecuadorian origin and the quality of its fine-aroma cocoa. It is also crucial to mitigate several of the weaknesses through regulatory compliance and the development of strategic distribution partnerships, in order to facilitate its entry and positioning in the Canadian market.

3.2. Objectives

The objectives of the international marketing plan for the entry of the Ecuadorian brand Selva Negra into the Canadian market must be clear and realistic; therefore, they are established using a SMART approach, which is defined as a methodology for setting strategic and effective objectives that allows for the definition of goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. These objectives are primarily aimed at facilitating the entry and positioning of premium Ecuadorian chocolate in the Canadian market, taking into account environmental conditions, market analysis, and the company's capabilities (Llamazares Garcia-Lomas, 2016). The objectives must stem from an understanding of the product's competitive environment and the company's capabilities, as the product must stand out in the Canadian market due to its origin and the sustainability of its production processes.

The overall objective is to achieve the entry and positioning of the Ecuadorian premium chocolate brand Selva Negra in the Canadian market, aiming to reach cumulative sales of approximately USD 40,000 by 2026. These figures are based on a gradual market penetration strategy, as the company currently has no prior export experience; additionally, the goal is to implement international marketing strategies focused on differentiation, quality, and sustainability.

For subsequent years, progressive growth is projected to achieve higher revenue levels as the brand's position in the international market consolidates. This international sales objective is based on the performance of similar Ecuadorian chocolate brands such as Pacari or Republica del Cacao, which similarly began their international expansion with small exports, limited distribution, and acceptance tests.

As for more specific objectives, several can be mentioned, such as increasing the brand's presence in the Canadian market to enable the sale of Selva Negra chocolates through distribution channels like online platforms and specialty or gourmet stores. The goal is also to build brand recognition in the Canadian market, driving significant growth in international digital engagement through social media and online e-commerce platforms. Furthermore, the product must be adapted to the requirements of the Canadian market to ensure 100% compliance with all entry regulations, such as labeling, packaging, and food safety standards, prior to the product's launch. Furthermore, strategic partnerships must be established with distributors or importers specializing in premium products and their marketing. Positioning the product in the premium segment is crucial, as the goal is for the product to be sold primarily to specialty stores with customers who share a similar profile those seeking differentiated products with high added value, which in this case would be the product's artisanal and organic nature, as well as the brand's unique differentiation. Last but not least, the international pricing strategy must be optimized, ensuring a minimum profit margin of 20% on the total export cost.

However, certain strategic considerations must be clear, as the objectives are aligned with current trends in the Canadian market, which is characterized by high demand for premium, sustainable products with traceable origins. Therefore, the market entry strategy must be based on a differentiated positioning that highlights the quality of the internationally recognized fine-aroma cocoa, as well as on artisanal production processes and compliance with the certifications required by the Canadian market. Furthermore, the objectives also align with the current capabilities of the Selva Negra company and its need to strengthen its

international positioning through various differentiation and value-added strategies, always keeping in mind that the product must be adapted to Canadian consumer preferences.

3.3. Strategies

3.3.1. Strategies for Entering the Canadian Market

Selva Negra is a medium-sized Ecuadorian chocolate company with limited resources that specializes in the artisanal production of premium chocolates. The company is currently at a critical stage of growth and is seeking to enter international markets for the first time. Although Selva Negra has no prior export experience, its products are based on fine Ecuadorian-aroma cocoa, and their flavors align perfectly with current global consumer trends: artisanal, traceable, ethical, sustainable, and distinctively flavored products.

For the brand's entry into the Canadian market, a phased strategy must be implemented to minimize risks and maximize brand positioning. In this case, a concentration strategy was chosen, meaning the company will initially focus on a single international market specifically Canada since concentrating on a single market allows for better adaptation and significantly increases the chances of successful positioning. The study focused on a single market because the company does not yet have a solid export structure; therefore, diversifying from the outset would entail assuming logistical, financial, and commercial risks for which it is not yet prepared. Instead, concentrating on a single market will allow it to dedicate all its production capacity, promotional budget, and logistical efforts to ensuring that the entry is carried out correctly, orderly, and successfully. Furthermore, it is important to note that the premium chocolate sector is highly competitive and requires a clear positioning from the very beginning. A concentration strategy helps build a solid identity, generate brand recognition, and better understanding of consumer preferences before expanding. This strategy has been used by other Ecuadorian brands such as Pacari, which began its exports by focusing on specific strategic markets, and then expanded to other destinations with a stronger and more stable foundation. This process reduces errors, mitigates risks, and increases the likelihood of long-term success.

The market Selva Negra seeks to enter is characterized by intense competition, with domestic and international companies that have established their reputations through sensory quality, certifications, innovation, and a presence in global markets. Despite this, there are strategic opportunities for the Selva Negra brand to enter Canada, as Ecuadorian cocoa

enjoys great international prestige, attributes linked to its origin, a sensory profile distinct from the rest, and is directly associated with responsible trade practices conditions required for a product to be accepted in Canada. Above all, entry strategies must adapt to the culture, language, preferences, and customs of the country to which the product is to be exported in this specific analysis, Canada, a country within the European Union that seeks the entry of organic and sustainably produced brands, as is the case with the Ecuadorian brand Selva Negra.

To ensure the brand's successful entry into the Canadian market, a combination of indirect export through a distributor specializing in gourmet products should be implemented, complemented by a direct digital presence targeting the end consumer via platforms used in Canada such as Shopify the most widely used e-commerce platform in this market, ideal for building a premium brand from scratch, enabling product integration with fast shipping and customer personalization. Selva Negra excels in the production of artisanal chocolate, its area of specialization; however, it does not yet have sufficient experience with international regulations, global logistics distribution, or negotiating with foreign retail chains. Therefore, a specialized distributor would allow the company to mitigate risks and leverage existing networks in the Canadian market.

An importer-distributor would handle the procedures and processes that are still unfamiliar to the brand, such as registering the products with the CFIA, which is responsible for ensuring food safety by regulating and approving products to protect public health. They would also ensure compliance with all the aforementioned product labeling requirements which must be in English and French so that the product can enter the country without complications and be placed in gourmet shops, chocolate boutiques, and specialty supermarkets. They would also handle basic B2B marketing activities, a business model in which the company sells its products to another company rather than to the end consumer. The suggested model has proven successful for Ecuadorian companies in the cocoa sector during their initial export phases, making it the most viable strategy for Selva Negra chocolate's entry into the Canadian market.

This choice is based on what is best for the brand, as the distributor offers immediate access to strategic channels without the company having to build them from scratch; since the company is new to an unfamiliar country and seeking to enter on its own, doing so is extremely complicated, costly, and time-consuming. Therefore, a specialized distributor already has contacts, contracts, and an established presence, which accelerates Selva Negra's

entry and allows it to compete from the outset with already-established brands. Additionally, another advantage is that financial, logistical, and regulatory risks would be significantly reduced, since the brand's direct entry into Canada requires compliance with a series of regulatory requirements, controls, import permits, insurance, and domestic transportation all of which the importer-distributor would handle directly without any issues, as they specialize in these areas. For Selva Negra, it would be difficult to manage this from the very first export, as it is a complex undertaking given the lack of familiarity with the entire process required in the destination market. Thus, working with a distributor offloads much of the risk and lowers the barriers to entry.

Indirect exporting also allows us to test the market before making major commitments without fully understanding it such as investing in warehouses, local staff, or mass marketing all of which would be considered a risk. Therefore, Selva Negra must make a more measured entry to assess product acceptance, analyze consumer behavior, adjust packaging according to consumer preferences, measure product acceptance, gather feedback, and refine flavors, packaging, and prices without jeopardizing the entire operation.

3.3.2. Segmentation Strategies, Target Audience, and Positioning

To successfully introduce the Ecuadorian premium chocolate brand Selva Negra into the Canadian market, it is essential to define clear strategies for market segmentation, target audience, and positioning, with the goal of effectively guiding the actions of the international marketing plan and maximizing its impact in the target market.

The Canadian market should be segmented by considering geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral variables, which will allow us to identify consumer groups with similar characteristics and needs that will constitute our potential customer segment. Regarding initial geographic coverage for resource optimization and risk reduction, distribution should begin in strategic Canadian cities that is, the most populous ones such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal since these cities have the largest populations, high purchasing power, and the highest consumption of gourmet products, allowing for the creation of a geographic concentration strategy aligned with the company's current capacity. Demographically, the target segment consists primarily of adults between the ages of 25 and 55 with middle-to-high incomes, who have purchasing power and are willing to pay a premium price for higher-quality products.

The psychographic analysis reveals that potential customers prefer products considered to be ethically conscious, sustainable, fair-trade, and natural, making them consumers who seek distinctive sensory experiences that reflect ethical and social values. Finally, in the behavioral sphere, consumers are segmented based on purchasing habits oriented toward gourmet, organic, and premium products, with a focus on customers who buy chocolate for special occasions and gifts.

The target consumer audience for Selva Negra Ecuadorian premium chocolate can be defined based on the segmentation as urban Canadian consumers of upper-middle socioeconomic status who are interested in premium, sustainable, and traceable products, with a modern lifestyle, who are informed about current consumer trends and have a strong preference for products that offer quality, exclusivity, and an experience distinct from other mass-produced and mass-distributed products. Another aspect valued by the Canadian target audience includes attributes such as the origin of the cocoa, traceability, ethical production, and the product's environmental impact. Complementary to this primary target audience, there may be a secondary one consisting of consumers seeking products with attractive, personalized packaging and high perceived value for collecting or occasional consumption.

Selva Negra's positioning strategy in the Canadian market should be based on differentiating its products from those of the competition, highlighting attributes associated with product quality, the Ecuadorian origin of the cocoa, and the premium experience that only Selva Negra chocolate offers. The brand seeks to position itself as a premium artisanal chocolate made with fine-aroma cocoa that offers a unique sensory experience and high added value, relying on key elements such as product authenticity, flavor innovation, and the possibility of customization.

The positioning, on the other hand, seeks to align with current trends in the Canadian market by focusing on attributes that must be present in premium products such as chocolate namely sustainability, fair trade, and responsible consumption thereby generating consumer interest and an emotional connection to the product. Therefore, Selva Negra does not compete solely on price, but rather on its market value, differentiating itself from mass-market brands through a proposition based on quality, origin, and exclusivity.

3.3.3. International Marketing Mix Policy

The international marketing mix strategy is based on deciding how to adapt and combine the 4Ps to capture the foreign Market in this case, Canada. It is essential to define what will be offered to this market while taking into account its regulations, competition, cultural preferences, and economic conditions.

Product

As previously identified, the product is the Ecuadorian premium chocolate brand Selva Negra, which aims to enter international markets. It is very important to know how to identify where to create value to highlight the product and how to defend that position. Value can be created through product design and presentation, showcasing exclusivity, sustainability, and the product's premium value by telling its story, highlighting its impact on the Ecuadorian economy, and promoting conscious consumption of this resource in order to enter and compete in a market as demanding as Canada's.

The product also possesses intrinsic, external, and intangible attributes. Among the intrinsic attributes, several stand out: the chocolate is premium in nature and made with fine Ecuadorian-aroma cocoa, with percentages of 70%, 80%, and 95% depending on the variety and product. It is made with 100% natural ingredients, free of preservatives and additives. Furthermore, the chocolates feature a distinct sensory profile composed of floral and fruity notes and an elegant bitterness characteristic of Ecuadorian cacao, with a smooth texture, intense aroma, and lingering flavor. There are several options within the Selva Negra catalog, such as:

1. Classic bar with 70% cacao
2. Mixed white and dark chocolate bar
3. Bar with cacao nibs
4. Bar with fruit blends such as mango, berries, mint, pineapple, orange, and passion fruit

Among the product's external attributes, the packaging stands out first and foremost. It features a premium design inspired by Ecuador's Black Forest, highlighting its biodiversity through a minimalist design that conveys luxury, origin, and sustainability. Additionally, the packaging material consists of 100% recyclable cardboard and a fully biodegradable inner wrapper. The chocolate comes in 50g sizes, considered a premium snack, and 100g sizes, the standard gourmet option, where all chocolates must feature

bilingual labeling in this case, in French and English. Furthermore, the brand already holds visible certifications such as the Ecuadorian Fine Aroma Cacao certification, organic certification, and SSC 22000 or BRCGS, which guarantee the quality of the production process and are considered necessary for the chocolate's entry into the Canadian market.

Finally, among the brand's intangible attributes, it is associated with natural luxury, Ecuadorian origin, craftsmanship, and sustainability; therefore, effective storytelling is essential in this case, the product's story is that of a chocolate born in the Ecuadorian rainforest, cultivated by local communities, and crafted using traditional methods. Additionally, the goal is to create a premium image comparable to brands like Lindt Excellence, but with an exotic Latin American identity. An emotional connection must be created for the consumer, encouraging them to perceive the product as exclusive and authentic, offering a connection to nature and the added value of a product that supports small Ecuadorian cocoa farmers and fair trade.

To successfully enter the Canadian market, mandatory adaptations must be made to comply with a series of regulatory requirements established by health and consumer protection authorities. These adaptations are not optional, as they directly determine the product's access to the Canadian market and must therefore be fully complied with. Bilingual labeling in English and French is a mandatory requirement in Canada. All product information, including the name, ingredients, instructions, warnings, and nutritional information, must be presented in both languages, which requires a direct adaptation of the original packaging. A nutrition facts panel must be included in accordance with Canadian regulations, adhering to specific requirements regarding design, content, and units of measurement. In addition, it is mandatory to include a complete list of ingredients, highlighting potential allergens such as milk, nuts, or soy, if present in the product. A metric system must also be used, expressing the product's weight in grams and ensuring that the weight of all products is consistent. Furthermore, the labeling must include information about the importer or authorized distributor in Canada, which is essential for product traceability. The packaging must comply with food safety regulations, ensuring that the materials used are safe for consumption and adequately protect the product from external factors such as humidity and temperature fluctuations. Last but not least, requirements related to health registration, traceability, and compliance with safety standards must be considered, as these are of great importance to the Canadian market, which requires the brand

to comply with Good Manufacturing Practices and obtain international certifications that support product quality (Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2025).

Voluntary adaptations are not necessary, but they are beneficial as they are based on a strategic decision to generate greater interest in the product within the Canadian market and strengthen its positioning within the premium segment. One possible adaptation is to develop a differentiated product line aimed exclusively at the international market, which could include an edition inspired by Ecuadorian biodiversity perhaps named the Amazonian Edition thereby achieving differentiation in the gourmet market, reinforcing the brand's storytelling, and generating additional emotional value for the consumer. Another good strategy would be to incorporate key messaging into the product, such as: 100% Ecuadorian origin, organic product, or bean-to-bar, as these are highly valued by Canadian consumers who prioritize sustainable, ethical, and transparently sourced products. Furthermore, the product's sensory profile could be adjusted by modifying the sweetness and intensity of the cocoa to align with what most Canadian consumers generally prefer; typically, this should be adjusted to a cocoa content of 60%–75%. Regarding packaging, the visual design could be enhanced by incorporating minimalist elements, clear information about the cocoa's origin, and an aesthetic aligned with international trends. To increase the brand's acceptance among the Canadian target audience, products adapted to local preferences could be added to the catalog, thereby differentiating the product from other premium brands.

Strategic Pricing

For Selva Negra, the pricing strategy in the Canadian market should be based on reflecting the added value offered by the product which aims to position itself above mass-market brands its artisanal Ecuadorian origins, the globally recognized quality of its raw materials, and the brand's identity. The pricing policy for the target market should position Selva Negra chocolate as a competitive premium product, priced higher than commercial chocolates but more affordable than ultra-premium artisanal ones.

To achieve proper international pricing, the product must be based on cost and demand criteria that allow for a balance between profitability and competitiveness. Manufacturing costs which include raw materials, artisanal processes, and packaging must be considered. Regarding the adaptation costs necessary for the Canadian market, bilingual labeling, compliance with health regulations, and packaging redesign must be taken into account. International logistics costs include transportation from Ecuador, cargo insurance, and

storage and distribution within Canada. Finally, customs and regulatory costs must be taken into account.

On the other hand, the demand criterion must consider the high purchasing power of Canadian consumers and their willingness to pay higher prices for premium, organic, and certified-origin products. Another important factor is the exchange rate, which similarly affects the product’s pricing structure and competitiveness. The brand’s positioning as premium and of Ecuadorian origin reinforces the product’s value, allowing it to enter a market like Canada’s, which seeks premium products with high added value.

To determine the correct price for the product, several criteria must be considered, such as:

Table 2
Pricing Criteria

Costs	Logistics costs	Competition	Canadian consumer complaint	Made in Ecuador Effect
Premium ingredients Artisanal process Sustainable packaging	Transportation Export Insurance Warehouse	Price comparison with competitors	High interest in natural, organic, and Latin American products	Origin valued for the quality of its fine-aroma cocoa

To develop an effective pricing strategy, a competitive premium pricing strategy with moderate market penetration should be adopted. This involves entering the market with prices aligned with the gourmet segment, but without reaching the highest price points of the specialized artisanal market. This strategy will facilitate initial product acceptance, drive sales at retail locations, and build strong brand positioning.

The recommended price range for the Selva Negra brand’s entry into the Canadian market is as follows:

- CAD \$6.50 – \$8.50 per 100-g bar
- CAD \$4.00 – \$5.50 per 50-g bar

These suggested prices are strategically positioned between premium commercial brands and artisanal bean-to-bar chocolates, which would allow Selva Negra to compete effectively in the premium segment of the Canadian market. Another strategy for moderate initial penetration in supermarkets and gourmet stores could be to set prices ending in .99

cents to improve the perception of the product’s affordability, depending on the channel where the product will be sold. The 100g bar would be priced at \$7.99 and the 50g bar at \$4.99, thereby differentiating between large retailers and wholesalers.

Finally, the strategy based on the distribution channel to be implemented, in which the price must be adapted according to the marketing channel, considering margins and perceived value: in retail which consists primarily of supermarkets and gourmet stores prices should be slightly lower to drive volume; on e-commerce platforms, prices should remain standard with occasional promotions; and in B2B channels, prices should be wholesale with volume discounts. Therefore, this channel-based price differentiation allows for consistency in positioning without affecting profitability.

Table 3
Price Differentiation

Distribution channel	Type of customer	Producto	Precio Sugerido	Estrategia
Supermarkets and gourmet shops	End consumer	50g bar	\$4.99	A competitive price point that drives higher sales volume within the premium segment
		100g bar	\$7.99	
E-commerce	Digital end consumer	50g bar	\$4.50	Flexible pricing with occasional promotions available
		100g bar	\$7.50	
B2B Channel	Companies and intermediaries	50g bar	\$3.99	Wholesale prices with volume discounts
		100g bar	\$6.99	

Another key aspect of the pricing strategy is consistency with the brand positioning, as the Selva Negra brand is positioned as a premium, sustainable, and single-origin chocolate; therefore, the price should not compete on the basis of being low, but rather on reflecting quality and differentiation. A price that is too low could affect the perceived value of the product, while a price that is excessively high could limit initial market penetration; therefore, the goal is to strike a balance in pricing that allows the brand to establish itself in the Canadian market.

Place

The distribution strategy for Selva Negra in the Canadian market aims to ensure selective coverage in premium channels, specifically aligning with the product’s positioning

as a high-quality artisanal chocolate. Since the product is considered gourmet, the goal is not mass distribution but rather achieving a strategic presence at retail locations that reinforce the perception of exclusivity, origin, and sustainability. Additionally, the company’s strategy should target specific segments that value fine-aroma cocoa and the authenticity of the Ecuadorian product, making this a key differentiator in its value proposition to achieve market acceptance despite competition in the Canadian market.

Regarding the distribution model, Selva Negra should adopt selective distribution, focusing on channels that allow it to maintain brand value and reach the target consumer. This type of distribution is consistent with the premium segment, as it avoids overexposure of the product and protects its positioning in only certain parts of the Canadian market.

Table 4
Types of Distribution

Short-term indirect distribution	Retailers specializing in gourmet products, such as shops and cafés
Long-distance indirect distribution	Wholesalers – Retailers – End Consumers
Digital direct distribution	Amazon, company website, e-commerce

The distribution channels to be utilized are physical retail as the primary channel, since the entry into the Canadian market will primarily occur through gourmet and specialty stores focused on premium products, followed by premium supermarkets such as organic chains offering natural, healthy, and organic products. These distribution channels, in this order of preference, are a key factor as they provide access to consumers with high purchasing power and preferences aligned with premium and sustainable products. As a secondary but no less important channel, the online channel represents a strategic opportunity for Selva Negra’s positioning in Canada. The goal is to establish a presence on marketplaces, develop our own e-commerce channel, and build partnerships with online gourmet stores to reach the end consumer directly, build brand equity, and foster loyalty, thereby reducing exclusive reliance on the physical channel. Finally, the institutional channel B2B must be considered, which involves marketing through corporate clients such as boutique hotels, specialty coffee shops, gourmet restaurants, and gift shops. This channel allows the product to be positioned as a premium experience and expands its presence in differentiated consumption contexts.

Regarding the logistical requirements to ensure product quality during the export and distribution process in Canada, these must be met in a specific order:

1. International transport under controlled temperature and humidity conditions
2. Use of packaging that protects the product from climatic changes
3. Proper storage in certified warehouses
4. Inventory management that ensures product freshness
5. International cargo insurance
6. Required documents: commercial invoice, packing list, certificate of origin

The logistics export route from Ecuador to Canada follows this sequence, which optimizes time, costs, and quality control

1. Production in Ecuador
2. Transportation to the port of Guayaquil
3. Export to Canada by sea or air, depending on volume and urgency
4. Customs clearance through a broker in Canada
5. Distribution to: Distributor warehouses, retail outlets, and e-commerce logistics centers

The use of Incoterms is necessary to facilitate negotiations with business partners; their selection will depend on the level of control the company wishes to maintain over the logistics operation, so the following should primarily be taken into account:

- FOB (Free on Board): Under this Incoterm, the buyer assumes the costs of international transportation
- CIF (Cost, Insurance, and Freight): Under this Incoterm, Selva Negra covers the costs of transportation and insurance
- DAP (Delivered at Place): This Incoterm is ideal for e-commerce or direct deliveries

Distribution must be consistent with the brand's premium positioning; for this reason, it is not recommended to initially enter low-price mass channels, but rather retailers with prices commensurate with the product's characteristics. Priority should be given to points of sale that convey quality by providing a shopping experience that reinforces the product's value.

Promotion

The promotional strategy for Selva Negra in the Canadian market aims to build a premium brand based on origin, sustainability, and sensory experience, using a combination of digital and traditional tools to effectively position the product in a highly competitive

environment. It is important to note that the product competes not only on price but also on perceived value; therefore, communication must focus on conveying the product’s differentiating attributes, such as its production using Ecuadorian fine-aroma cocoa, its artisanal process, and its social impact. For the Ecuadorian company Selva Negra, the integration of sustainable practices, fair trade, and international certifications is crucial to achieving a foothold in the Canadian market, facilitating access to specialized advertising channels, and meeting all consumer expectations.

The primary promotional objective is to build brand recognition in the Canadian market, positioning Selva Negra as a premium, sustainable, and origin-based brand. Product tastings can be conducted in the initial stages to sell the product to consumers and build an emotional connection with them through communication strategies based primarily on a storytelling approach. This approach will tell the product’s story, starting with the origin of the cacao including its planting and harvesting processes followed by the process carried out by small-scale cocoa farmers who transform it from fruit into raw material through an artisanal process considered sustainable and fair trade which will differentiate Selva Negra from industrial brands and connect with Canadian consumers, who value authenticity and transparency.

Regarding promotional tools, the digital strategy should be the central pillar of the promotional strategy due to its reach, segmentation, and cost-efficiency. This can be complemented by an offline strategy to support the digital channel, as in-person activities are key for premium food products.

Table 5
Online Tools

Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instagram: Tell the product’s story visually, highlighting the origin of Ecuadorian cacao • TikTok: Creating chocolate recipes and videos featuring cacao from the plantation are strategies that could generate significant social impact • Facebook: Targeted campaigns, community engagement, and ads focused on gourmet consumers
Digital campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google Ads: “dark premium chocolate,” “single-origin chocolate,” “organic chocolate” • Social Ads: interest-based targeting • Influencers in the chocolate, healthy cooking, and organic products niches
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multilingual website available in both English and French • History of Ecuadorian cacao • Blog on the benefits of fine-aroma cacao
E-commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct sales • Monthly subscriptions for discounts • Gifts, samples, and limited editions

Table 6
Offline Strategies

International trade shows	Participation in events such as gourmet fairs and organic product exhibitions to increase visibility and network with distributors
Tastings	In gourmet shops and premium supermarkets, as they allow customers to try the product firsthand
POP materials	Flyers, displays, and visual materials at points of sale designed to highlight origin and quality

It is equally important to build public relations by implementing initiatives to strengthen the brand’s reputation, such as strategic partnerships with chefs and specialty coffee shops, and by maintaining a presence and participating in culinary events attended by a large number of potential customers who can sample the product. Communication through public relations must align with Selva Negra’s premium positioning, avoiding messages that focus on low prices and prioritizing the product’s quality, exclusivity, and origin through a visual design that reflects elegance and authenticity, while also adapting to Canadian culture, which considers important aspects such as language for consumer understanding and messages aligned with their values, allowing for a better cultural connection with the target market.

To ensure effective product promotion, it should be carried out in phases that reinforce the strategic approach. These could include:

1. Product launch with significant investment in social media and digital advertising, hiring influencers, and product tastings to build brand awareness as the brand is new to the Canadian market.
2. Brand growth through consolidation at physical and digital points of sale via consistent social media content to build customer loyalty.
3. Brand consolidation, allowing for a reduction in resources invested in customer acquisition, with a greater focus on branding through the launch of special editions.

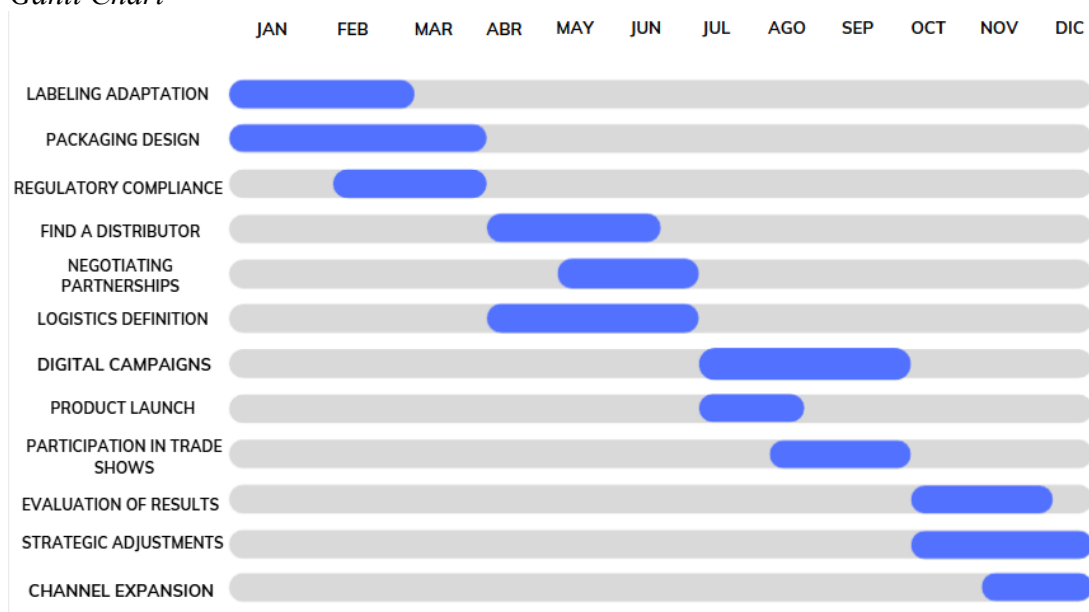
3.3.4. Implementation Plan: Timeline and Estimated Budget

The international marketing plan to bring the Selva Negra brand into the Canadian market must outline the actions, timelines, and resources necessary to effectively execute

the proposed strategies, making this plan viable through a preliminary cost estimate and establishing a basic framework to project the required investment level.

This plan is structured in sequential phases that allow for a gradual market entry, minimizing risks and optimizing the use of resources. The implementation process for the plan will take place over a period of approximately 12 months, divided into four phases. The first phase will occur during the first three months, during which the necessary adaptations will be made to comply with Canadian market requirements. The second phase will take place in the following quarter and will establish the commercial foundations for market entry. The third phase will be implemented in the third quarter of the year and will focus on introducing the product to the market. The final phase will be executed in the last quarter of the year, with monitoring of the plan’s performance.

Figure 3
Gantt Chart



The estimated budget for implementing the international marketing plan takes into account the key areas required for the product’s entry into the Canadian market. Key items include:

- Design and production of new sustainable labels and packaging tailored to the Canadian market and aligned with values of sustainability and authenticity.
- Necessary international certifications, such as Fair Trade, to access ethical consumer niches in Canada.
- Digital marketing campaigns on social media and e-commerce platforms.

- Participation in international trade shows such as SIAL Canada, the leading food innovation fair that alternates between Toronto and Montreal.
- Adaptation of the Selva Negra company website to make it accessible internationally.
- International logistics, including packaging, shipping insurance, customs documentation, and shipping costs to Canada.

This budget has been structured as a reference and may vary depending on internal factors in Canada; costs associated with product adaptation, logistics, promotion, and distribution were taken into account. The estimated budget should cover promotional activities and operating expenses in the first year and may be modified based on the results obtained in the first phase of the marketing plan.

Table 7
Estimated Budget

CATEGORY	ACTIVITY	ESTIMATED COST (USD)
PRODUCTION COSTS	Additional production for export	\$3.000
	Product adaptation: packaging, labeling, regulations	\$2.000
Production Subtotal		\$5.000
LOGISTICS COSTS	International logistics: transportation and insurance	\$5.000
Logistics Subtotal		\$5.000
MARKETING AND PROMOTION COSTS	Digital marketing: social media and advertising	\$2.500
	Participation in international trade shows	\$2.500
Marketing Subtotal		\$5.000
BUSINESS AND LEGAL COSTS	Development of distribution channels	\$2.000
	International trademark registration and legal documentation	\$1.000
Commercial and Legal Subtotal		\$3.000
GRAND TOTAL		\$18.000

The proposed timeline and budget are part of a strategy for a phased entry into the Canadian market that prioritizes efficient use of resources and product validation in the target market. This cost assessment will provide the company with an estimated financial guide for the investments it needs to make, in line with the objectives set out in the marketing plan,

particularly in terms of positioning, channel development, and sales generation. Therefore, the plan's success will depend on the proper execution of each phase, as well as Selva Negra's ability to adapt to market conditions and make strategic adjustments based on the results obtained. The goal is to ensure that the investment contributes to the long-term sustainability of Selva Negra's internationalization process.

3.3.5. Evaluation and Monitoring Indicators

The evaluation and monitoring indicators will make it possible to measure performance and verify compliance with the objectives set out in Selva Negra's international marketing plan for the Canadian market. These established indicators are known as KPIs, which are quantifiable and fundamental metrics that companies use to evaluate success, efficiency, and progress toward specific strategic objectives, and which facilitate strategic decision-making, the identification of deviations, and the implementation of timely corrective actions. The indicators are aligned with the SMART objectives defined above and are structured around key variables such as sales, brand positioning, distribution, product adaptation, and profitability (Kaplan y Norton, 2004).

Table 8
Performance Indicators

Objective	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Measurement	Target	Frequency
Achieve sales in Canada	International sales	Total revenue in USD	\$40.000 in 2026	Monthly
Increase market presence	Number of active channels	Number of distribution channels	2 channels	Quarterly
Brand awareness	Digital engagement	Likes, comments, and shares	30% growth	Monthly
Product adaptation	Regulatory compliance	Percentage of requirements met	100% compliance	One-time / initial
Strategic partnerships	Number of commercial agreements	Signed contracts	2 partnerships	Semiannual
Premium positioning	Premium product sales	Percentage of sales	70%	Quarterly
Profitability	Profit margin	(Revenue - costs) / costs	20%	Monthly

- Financial indicators are based on international sales and ROI, which allow for an assessment of the plan's profitability and enable measurement of progress toward the goal of achieving a specific revenue target in the Canadian market.

- Commercial indicators are based on conversion rates and the number of partnerships, reflecting the effectiveness of market penetration and aligning with the goal of establishing distribution channels in the target market.
- Digital marketing indicators focus on digital positioning, which relates to the objective of increasing brand visibility and measuring its reach.
- Customer perception indicators are based on customer satisfaction, which allows for an assessment of the product's acceptance in the target market.

The proposed indicators will be monitored on a regular basis using financial analysis tools and sales reports. This ongoing monitoring will help identify the level of progress toward the SMART objectives and allow for necessary adjustments to marketing strategies as needed. Monthly sales and commercial performance reports must be reviewed, followed by constant monitoring of social media and e-commerce platforms. Additionally, quarterly evaluations of distribution channels and a review of costs and profitability of the export process must be conducted. Furthermore, it is recommended to hold periodic evaluation meetings to analyze the results obtained, identify deviations or errors, and define corrective actions.

In addition to measuring results, evaluation indicators also generate key information for strategic decision-making within the company; therefore, analyzing KPIs will facilitate the identification of opportunities for improvement, the optimization of resources, and the adaptation of the marketing plan to the actual conditions of the Canadian market. Constant monitoring will allow Selva Negra to strengthen its position in the international market, ensuring the plan's sustainability and long-term growth.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrated that Ecuadorian chocolate has great potential for international expansion into developed countries such as Canada, not only because of its artisanal production but also due to the process by which it is manufactured from the harvesting of raw materials to its transformation into a product considered premium on the international market. Despite having advantages for internationalization, there were also limitations, such as the fact that Selva Negra does not have a specific commercial strategy for foreign markets; furthermore, its digital presence is quite limited, and it has not yet managed to establish long-term relationships with international consumers. This could obstruct the product's internationalization process if suitable alternatives are not sought to address these issues.

Selva Negra has experience in the artisanal production of premium chocolates and unique characteristics that set it apart from the competition. The environmental analysis showed that in the Canadian market, there is significant consumer interest in purchasing certified products that align with responsible consumption where production has been carried out with due regard for sustainability featuring clear and realistic storytelling that captures consumer attention, and where the brand possesses a distinct identity that sets it apart from mass-produced commercial brands.

Given the advantages and disadvantages of this product and market, the goal was to develop an international marketing plan tailored to the company's core needs, setting clear goals for the brand's positioning in the Canadian market, marketing mix strategies tailored to both the product and the consumer, and finally, a market entry strategy that combines direct export with strategic partnerships to significantly facilitate Selva Negra's entry and positioning, thereby substantially reducing potential risks.

To ensure the project's successful implementation, monitoring techniques and a financial evaluation for the first year of implementation were included, taking into account all costs associated with this process. This allows the company to work with a realistic financial proposal, taking the necessary steps to implement the product's marketing plan so that its entry into the Canadian market is viable, thereby achieving the internationalization of premium chocolate.

This study has certain limitations that are important to acknowledge before implementing the plan within the company, in order to anticipate potential obstacles and propose viable solutions to address them. One of the main limitations of the study was gaining access to the company's specific financial information, which limited the development of a detailed economic analysis with exact figures; consequently, the financial evaluation was conducted using reference values compared to the prices of direct competitors. Implementing the plan may pose another potential challenge, as the Canadian market is not fully understood; therefore, fully adapting to this market may be difficult for the brand initially, since it lacks prior experience with international expansion.

Among the recommendations for the plan's successful implementation, it must be based on strategic decisions, commitment, and a long-term vision. In this case, the export is to the Canadian market, so the plan is focused solely on this market and must target customers who value premium and artisanal foreign products. Partnerships should be established with local distributors of premium products to facilitate the product's entry into the market more quickly. Regarding the brand's online presence, a dedicated website should be created to promote the brand and align with Canadian consumer preferences. Additionally, effective brand storytelling on these digital platforms could further capture consumer attention. In the Canadian market, it is crucial for a product to hold international certifications such as fair trade and responsible artisanal production, as these build consumer trust. The company must focus on internationalizing the product, which requires modifying its logistics, regulatory, marketing, and labeling processes to adapt them to the requirements of the target market, building an international brand image without changing the product while always highlighting its Ecuadorian artisanal origin.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Interview with Hernan Carabajo

Structured FODA Interview

Questions to determine the company's strengths and weaknesses

Does the company have the possibility of increasing production if international demand grows?

Yes, the company has the capacity to increase production progressively if international demand grows. Selva Negra works with fine aroma cacao, and its suppliers are local and national, which makes it possible to ensure an optimal supply of raw materials. This also allows production processes to be optimized, thereby expanding installed capacity to respond to new markets without compromising product quality, which is the most important and distinctive feature of the Selva Negra brand.

What characteristics make Selva Negra chocolate unique compared to other premium chocolates?

Within the domestic market, there are several brands that offer very good products, each with its own recognized characteristics. However, Selva Negra has features that position it as a premium product. One of them is the exclusive use of fine aroma cacao, which is globally recognized for its quality and sensory profile. Another characteristic is its innovative flavor combinations, such as chocolate with a high cocoa content of 80%, which preserves its aromas and floral and fruity notes. A new product development has been white chocolate with pineapple, one of the exotic products the brand offers, in addition to several fruity flavors. All natural and organic components are preserved, which shows that the brand truly cares about health. Another aspect worth highlighting is the careful artisanal process used to preserve the natural notes of the cacao.

Has the company exported abroad?

At the moment, the company has not been able to export abroad for several reasons. One of them is that there has not yet been expansion into international markets, nor has the brand been introduced there. However, the company has sought to position the brand in the local market by participating in fairs both in Cuenca and nationwide. There is a project aimed at expanding the brand to international fairs and presenting it abroad. This project is being considered very seriously, and the company aims to carry it out as soon as possible.

Does the company have financial resources to invest in internationalization?

Currently, the company has limited resources, but it can be said that it is in constant growth, which is strategically directed toward strengthening the brand if it is to stand out both nationally and internationally. Improvements have been made in production processes and in the development of new products. Selva Negra also has the possibility of forming strategic alliances in order to seek support from exporters and external financing to promote the internationalization process.

What do you consider to be Selva Negra's main strengths and weaknesses in competing in the international market?

One of the strengths is the high quality of the Ecuadorian cacao used in its products. Both the dark chocolates and the fruity white chocolates are made from fine aroma cacao. Selva Negra's value proposition is based on premium chocolate and flavor differentiation. The brand identity highlights origin, nature, and tradition. Another strength is the flexibility in developing innovative products, since the owner has more than 20 years of experience in the food industry, which makes the development and testing of new products less difficult. The growing international interest in fine aroma cacao is what has led Selva Negra to propose this project and consider internationalizing the product.

Among the weaknesses is the fact that production capacity is still limited compared to large companies. Although there is the possibility of increasing production and adapting it to growth and demand, there is still a limitation when compared to large companies at the national level. Another weakness is the need for greater investment in international marketing and international brand positioning. The last point, which is very important for internationalization, is the need for certifications and international standards in order to access new markets. This is especially important because European and American markets require certain standards, such as the sustainability of raw materials and the origin of the product.

Although the company has traceability and complies with several regulations and certifications, these entail high costs, which currently represents an obstacle or weakness. It is also worth mentioning that experience as an exporting company would need to be developed, since there is still a lack of export experience in this regard.