



## INTERNSHIP REPORT

### THE STRATEGY FOR GLOBAL REACH

#### A CASE STUDY OF ESTUFAZORES

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Internship Report presented to IPAM, to fulfill the requirements needed to obtain the Master's Degree in Marketing, developed under the scientific supervision of Professor Mafalda Nogueira, Ph.D

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## **ABSTRACT**

Internationalisation is a complex phenomenon for most companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Often, a lack of resources, experience or knowledge can jeopardise business expansion across borders.

In this sense, there are external agents, known as consultants, with specialised knowledge, strategic contacts and know-how, who provide support to these companies, helping them before, during and after the internationalisation process.

In order to understand how a consultant can support a company in the development and implementation of an internationalisation strategy, this research is based on a case study of the relationship between CH Business Consulting and Estufazores.

In order to answer the research problem, a literature review was initially carried out focusing on the themes of the internationalisation process, international marketing and the role of consultancies in business internationalisation. Since this is a case study, a qualitative approach was adopted, using document analysis and semi-structured interviews with three CH Business Consulting employees and one Estufazores employee.

Finally, from the triangulation of the data, it was concluded that, despite the strategies developed by CH Business Consulting, Estufazores' internationalisation faced significant challenges, underlining the need for meticulous preparation and continuous adaptation if SMEs are to achieve success in international expansion.

**Keywords:** Business Consulting; Internationalisation; Business Strategy; SMEs; International Marketing; Case Study

## RESUMO

A internacionalização constitui um fenómeno complexo para a maioria das empresas, especialmente para as pequenas e médias empresas (PME's). Frequentemente, a falta de recursos, experiência ou conhecimento pode comprometer a expansão dos negócios além-fronteiras.

Neste sentido, existem agentes externos, denominados de consultores, dotados de conhecimentos especializados, contactos estratégicos e *know-how*, que fornecem apoio a estas empresas, auxiliando-as antes, durante e após o processo de internacionalização.

É no sentido de compreender de que forma uma consultora pode apoiar uma empresa no desenvolvimento e implementação de uma estratégia de internacionalização que surge esta investigação, através de um estudo de caso da relação entre a CH Business Consulting e a Estufazores.

De forma a dar resposta ao problema de investigação, foi inicialmente realizada uma revisão de literatura centrada nas temáticas do processo de internacionalização, marketing internacional e o papel das consultoras na internacionalização empresarial. Tendo em conta que se trata de um estudo de caso, adotou-se uma abordagem qualitativa, recorrendo à análise documental e a entrevistas semiestruturadas com três colaboradores da CH Business Consulting e um colaborador da Estufazores.

Por fim, a partir da triangulação dos dados, concluiu-se que, apesar das estratégias desenvolvidas pela CH Business Consulting, a internacionalização da Estufazores enfrentou desafios significativos, sublinhando a necessidade de uma preparação metódica e de uma adaptação contínua para que as PME's possam alcançar sucesso na expansão internacional.

Palavras-chave: Consultoria Empresarial; Internacionalização; Estratégia Empresarial;  
PME's; Marketing Internacional; Estudo de Caso

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

SMEs – Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

R&D – Research and Development

SWOT - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly global world, internationalisation is an essential strategy for companies seeking long-term success and growth. Increasing the customer base and diversifying revenues are some of the advantages of expanding horizons to international markets. A growing number of companies believe that their target market should extend beyond national borders, and that expanding internationally is now vital to their existence (Calvelli & Cannavale, 2019).

Internationalisation is a process used by companies with the aim of expanding their operations beyond national markets, becoming involved in international trade and investment (Twarowska & Kąkol, 2013). In the contemporary economic landscape, internationalisation is a phenomenon that shapes economic, cultural and social trajectories, transcending geographical borders (Stein, 2017).

The accelerated pace of globalisation and the rapid adoption of the concept of the global village have forced nations to develop internationalisation strategies, promoting both challenges and opportunities (Wu et al., 2022).

Today, internationalisation has become an important path to follow. The panorama of other companies in the world, the globalisation of markets and the globalisation of competition force companies to implement strategies that make them competitive in wider markets and enable them to win at the level of the product value chain (Stein, 2017).

By internationalising, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) become more competitive and more sustainable in the long term, as they reduce their dependence on the

domestic market. Internationalisation has become a prerequisite for SMEs to survive in today's highly competitive environment (Tien et al., 2019).

However, selling products and services outside national borders involves greater risks than operating in the domestic market, which is why it is important to know and understand the various stages of this process and the challenges that come with it.

Since the marketing environment directly affects each company's production and business operations, understanding the international marketing environment is a crucial initial step for companies (Tien et al., 2019).

It is therefore of great importance to gain an understanding of the habits, usage, and tastes of foreign consumers in order to successfully penetrate the market with the company's products. Furthermore, marketing research covers other types of studies and research, such as understanding the political, economic, legal, social, and cultural environment. Because of this, market planners need to constantly assess the internal and external marketing environments that are pertinent to the business's operations (Tien et al., 2019).

As this process presents complex challenges for companies, it is sometimes necessary to rely on external help (Hill, 2013). Consultancy firms act as important external agents, providing specialised support, information and strategic guidance (Canato & Giangreco, 2011). Especially for SMEs that lack resources, these services are essential for navigating international markets (Kuivalainen et al., 2018). By leveraging consulting expertise, companies can accelerate their market entry and increase their global competitiveness (Kuivalainen et al., 2018).

This research was carried out as part of an internship at CH Business Consulting, a consultancy specialising in support services for the export and internationalisation of companies, which belongs to the Grupo CH.

Given the relevance of the subject to the business world and its respective growth, this research is based on a real case of an Azorean company (Estufazores) and the role of CH Business Consulting in the internationalisation process of Estufazores and comes as a way to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the role of consultancies in developing and implementing international strategies for other companies.

This project was developed as part of an operational programme resulting from European Union funds for the development of nations. Portugal received these funds and turned them into incentives for the economic and social development of its country (mainland and islands). In this way, and on the basis of this support, the Government of the Azores launched a measure called "*Vale Exportar Açores*" (Azores Export Voucher) which consists of contracting services in the field of exporting products and services, aimed at SME companies established in the Autonomous Region of the Azores.

It is in this context that the relationship between CH Business Consulting and Estufazores emerges. CH Business Consulting was one of the companies accredited by this project and, as a consultancy specialising in international strategy, was tasked with supporting Estufazores in designing and implementing its internationalisation strategy.

In order to carry out this study, a qualitative methodology, based on a case study, was adopted in which data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. That said, the general objective of this research is to explore the role of CH Business Consulting in the development and implementation of Estufazores' internationalisation strategy.

The following specific research objectives were also outlined:

1. To understand the motivations that led Estufazores to expand its business internationally;

2. To analyse the strategy associated with the internationalisation plan proposed by CH Business Consulting;
3. To investigate the role of digital marketing and communication in the internationalisation plan of Estufazores.

Considering the structure of this report, it is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the literature review, which sets out the theoretical knowledge relevant to this research. Given the vastness of the literature, it was decided to analyse some key points in the light of the selected case and therefore to study three themes: Internationalisation, International Marketing and The Role of Consultancies in Company Internationalization. The second chapter deals with the methodology selected, as well as the techniques used to collect and analyse the data, with the appropriate justification. The third chapter analyses and discusses the data collected. And finally, the fourth and last chapter will contain all the conclusions and contributions of this study.



## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter aims to present the literature of the most relevant authors for the two domains presented below, with the aim of creating a theoretical framework to support this research.

This section is divided into three large groups that will contribute to understanding concepts that are critical to the development of this research: internationalization, international marketing and the role of consultancies in company internationalization. Associated with these three major themes are others that are equally relevant to this research, such as internationalisation strategies, motivations for exporting, international marketing strategies and the presence of digital marketing in exports.

### **2.1. THE PROCESS OF INTERNATIONALISATION**

More businesses are beginning to internationalise in order to take advantage of development prospects, diversify their company risks, and boost profitability as a result of growing globalization and escalating international competition (Tan & Sousa, 2015).

Many organisations believe that national borders do not exist in their industry due to the move towards a global economy. Businesses are venturing outside of their home market more and more to seize development and profit prospects. The rationale behind internationalisation has been the subject of extensive empirical investigation, with a particular focus on the subject since the 1990s (Burt, 1991; Dawson, 1994; Laulajainen, 1991). Some factors that may influence a company's decision to expand globally include domestic market saturation, public policies that limit domestic market share growth,

identification of growth or niche opportunities in the global marketplace, potential for higher profits due to cost structure or competitive dynamics, risk distribution across global markets, and opportunities for buying power consolidation through joint purchasing arrangements (Pickton & Broderick, 2005).

The internationalisation of companies is not a new phenomenon, but it is currently taking on a dimension that has never been reached before. From a global point of view, internationalisation is becoming an increasingly important aspect of doing business today, particularly for SMEs (Alrashidi, 2014).

Internationalisation has been a phenomenon in business society for many years and its definition has been subject to various adjustments. As Knight (2003) says “Internationalization is not a new term. The term has been used for centuries in political science and governmental relations” (page 1). The term internationalisation was introduced to the world of international business in 1970 by Russel A. Matthews and since then it has undergone a number of changes and adjustments as the business and technological world has advanced. The term internationalisation was defined by Buckley and Ghauri (1998) as a process related to companies' international activities. Since then, researchers have focused on the elements, methods and strategies related to internationalisation. According to Üner et al. (2023), “the behavioral models affirm that the study of internationalization is accumulative, path-dependent and process-oriented” (page 4). However, due to differences in performance measurement methods, units of analysis, geographical differences and theoretical and conceptual approaches, there is no unanimous view on the concept of internationalisation. This is a complex phenomenon due to its context-based approach, as well as its cumulative, trajectory-oriented, and process-oriented characteristics. As such, the

phenomenon of internationalisation can be studied by various fields and disciplines, namely economics, geography, sociology, history, etc. (Hawkins, 1984).

That said, there are several different definitions that give voice to the concept of "internationalisation". This spectrum of concepts is what makes this phenomenon so peculiar, since all the definitions are valid and apply to a particular period and environment. For instance, the meaning of internationalisation varies depending on whether a business works only online or in the manufacturing sector. This reality supports the growth of businesses, since internationalization now entails more than just expanding overseas—it also means acquiring new resources and competencies (Morales, 2020).

Internationalisation is related to geographical diversification (Serrano et al., 2018) and permits businesses to expand into new markets in order to create new business ventures and make remarkable profits (Costa et al., 2018). It is also the procedure for acquiring, developing, and mobilizing resources for international operations (Ruzzier et al., 2006), enabling the company to operate its services and make profits outside its home country (Li Sun, 2009).

The internationalisation process involves strategy and choices. It is up to entrepreneurs to choose the best location and structure for each stage of the process in order to minimise transaction costs (Kamakura et al., 2012). When it is done successfully, companies are able to gain a major global competitive advantage over their competitors (Guillén & García-Canal, 2009).

It is characterised by being a process of identifying opportunities, developing and exploiting businesses across borders (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). When expanding their business internationally, companies have to adapt their structure, strategy and resources to the new environment around them (Calof & Beamish, 1995).

This phenomenon is usually characterised by a way of involving the company's activities internationally, through international trade and/or investment (Eden et al., 2010).

Internationalisation is seen by many as a phenomenon, a process or even a choice. Its definition differs between all the authors / differs in each author's opinion but has a common denominator: its importance. Greater business performance has been linked to companies that operate outside of their local markets (Morales, 2020).

Therefore, understanding the significance of international business is crucial to a nation's economic sustainability, serving as a formidable economic link between countries. The remarkable increase in global business highlights a fundamental aspect of the progressively interconnected global market. This is evident in the growing participation of companies involved in the exchange of goods and services on a global scale (Alrashidi, 2014).

### 2.1.1. Internationalisation Strategies

Internationalization is a crucial component of the strategic process that most businesses are currently undergoing (Andersen & Buvik, 2002).

Market expansion refers to the process of entering a new market or a series of related new markets, when the entries are made based on a single choice or relationship (Agndal & Chetty, 2007) .

When it comes to expanding their business across borders, companies must decide how they want to do it, i.e. which strategy they want to adopt. Depending on the stage the company is at and the managers' perception of the foreign market, internationalisation strategies can inevitably be different (Calof & Beamish, 1995).

Consequently, foreign market entry can be categorized into three modes: export, contract, and investment (Andersen & Buvik, 2002). It comprises the following strategies, as shown in **Table 1**:

**Table 1: Internationalisation strategies, categorized by mode**

Export mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirect</li> <li>• Cooperative or shared</li> <li>• Direct</li> </ul>
Contract mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensing</li> <li>• Franchising</li> <li>• Subcontracting</li> <li>• Joint ventures</li> <li>• Alliances</li> </ul>
Investment mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquisitions</li> <li>• Greenfield Investment</li> </ul>

**Source:** Own elaboration, based on Teixeira (2020)

Companies establish commercial relations with foreign companies through the purchase and/or sale of products and services. Exporting is the most popular method of penetrating foreign markets. In some cases, this is just the start of a company's internationalisation process and can take various forms (Teixeira, 2020). The way international markets are traded varies according to the number and type of intermediaries involved. (Shenkar et al., 2021).

There are essentially three types of export: direct export, cooperative or shared export and indirect export.

Direct export is a strategy in which the company takes care of all the inherent tasks and the internationalisation function (through its own commercial organisation in the country or countries of destination) (Teixeira, 2020), i.e, the products created in its country of origin are directly exported to consumers in other countries (Peng et al., 2009).

Cooperative or shared export, on the other hand, involves distribution being handled through agents, individuals, or companies (Teixeira, 2020).

On the other side, indirect export involves the company handling all inherent tasks and distribution through cooperative agreements with other companies (Teixeira, 2020). Indirect exports can be defined as exports facilitated by an intermediary established in the country (Peng et al., 2009).

Internationalisation is defined as a contractual agreement between two or more companies in different countries, whereby one party grants the other the right to use a trademark, technology, product specification or other intellectual property in the manufacture or sale of products or services (Teixeira, 2020). The forms of contractual internationalisation may be classified as follows: licensing, franchising, subcontracting, joint ventures and alliances (Shenkar et al., 2021).

Licensing is a contractual agreement in which one business permits another to use its trademarks or copyrighted technology in exchange for payment, typically in the form of a royalty that is often determined by the number of sales associated with the arrangement (Andersen & Buvik, 2002). Technical support, engineering services, or in-person instruction may be included in licensing agreements (Teixeira, 2020).

A franchise is a business arrangement where a company, known as the franchisor, grants another company, known as the franchisee, the right to use its developed business in a specific way as specified in the contract. This includes the use of the franchisor's name, trademark, know-how, and business procedures (Teixeira, 2020).

Furthermore, a company can also expand internationally through a contract by entering into a subcontracting agreement with a company in the country of destination (Teixeira, 2020). The subcontractor would be responsible for manufacturing the products, while the

multinational company would be responsible for marketing them. Subcontracting may entail the production of individual components or the entire product (Andersen & Buvik, 2002).

In contrast, a joint venture is an agreement between two or more companies from different countries, with the objective of conducting business in one of those countries. Such arrangements typically comprise a distinct business entity, offering anticipated advantages to all parties involved, who also bear the associated risks (Teixeira, 2020).

An alliance is a contractual agreement between two or more companies that establishes a framework for the reciprocal sharing of resources and knowledge. While equity participation is not always included, it is nevertheless one of the defining characteristics of an alliance (Teixeira, 2020). A consortium is an agreement between numerous rival or complementary companies that have come together with a specific goal in mind, while maintaining their legal and strategic independence. Such agreements frequently necessitate the commitment of substantial financial resources (Shenkar et al., 2021).

Finally, direct investment is a form of business internationalisation that involves acquiring operational assets in another country. It can be categorised into two types: greenfield investment, which involves establishing a new company to begin operations, and acquisition, which involves purchasing an existing company. The latter is more popular as it offers the benefit of quicker market access, which can be crucial at times (Teixeira, 2020).

Given the aim of this report, the adopted internationalisation strategy in the case study was direct exporting. Therefore, the following chapters will focus on the export process.

## 2.1.2. Exporting – Motivations and Benefits

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, exporting is a crucial aspect of international business (Katsikeas & Morgan, 1994) and is often employed as an internationalisation strategy. It is considered one of the most appealing methods for companies to expand globally, both from a business and national perspective. Therefore, exporting is highly associated with fast and sustainable economic growth. However, exporting is more challenging than selling locally, and overcoming the barriers to exporting takes time (Eaton et al., 2021).

One of the fundamental issues in economics is growth, which is significant at both macro and micro levels. It is widely acknowledged that exports, being the primary source of revenue, are crucial in achieving sustainable development (Mehdipour & Shirini, 2021).

Exporting offers microeconomic advantages, including the generation of funds for reinvestment, risk diversification across multiple markets, optimal use of existing operational capacity, and improvements in technology, quality, and service levels within the company. Furthermore, the generation of higher profits serves to attract and remunerate both shareholders and employees (Leonidou, 1995).

In macroeconomic terms, exports play a crucial role in the development of economies and countries. They generate foreign exchange reserves, establish connections between different economies and countries, increase job opportunities, and support other economic activities by utilizing resources. (Leonidou, 1995). Exports can increase a country's income when domestic demand is insufficient and help avoid balance of payments crises (Freund & Pierola, 2008). Additionally, export growth is a determining factor in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and many developing countries have encouraged exports to stimulate their national economies (Alrashidi, 2014).



Furthermore, exporting is seen as an essential survival activity for a nation's economy as it is one of the most significant entrance ways into worldwide markets (Lado et al., 2001).

SMEs choose to export as a way of entering foreign markets, as they often lack the staff and resources of large companies. SMEs' entrepreneurs are realizing that exporting may help their companies succeed and develop, particularly in the near term, which lends credence to this result (Alrashidi, 2014).

To summarise, exporting provides companies with many incentives to explore international markets. Firstly, the potential for greater profit opportunities abroad compared to the domestic market drives many companies to expand globally. Additionally, the pursuit of a larger customer base facilitates economies of scale, which enhances operational efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Diversification is a crucial strategy as exporting allows companies to reduce their reliance on a single market, thereby mitigating risks associated with market fluctuations. Furthermore, the competitive landscape motivates companies to export to fortify their position and gain an edge in the global market. Finally, meeting the demand for international services from travelling customers highlights the importance for companies to export and effectively meet the needs of a diverse clientele. These various incentives come together to drive companies towards international expansion, promoting sustained growth and enhancing competitiveness (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

Once the general aspects of internationalisation have been discussed, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the issues associated with the international marketing literature. This will be the focus of the following section.

## 2.2. INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

Consumer standards have been moving away from what they used to be. Today's consumers are better informed, more demanding, and increasingly have more specific needs. As a result, international marketing is growing more and more every day (Rose et al., 2022).

According to Tien et al. (2019) “international marketing is defined as the conduct of a business to plan, price, promote and drive a line of goods and services to customers or users in more than one country to create a profit” (page 135).

International marketing is an important discipline and practice of the internationalization process since it raises the degree and durability of achieved positioning advantages to boost company performance (Morgan, N.A et al., 2018).

The marketing strategies of international companies have been affected by changing social and economic perspectives, creating competition that affects all types of companies. International corporations must decide whether to increase the productivity and efficiency of their current market operations or expand into new international markets. While they can benefit from the expertise of similar organizations, they may also encounter conflicting information and arguments due to different performance paths of each business (Rana et al., 2020).

The field of international marketing has evolved, becoming increasingly important, complex and refined compared to its historical form. When a company seeks to expand into foreign markets, the first and most crucial step is to analyse the international marketing environment. This analysis has a direct impact on production and business activity. Therefore, it is essential to study the habits, needs, and preferences of foreign consumers. Additionally, it is necessary to investigate the internal marketing environment of each market that the company intends to enter (Paul & Mas, 2020).

International marketing is crucial for research, forecasting, and strategy development for product sales in importing nations. It can be challenging to modify branded goods and gather information to promote them. Marketing is one of the most powerful tools for competition in the global market. It strengthens the bond between consumers and producers by gathering input from the latter to shape and fulfil demands as much as possible (Hoang-Tien et al., 2019).

In general, an international marketing strategy is a company's plan of action for responding to internal and external environmental factors pertaining to foreign markets in order to achieve business objectives. These objectives primarily involve decisions about the product, promotion, pricing, and distribution components of the marketing mix (İpek, 2020).

The key to achieve business success and its goal is to identify the needs and desires of key markets and distribute the products and services that the markets offer (Hoang-Tien et al., 2019).

Having discussed at a general level the key aspects of international marketing, it is now necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the specific strategies that are employed in this area. This will be the subject of the following section.

### 2.2.1. International Marketing Strategies

Marketing has overcome all barriers and is now established in the modern business ecosystem and therefore constitutes a fundamental strategy in a company's internationalisation plan (Kvasova et al., 2023).

International marketing is, in today's world, essential for companies to survive, grow and increase profits in an environment that changes quickly and easily (Hariyana et al., 2022).

### **Marketing-Mix Adaptation vs. Standardisation**

One of the primary topics of interest in international marketing theory, practice, and research is the marketing mix notion. The marketing mix notion is a key area of focus in international marketing (Hariyana et al., 2022).

The concept of the marketer as a "mixer of ingredients" - someone who combines different competitive opportunities and combines them into a "marketing mix" - led to the development of the marketing mix. This approach aims to maximise or, more accurately, satisfy a profit function. In the words of Kotler (1964), "marketing mix is the set of controllable variables that the firm can use to influence the buyer's response" (page 43). Because decisions made in one area affect decisions made in other areas, these factors are interrelated.

International marketing mix strategy differs from national strategy because marketers face different sets of uncontrollable variables from different countries. In today's increasingly competitive and globalised economy, many organisations rely on the success of international marketing mix operations, which involve making marketing mix decisions outside their home country (Akgün et al., 2014).

Marketers face the challenge of adapting to foreign environments that differ in consumer behaviour, cultural norms, economic factors, technology, market structures, business practices, politics and regulations. Effective global expansion requires a carefully crafted strategy to navigate these complexities (Hariyana et al., 2022).

In the context of international marketing, companies must make an important strategic decision, and this involves deciding whether to standardise or adapt the marketing mix strategy as they expand globally (Pickton & Broderick, 2005). In this way, one of the most crucial strategic decisions it makes is whether to use the same marketing mix strategy, which includes managing people, locations, promotions, products, prices, and processes, as well as the same marketing strategy in all countries, or to modify both to better adapt to the particular characteristics of each local market. Some companies believe that standardisation is crucial for their survival, as they perceive markets to be increasingly similar and global. Others argue for market adaptability, citing the difficulties of implementing a standardised approach (Vrontis & Thrassou, 2007). The standardisation vs. adaptation debate has arisen due to the growing emphasis in the literature on international marketing on the communication between businesses and their foreign clients (İpek, 2020).

On the one hand, the standardised marketing campaign guarantees the lowest cost. On the other hand, there is the adaptive marketing campaign, in which the organisation recognises that customer needs vary and modifies the campaign for each of its target markets (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

Standardisation is therefore understood to be the process of successfully expanding and implementing strategy standards - tangible and/or intangible attributes - dictated by national target markets to markets abroad (Hussain & Khan, 2013). Companies should behave consistently in order to reduce overall expenses and enhance their reputation internationally (Vrontis & Thrassou, 2007).

The standardisation strategy is predicated on the idea that consumer demands, wants, and requirements are universal across markets and nations. It mandates that, regardless of location, consumers have the same needs and demands, and that the world is growing more

and more alike in terms of the environment and what customers require (Vrontis & Thrassou, 2007).

Supporters of the standardization approach argue that the uniformity of markets and consumer behaviour is a result of globalisation tendencies, the expansion of integrated marketing communications in international markets, the emergence of global market segments, and the introduction of the internet (İpek, 2020).

A standardised marketing strategy, based on the concept of using a uniform product, price, distribution, and promotion strategy worldwide (İpek, 2020), has some advantages, such as the possibility of achieving economies of scale in production and distribution, reduced marketing costs, power and scope, consistency of brand image, the ability to exploit good ideas quickly and efficiently, and uniformity of marketing practices.

Inevitably, this strategy has its drawbacks. It overlooks differences between consumers in terms of their needs, preferences and product usage patterns. It also ignores differences in consumer responses to marketing elements, branding, product development and competitive landscapes. In addition, it does not take into account differences in legal frameworks, marketing institutions and administrative procedures, which may hinder its effectiveness (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

On the other hand, the adaptation strategy challenges the simplifications and assumptions of the standardisation perspective. This strategy reflects the fact that, despite globalisation, differences between countries remain undeniable. Therefore, a company's marketing strategy must be adapted to the characteristics of the local market. Furthermore, a company's main objective should not be to reduce costs through a standardised approach, but rather to increase sales and profits in the long term by adapting to and satisfying the demands of global customers (İpek, 2020).

In certain circumstances, businesses may modify specific elements of their marketing campaign, even when a standardized approach is appropriate. This may require more specialized pricing, distribution, and/or communication (Samiee & Chirapanda, 2019).

By adapting its offering to local needs, the company increases the value of the product in the local market. On the other hand, personalisation makes it more difficult for the company to achieve cost savings associated with mass-producing a standardised product for global consumption. This is because it requires some duplication of functions and smaller manufacturing runs (Hill, 2013).

The most successful global brands follow a consistent approach, but they also take into account significant differences in customer behaviour, brand development, market dynamics and the political and regulatory environment. "Think globally, act locally" is a common, and occasionally modified, piece of advice for global brand marketers (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

### **International product strategies**

Understanding which products or services can be standardised and the most effective adaptation techniques is crucial for developing global product strategies (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

While some products can be sold across borders without modification, others cannot. Mature products have unique histories or positions in each market, but since consumer perceptions are still developing, consumer awareness of new products is generally universal (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

Standardisation is beneficial for sophisticated products as it allows for consistent promotion of status and quality across national borders. However, standardising food and beverage products can be challenging due to the variety of cultural tastes and behaviours.

The adoption and diffusion rates of new products in a country are influenced by cultural and purchasing power factors, but these are becoming more comparable across nations (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

A corporation may use different product focuses depending on the markets in which it operates. Keegan (2013) has identified five strategies for adapting messages and products, as shown in **Figure 1**:

**Figure 1: Product and communication strategies**

		<b>Product</b>		
		Do not change Product	Adapt Product	Develop new Product
<b>Communications</b>	Do not change Communications	Direct extension	Product adaptation	Product invention
	Adapt Communications	Communication adaptation	Dual adaptation	

**Source:** Own elaboration, based on Keegan (2013)

One of these tactics is to introduce the product, unchanged, to the global market by direct extension. This tactic is seductive in its simplicity, as it requires no new research and development (R&D) expenses, factory modifications, or marketing campaigns. It has proven to be successful for cameras, electronics, and various types of machinery. However, it has also been disastrous in other situations (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

Product adaptation involves modifying a product to meet regional needs or preferences. This is facilitated by flexible manufacturing in several ways (Kotler & Keller, 2015).



Product invention is a strategy for creating new products, which can result in two possible outcomes (Kotler & Keller, 2015):

- Backward innovation involves reintroducing earlier versions of a product that have been successfully tailored to the requirements of a foreign market;
- A new product is created to fulfil a demand in another country.

### **International communication strategies**

The movement of people, products, and organizations across borders has led to the emergence of global market sectors and internationally linked markets. Technological advancements in information and communication systems have further facilitated the flow of ideas, information, and images, resulting in significant changes in global markets and business practices (Pickton & Broderick, 2005).

Communication in foreign markets is more complex than in domestic markets due to differences in language, literacy, and cultural characteristics. It is important to translate spoken messages to ensure understanding in any situation. Visual symbols can also pose challenges as different people associate different colours with different symbols. Respecting cultural taboos and contextual variations, it is important to handle appeals to humour, sex, and other sensitive themes with care. Therefore, adapting marketing messages may be necessary to avoid misunderstandings or miscommunications (Pickton & Broderick, 2005).

Communication adaptation involves the adaptation of marketing messages for each local market. Dual adaptation refers to the adaptation of both the message and the product (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

An international strategy can use the same message globally, changing only the language, names and colours; keep the concept consistent but adapt the adverts locally; or create a

range of adverts so that each country can choose the most appropriate one. Some companies allow local managers to create their own adverts, respecting specific regulations, to make the message more attractive in the home market. Intercultural integration is facilitated by international marketing communications, using universally understood slogans and symbols to create a common global language (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

Companies adapting their communications face challenges such as ensuring compliance with legal and cultural norms, evaluating the effectiveness of their creative strategies and communication tactics, and varying the appeal of messages. Brands that are new to the market may need to adjust various messages and undertake brand building work to educate consumers about the product (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

When a company expands internationally, marketing operations take place in a complex scenario. Marketing communications are the most visible and culturally specific of an organisation's marketing operations and are therefore highly influenced by the global environment (Pickton & Broderick, 2005).

When developing an international marketing strategy, it is essential to analyse the main environmental factors that must be considered to ensure its success:

- **Political and regulatory:** These vary according to moral and legal norms in different countries and influence advertising and creative strategies (Pickton & Broderick, 2005);
- **Economic:** Transnational differences in channel networks, payment methods and financial structures affect commercial communication (Pickton & Broderick, 2005);
- **Social and cultural:** Culture influences consumer behaviour, so understanding cultural preferences is essential for effective communication (Hill, 2013; Hollense, 2011; Pickton & Broderick, 2005; Yani-de-Soriano et al., 2019);

- **Country of origin:** Perceptions of a product's origin influence purchasing decisions and it is important to manage these perceptions (Hill, 2013; Kotler & Keller, 2015; Pickton & Broderick, 2005);
- **Technological and competitive:** Foreign technical expertise and cost differences can increase profit margins (Kotler & Keller, 2015);
- **Organisational:** The centralisation or decentralisation of management decisions affects the communication strategy (Kotler & Keller, 2015);
- **Market:** Varying market expectations influence the acceptance of goods and services and marketing appeals (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

### **International Pricing Strategies**

When selling in the global marketplace, companies face several challenges, including price increases, transfer pricing and allegations of dumping. Counterfeiting and parallel marketplaces are two particularly difficult concerns (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

#### **Price Escalation**

Price escalation can make a product two to five times more expensive than it would be in another country to make the same profit for the manufacturer. This is due to various factors such as transportation costs, taxes, importer, wholesaler, and shopkeeper margins, as well as the risk of fluctuations in exchange rates (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

There are three ways in which businesses may determine prices in different countries (Kotler & Keller, 2015):

1. Set a standard price for all countries. However, this may result in varying profit margins in different countries. Additionally, this approach may lead to high prices in developing countries and low prices in developed countries;

2. Determine the price in each country based on the market. However, this approach ignores the variations in actual prices across national boundaries. Additionally, it can lead to a situation where intermediaries in countries with lower prices transfer the soft drink to those with higher prices;
3. Set a price based on what each nation charges. However, in countries where expenses are high, this strategy could result in higher prices for the brand compared to market rates.

Businesses that sell their goods online see a reduction in price differentials between countries and a transparent pricing structure (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

Countries with overproduction, depreciating currencies and a strong export drive have lowered prices and depreciated their currencies, which is another issue for global pricing. Selling in developing countries has been challenging due to slow demand and resistance to higher pricing (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

### **Transfer Prices**

When one unit of a firm charges another unit of the same company a transfer price for items sent to subsidiaries overseas, it creates another issue. The corporation may pay higher customs duties, even if it pays lower income tax in other nations, if it charges an excessive amount to a subsidiary. A company may be accused of dumping, or charging less than its expenses or what it charges in its home country, in order to gain entry into or control over a market, if it sets a price for its subsidiary that is too low. To prevent such abuses, many governments require businesses to set their prices in accordance with the arm's length concept, which is the amount that rivals businesses charge for the same or comparable goods (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

## **International Distribution Strategies**

Many manufacturers believe that their work is complete once the product leaves the factory. However, it is important to consider the product's international distribution strategy and adopt a 'whole channel' perspective to reach the final consumer (Kotler & Keller, 2015).

The selection of a distribution strategy is a critical factor in determining how a company can reach potential consumers. The decision is influenced by factors such as retailer concentration, channel length, channel exclusivity, and channel quality. The optimal strategy varies from country to country based on these factors (Hill, 2013).

Each intermediary in a distribution channel adds their profit margin to the products, which affects the final selling price and the company's profit margin. Longer channels typically result in higher aggregate commercial margins and consumer prices. Companies may prefer shorter channels to maintain competitive prices and profit margins. However, longer channels offer advantages such as reduced selling costs in fragmented retail sectors and access to exclusive channels. For instance, import agents and wholesalers may have established relationships with important retailers or consumers, facilitating the company's access to the market. Import agents can effectively distribute products by capitalising on their local reputation (Hill, 2013).

### **2.2.2. Digital Marketing in Exporting**

Technological advances in information, communication and transport have significantly reduced the barriers for businesses operating internationally, with the increased global use of social media and the internet contributing to this trend (Katsikeas et al., 2019). One of the new marketing approaches that has emerged with the advancement of information

technology is digital marketing, which promotes products and services through digital platforms and technologies in order to increase brand awareness, attract new customers, retain existing customers and increase revenue (Kannan & Li, 2017; Kvasova et al., 2023).

In the 21st century, digital marketing represents a new industrial revolution along with market globalisation, with the internet transforming global markets faster than any other communication tool (Kvasova et al., 2023). This type of marketing has revolutionised the way companies reach consumers on an international scale (Zahay, 2015), requiring more personalised and interactive approaches to engage technologically sophisticated consumers.

Companies of all sizes are realising the potential of digital platforms to cost-effectively reach a wide range of consumers, enable personalised campaigns and measure their impact in real time (Melandi et al., 2023). Digital marketing makes it easier to gain insights into consumer behaviour, competitive dynamics and environmental factors in different countries, supporting international marketing decisions and simplifying cross-border transactions (C. Katsikeas et al., 2019).

The term digital marketing initially referred to the promotion of goods and services created with technology, but now encompasses all processes that use digital technologies to promote business solutions, increase brand awareness and drive sales (Hogenhuis et al., 2017). Online internationalisation has emerged as a key strategy to access foreign markets more cost-effectively, especially for SMEs, which can use digital platforms to present products and services to a global audience (Ipsmiller et al., 2022).

Digital marketing strategies allow companies to reach global customers at a lower cost than traditional methods, eliminating territorial barriers and receiving feedback from consumers around the world, which strengthens companies' international presence (Katsikeas et al., 2019). Companies can monitor competitors and respond quickly to their

marketing strategies, as well as collaborate or compete with rivals in different countries (Katsikeas et al., 2019).

For SMEs, global digital transformation is crucial, despite financial and organisational difficulties. This transformation requires a comprehensive strategy that affects all aspects of the business, resulting in the development of new products and adaptation to technological advances (Dethine et al., 2020). The adoption of digital platforms can facilitate internationalisation by providing stronger intermediation services and reducing transaction costs (Deng et al., 2022).

Digital marketing is essential for entering international markets, increasing global brand visibility and enabling the engagement of target customers across borders. The proliferation of e-commerce and digital channels has reshaped the export landscape, making it imperative for firms to use digital marketing tools and platforms to remain competitive in the global marketplace (Rima et al., 2021). Thus, a digital presence is a necessity for the international success of firms (Katsikeas et al., 2019).

Once the relevant literature on internationalisation and international marketing has been presented, it is important to understand how consultancies can assist in the practical implementation of this theory and what their role is with the companies that hire them.

### 2.3. THE ROLE OF CONSULTANCIES IN COMPANY INTERNATIONALIZATION

The process of internationalisation is complex and can present challenges for companies that are exporting for the first time (Hill, 2013). That said, when it comes to emerging in an international context, one of the main points to remember is the importance of external

players. This type of intervention includes numerous agents, namely consultancy firms in general and their consultants in particular (Canato & Giangreco, 2011).

Consultancies are specialised entities that help companies in their internationalisation efforts. They act either as interim export departments or as permanent partners (Hill, 2013).

Thus, consultancy firms initially appear as sources of information. In other words, their consultants act as agents providing information that improves the performance of each project. Additionally, consultancies have the ability to enrich decision-making processes by providing specific information on each market. Consultants become valuable due to their title as specialists in certain markets, which makes them reliable in their forecasts (Canato & Giangreco, 2011). They also have expertise in analysing the market, identifying profitable opportunities and navigating regulatory frameworks (Hill, 2013).

Consultants build competences through their availability of information, which can be linked to their extensive experience and specialisation in a particular market or business area, which can give them access to extensive networks of contacts that will subsequently give them the ability to access information from multiple sources (Canato & Giangreco, 2011) and increase their ability to provide personalised support to companies (Hill, 2013).

SMEs have a prominent place in economies, since their role is fundamental to global economic development and growth. However, this type of company sometimes does not have all the knowledge and resources needed to carry out an internationalisation action on its own. Generally, expanding into foreign markets also requires a certain critical mass of resources that many SMEs don't have. This type of company is therefore forced to seek out internationalisation support services (Kuivalainen et al., 2018).

The services provided by specialist internationalisation consultancies aim to help companies overcome obstacles to internationalisation by improving their capabilities,



resources, strategies and global competitiveness (Kuivalainen et al., 2018). The main advantage of using these services lies in their experience and specialisation, which can help fledgling companies avoid frequently encountered pitfalls and take advantage of emerging opportunities (Hill, 2013).

Internationalisation consulting firms usually maintain extensive networks in the target markets, have multilingual capabilities and are well acquainted with local customs and trade regulations. These characteristics enable them to provide valuable information and guidance throughout the export process. Furthermore, by using the services of consultants, companies can speed up market entry and benefit from their infrastructure and expertise (Hill, 2013).

By using this type of support, companies are a step closer to success. The intense competition, volatility and complexity that characterise the global economic context make the use of consultancy services crucial (Kuivalainen et al., 2018) and something that companies believe is the most beneficial solution (Canato & Giangreco, 2011).

The type of service provided by consultancies comprises three phases. The first is the motivational phase, where consultants motivate companies to start their internationalisation process. The second is the information phase, in which consultants begin by preparing an internationalisation strategy and gathering information on the potential target markets chosen. And finally, the last phase is the operational phase. In the operational phase, the consultants find the best and most suitable clients or partners in a given market (Kuivalainen et al., 2018).

Not only do companies use consultancy services, but governments, through different methods to influence companies' propensity to expand across borders, also use these external agents to encourage their national companies to operate in international markets (Kuivalainen et al., 2018), as explained in this case study.

In conclusion, export consultants play a crucial role in helping new exporters navigate the complexities of international trade. By utilising their knowledge and networks, consultants can facilitate market entry and mitigate the risks associated with exporting (Hill, 2013).

## 2.4. FINAL THOUGHTS

After presenting the literature on the most relevant topics for this research, it is possible to conclude that the internationalisation of companies represents a strategic process that seeks to expand operations beyond national borders, approaching new markets and taking advantage of global opportunities. In this context, international marketing plays a crucial role, as it involves adapting product, price, promotion and distribution strategies to the cultural, economic and legal particularities of each target market. International marketing is not simply an extension of domestic marketing; it requires a deep understanding of local nuances and the ability to adapt quickly to changes in the global environment.

The role of consultancies is of great importance for companies wishing to internationalise. They offer expertise and specialist knowledge of foreign markets, helping companies navigate the complexities of regulations, business practices and consumer behaviour. They can carry out detailed market analyses, develop entry strategies and provide support in areas such as logistics, negotiation and legal compliance.

The success of internationalisation therefore depends on the synergy between a well-designed international marketing approach and the strategic support of consultants. Together, these dimensions enable companies to maximise their chances of success in a competitive global landscape.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

After identifying the problem under study, defining the research objectives, and addressing the necessary theoretical framework, this chapter presents the proposed research methodology.

The methodology is structured into three main sections: the identification and justification of the methodology, the data collection techniques, and the data analysis techniques. The first section justifies the methodology adopted, and the two last sections present the techniques used to collect and analyse the data, respectively.

#### 3.1. IDENTIFICATION AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE METHODOLOGY: CASE STUDY

As previously stated, the main objective of this research is to examine the role of CH Business Consulting in the development and implementation of Estufazores' internationalisation strategy. The research is divided into three specific objectives. The first is to understand the motivations that led Estufazores to expand its business internationally. The second is to analyse the strategy associated with the internationalisation plan proposed by CH Business Consulting. The third is to investigate the role of digital marketing and communication in Estufazores' internationalisation plan. Therefore, a qualitative method will be adopted, supported by a case study.

In this way, qualitative research is concerned with understanding the beliefs, motivations, and actions of individuals, organizations, or institutions (Lakshman et al., 2000).

The aim is to understand the nature, strengths, and interactions of dimensions. Qualitative research can address causality and involves observing and interpreting events. Also, this type of research aims to answer the question 'what' and adopts a holistic perspective that preserves the complexities of human behaviour (Lakshman et al., 2000). In this case, qualitative research seeks to answer the question "What is the role of a consultant in the development and implementation of an internationalisation strategy?"

Therefore, since this research concerns an internship report, where the intern is a researcher, the qualitative method used in this research corresponded to a case study of the company CH Business Consulting and its intervention in the company Estufazores.

The case study method is considered a valuable tool for achieving an in-depth understanding of a problem, event or phenomenon in its natural and real context. It allows researchers to comprehensively understand a subject through the use of case studies (Crowe et al., 2011).

A case study is an empirical technique that allows for a comprehensive examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its original context. Its aim is to understand the situation and identify the relevant contextual conditions. It deals with complex circumstances that have more variables than data points. It benefits from theoretical propositions to guide its design, data collection and analysis. This dual definition emphasises the comprehensive nature of case study research, encompassing a unique design logic, data collection techniques and specific data analysis approaches. These distinguish it from a mere data collection tactic or design feature (Yin, 2018).

The case study approach was selected in order to provide an in-depth and contextual analysis of the role of CH Business Consulting in the development and implementation of Estufazores' internationalisation strategy. This approach allows for a comprehensive

understanding of the unique challenges and outcomes associated with this specific business collaboration.

### 3.2. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

This section presents the most appropriate techniques for collecting data for the qualitative structure proposed in the study, following the methodology.

In order to respond to the research model, two data collection techniques were selected, one primary and the other secondary.

The first data collection technique is characterised by the collection of secondary data and involves the documentary analysis of the process of CH Business Consulting's intervention in the implementation of the internationalisation strategy of the company Estufazores. This technique provides secondary data.

Characterised as a primary data source, the second data collection technique involved semi-structured interviews with a number of CH Business Consulting and Estufazores employees to explore their attitudes, behaviours and experiences with the project.

#### 3.2.1. Document Analysis

Document analysis is a qualitative research method that enables investigations by examining materials such as books, articles, and reports (H. Morgan, 2022). It uses systematic procedures to extract meaningful information aligned with research goals (Junior

et al., 2021). This method can be used alone or with other techniques like interviews and observations.

Compared to other methods, document analysis is efficient and time-saving (Bowen, 2009). It provides extensive data coverage, making it a valuable tool for qualitative research, offering significant insights based on solid evidence (Junior et al., 2021).

A qualitative documentary analysis was carried out to understand the phenomenon in question and the significance of the study. Various reports on CH Business Consulting's involvement in the process of developing the Estufazores company's internationalisation strategy were analysed in order to justify and demonstrate all the steps taken. The documents analysed are shown in the **Table 2**:

**Table 2: Identification and justification of the documents analysed**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Relevance to the study</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Coding</b>
<b>Form “Vale Exportar Açores”</b>	Form filled in by the company Estufazores, in which the company indicates the services and support it requires from CH Business Consulting.	Provided by CH Business Consulting	<b>D1</b>
<b>Diagnosis of Export Potential and Capacity</b>	Diagnostic report on the situation of Estufazores, in which its export potential was assessed.	Provided by CH Business Consulting	<b>D2</b>
<b>Recommendations and Company Preparation and Capacitation Plan</b>	A plan in which the various areas of the Estufazores company with opportunities for potential improvement were indicated, and in which recommendations and actions based on these	Provided by CH Business Consulting	<b>D3</b>

	recommendations were also indicated, with the aim of addressing the company's greatest difficulties.		
<b>Export Plan</b>	A strategic document designed to provide guidance to Estufazores in its export activities, outlining the necessary steps and actions to be taken in order to enter international markets.	Provided by CH Business Consulting	<b>D4</b>
<b>Final Report</b>	The report provides a comprehensive overview of the internationalisation process of Estufazores, from the initial diagnosis to the follow-up of business opportunities.	Provided by CH Business Consulting	<b>D5</b>
<b>Communication Plan</b>	Plan for the development of Estufazores' communication actions, detailing the objectives to be achieved, the communication channels to be used and the message targets.	Provided by CH Business Consulting	<b>D6</b>
<b>Definition of the Digital Strategy</b>	The report defined the digital strategy that Estufazores should follow, based on the diagnosis made of its digital footprint and the best communication tools to use.	Provided by CH Business Consulting	<b>D7</b>

Source: Own elaboration

### 3.2.2. Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a fundamental component of qualitative research, as they enable the collection of comprehensive data. Kakilla (2021) describes them as a flexible method that allows researchers to interact deeply with participants, thus facilitating an in-depth exploration of relevant topics. Semi-structured formats permit the emergence of ideas in a more organic manner, thereby enabling researchers to explore unanticipated avenues and navigate discussions with greater flexibility, which in turn enhances their comprehension of the subject matter (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

These interviews are of great importance for the acquisition of insights through interpersonal interaction. They facilitate dialogue and the identification of themes derived from a variety of life experiences, thereby providing a rich source of knowledge (Kakilla, 2021). The objective of this qualitative approach is to gain insight into individuals' perceptions and experiences. By examining the socio-cultural factors that shape people's lives, this approach contributes to our understanding of social phenomena (Imran & Almusharraf, 2023).

Therefore, this method of data collection was one of those selected for this research. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted, three with employees of CH Business Consulting and one with an employee of Estufazores.

That said, two semi-structured interview scripts were prepared for different purposes: one for the employees of CH Business Consulting and the other for the employees of Estufazores. Both scripts were prepared in advance, taking into account the dimensions supported by the literature review and the specific objectives of this research.

The interviewees were selected on the basis of their involvement in the case and are shown in **Table 3**. In the case of CH Business Consulting, the employees responsible for



developing the strategy were interviewed and, in the case of Estufazores, the owner of the company was interviewed, as he was the employee most involved in the process.

**Table 3: Characterisation and coding of interviewees**

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Position held in the company</b>
<b>I1</b>	CH Business Consulting	International Consultant
<b>I2</b>	CH Business Consulting	Marketing and Communication Specialist
<b>I3</b>	Estufazores	CEO
<b>I4</b>	CH Business Consulting	Director of Internationalisation

Source: Own elaboration

It should be noted that two distinct scripts were created, one for the CH Business Consulting employees and another for the Estufazores employees. The main difference between the scripts is the way the questions are asked and the way in which the perception of each side of the internationalisation plan is assessed – the side that developed it and the side that implemented it. The following tables show the interview scripts for the employees of both companies, which illustrate the construction of the interviews.

The interview questions were formulated not only in accordance with the research objectives, but also with consideration of the categories and subcategories of analysis, and authors presented in the previous literature review. With regard to the organisation, each semi-structured interview script is divided into three main categories of analysis: background and motivations, internationalisation strategy and digital marketing and communication. Each category comprises three questions, which were defined *a priori* based on the

dimensions of the literature, counting nine questions in the interview script. Although the majority of the questions were derived from the literature review, in accordance with the nature of the study, an additional four questions were posed in both exploratory scripts.

**Table 4** presents the interview script for CH Business Consulting employees, which has been designed and constructed in accordance with the perspective that a consultancy's employees might have in relation to a case of this kind.

**Table 4:** Semi-structured and simplified interview script for CH Business Consulting employees

Objectives	Categories	Subcategories	Questions	Authors
<b>Objective 1 and 2</b>	<b>Background and Motivations</b>	Involvement of CH Business Consulting	1. Can you provide an overview of CH Business Consulting's involvement in Estufazores' internationalization process?	Kuivalainen et al., 2018 Hill, 2013
		Motivations to export	2. What were the primary motivations for Estufazores to expand its business internationally?	Mehdipour & Shirini, 2021 Leonidou, 1995 Kotler & Keller, 2012
		Identification and assessment of motivations	3. How did CH Business Consulting identify and assess these motivations?	Kuivalainen et al., 2018

<b>Objective 2</b>	<b>Internationalisation Strategy</b>	Strategic planning	4. Can you describe the strategy associated with the internationalization plan proposed by CH Business Consulting?	Calof & Beamish, 1995
		Components of the plan	5. What were the key components of the internationalization plan?	Paul & Mas, 2020 Hoang-Tien et al., 2019
		Adaptation of the strategy to needs and goals of Estufazores	6. How did CH Business Consulting adapt the strategy to suit Estufazores' specific needs and goals?	Hill, 2013 Canato & Giangreco, 2011
<b>Objective 3</b>	<b>Digital Marketing and Communication</b>	Communication	7. What role did digital marketing and communication play in the internationalization plan of Estufazores?	Pickton & Broderick, 2005 Zahay, 2015 Melandi et al., 2023 Dethine et al., 2020
		Advantage of digital marketing channels in international markets	8. How did CH Business Consulting leverage digital marketing channels to facilitate Estufazores' entry into international markets?	Deng et al., 2022 Rima et al., 2021

		Challenges of digital marketing strategies	9. Were there any challenges encountered in implementing digital marketing strategies, and if so, how were they addressed?	Dethine et al., 2020
	<b>Additional Insights</b>		10. In your opinion, what were the major challenges faced by Estufazores during the internationalization process?	
			11. How did CH Business Consulting support Estufazores in overcoming these challenges?	
			12. Looking back, what would you say were the key success factors in the collaboration between CH Business Consulting and Estufazores?	

	<b>Conclusion</b>		13. Is there anything else you would like to add or any further comments you have regarding CH Business Consulting's role in Estufazores' internationalization process?	
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Source: Own elaboration

Since the script in the previous table was not suitable for the employees of Estufazores, another script was designed, as shown in **Table 5**, so that it would be possible to fully understand the perspective that the employees of Estufazores might have in relation to this case.

**Table 5: Semi-structured and simplified interview script for Estufazores employees**

Objectives	Categories	Subcategories	Questions	Authors
<b>Objective 1</b>	<b>Background and Motivations</b>	Motivations to export	1. What were the primary motivations for Estufazores to expand its business internationally?	Mehdipour & Shirini, 2021 Leonidou, 1995 Kotler & Keller, 2012
		Identification and assessment of motivations	2. How did the company identify and prioritize potential international markets?	Kuivalainen et al., 2018

		Involvement of CH Business Consulting	3. What were the key factors considered when selecting CH Business Consulting as a partner for the internationalization process?	Kuivalainen et al., 2018 Hill, 2013
			4. Can you describe the collaboration between Estufazores and CH Business Consulting during the internationalization process?	Kuivalainen et al., 2018 Hill, 2013
<b>Objective 2</b>	<b>Internationalisation Strategy</b>	Strategic planning	5. How did CH Business Consulting contribute to the development and execution of Estufazores' internationalization strategy?	Calof & Beamish, 1995
		Adaptation of the strategy to needs and goals of Estufazores	6. Were there any specific challenges or obstacles encountered during the collaboration, and if so, how were they addressed?	Hill, 2013 Canato & Giangreco, 2011

<p><b>Objective 3</b></p>	<p><b>Digital Marketing Strategy</b></p>	<p>Communication</p>	<p>7. How significant was the role of digital marketing and communication in Estufazores' internationalization efforts?</p>	<p>Pickton &amp; Broderick, 2005 Zahay, 2015 Melandi et al., 2023 Dethine et al., 2020</p>
		<p>Advantage of digital marketing channels in international markets</p>	<p>8. What digital marketing strategies were implemented to support the company's expansion into international markets and how did it help the company?</p>	<p>Deng et al., 2022 Rima et al., 2021</p>
		<p>Challenges of digital marketing strategies</p>	<p>9. Did Estufazores face any difficulties in adapting its digital marketing strategies to suit different international markets?</p>	<p>Dethine et al., 2020</p>
<p>_____</p>	<p><b>Reflection and Lessons Learned</b></p>	<p>_____</p>	<p>10. Looking back, what were the key learnings from the internationalization experience?</p>	<p>_____</p>
		<p>_____</p>	<p>11. How do you assess the overall impact of CH Business Consulting's involvement in the</p>	<p>_____</p>

			internationalization process?	
			12. Are there any recommendations or suggestions you would make for future internationalization initiatives?	
	<b>Conclusion</b>		13. Is there anything else you would like to add or any further comments you have regarding Estufazores' internationalization journey and collaboration with CH Business Consulting?	

Source: Own elaboration

### 3.3. DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

Once the data has been collected, it is necessary to organise it in a way that allows for meticulous analysis.

As previously stated, two distinct data collection techniques were employed, with the two techniques complementing each other effectively. In order to analyse the data extracted and transcribed from the semi-structured interviews and document analysis, a process of content analysis was initiated. Content analysis is a set of methods for analysing communications,



with the objective of obtaining indicators that allow us to ascertain the circumstances in which these messages were created and received. This is achieved through the application of methodical and objective processes for characterising the content of the messages. (Bardin, 2013).

Content analysis comprises three distinct phases: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of the results, and interpretation. Pre-analysis is the first stage in the organisation of content analysis, where the researcher prepares the material for the research. It involves four stages: initial reading, selecting documents, setting objectives and hypotheses, and defining indicators. The next stage is the exploration of the material, where categorisation or coding takes place. Here, categories are defined to highlight important elements in the research. In the third phase, the results are processed, interpreted and inferred, with the objective of identifying the meaning conveyed in the messages. The dimensions of coding and categorisation are crucial for the interpretations and inferences that are drawn (Bardin, 2013).

The initial phase of content analysis involved the reading of all the interviews conducted and the selection of documents (in this case, CH Business Consulting's reports on the Estufazores company). This was followed by the formulation of objectives and the establishment of the categories *a priori* required for the analysis of the material. These categories encompass the main themes, concepts, or elements to be identified and analysed in the content. The subsequent stage involved the exploration of the previously selected material, during which an intensive reading was carried out, identifying and coding the relevant units of analysis. In order to facilitate the process, different colours were employed to highlight the various categories of analysis. This approach enabled the identification *a priori* of three key categories, which were subsequently divided into nine subcategories.

These categories were derived from the semi-structured interview script, the content of the reports analysed and the literary dimensions supported by the most prominent authors cited in **Table 6**.

**Table 6: Categories for analysing interviews and documents**

Categories	Subcategories
Background and Motivations	Involvement of CH Business Consulting
	Motivations to export
	Identification and assessment of motivations
Internationalisation Strategy	Strategic planning
	Components of the plan
	Adaptation of the strategy to needs and goals
Digital Marketing and Communication	Communication
	Advantage of digital marketing channels in international markets
	Challenge of digital marketing strategies

Source: Own elaboration

The final phase of the content analysis involved the processing of the results and their subsequent interpretation. The aim was to identify the contents present in all the material collected, which in this case were the interviews and documents.

Upon analysis of the data, it became evident that two new categories and six new categories (*a posteriori*) could be identified.

Thus, within the ‘Internationalisation Strategy’ category, two new subcategories were identified: ‘Market selection and entry strategy’ and ‘Challenges of internationalisation’. In the ‘Digital Marketing Strategy’ category, the subcategory ‘Online presence’ was discovered.

A further category, entitled 'Market Adaptation', was also identified. This was divided into three subcategories: ‘Product Adaptation’, ‘Pricing Strategy’ and ‘Distribution Strategy’.

Finally, the last category identified was ‘Brand Strategy’.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents the company where the internship took place and also the company that served as a model for this case, the research context of the relationship between the two companies covered in this case study, and the analysis and discussion of the semi-structured interviews and documents analysed. The analysis is based on three categories established *a priori* on the basis of the interviews (primary data): Background and Motivations, Internationalisation Strategy, and Digital Marketing and Communication; and on the secondary data obtained through the documents analysed (reports).

### 4.1. THE COMPANY – CH BUSINESS CONSULTING

CH Business Consulting is a consultancy specialising in support services for the export and internationalisation of companies. Its commitment to offering personalised and effective solutions for its clients' internationalisation needs is evident in its provision of a range of services, including international strategic planning and advice, internationalisation management, business intelligence, international operations, identification of international buyers and partners, capacity-building consultancy for international projects, and other complementary actions.

As stated in D5, the mission of CH Business Consulting is to resolve issues by disseminating optimal management techniques, infusing enthusiasm and passion into organisations, and exemplifying positive societal conduct. In terms of vision, CH Business Consulting aspires to be regarded as market leaders in all aspects of their operations.

The company's values are seven and are based on transparency, integrity, determination, excellence, commitment, reciprocity, and enthusiasm, as indicated in D5.

## 4.2. THE COMPANY – ESTUFAZORES

Estufazores is a family business dedicated to the exploitation, marketing and production of Azores Pineapple under the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) *Ananás dos Açores / S. Miguel*. Formally established in 2005, the company has been owned by the same family for around 156 years, with the fourth generation involved in the business, as explained in D1.

According to D2, Estufazores' production uses traditional techniques in glass greenhouses, including the use of "fumes" and "hot beds" based on plant material. This process results in a product with unique qualities of aroma and flavour, which is harvested after a period of two years. The company has no cold storage facilities and only harvests pineapples to order to guarantee freshness.

In short, Estufazores combines tradition and innovation in the production of Azores Pineapple, maintaining a strong family link to the business and seeking to expand and enhance its product in international markets.

### 4.3. RESEARCH CONTEXT

As mentioned above, the purpose of this research is to investigate the role of a consultancy firm (CH Business Consulting) in developing and executing the internationalisation strategy of a company (Estufazores).

The context in which this collaboration between the consultancy and the Azorean company occurred will be elucidated.

Estufazores is a well-established pineapple cultivator on São Miguel Island, Azores, with a heritage of over a century and a half. The company operates under the esteemed Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) for Ananás dos Açores (Azores Pineapple) / *S. Miguel* and distinguishes itself through its use of glass greenhouses, which is rare in global pineapple production. This family enterprise has been passed down through generations and has become an important player in the Azores Pineapple industry (Relatório Final “Vale Exportar Açores,” 2022).

The company is dedicated to traditional cultivation methods and meticulously cultivate *Ananas comosus L. Merrill Cayene* pineapples on S. Miguel Island using techniques such as smoke application and hot beds made from organic matter. The result of this meticulous process is the production of fruits with a distinctive aroma and flavour, which mature over a two-year period from planting to harvest. It is noteworthy that Estufazores does not utilise traditional cold storage methods; instead, a demand-driven approach to harvesting is employed. This practice has been commended by discerning customers, particularly prominent retailers, for ensuring that the fruit is at its optimal ripeness and flavour (Relatório Final “Vale Exportar Açores,” 2022).

The annual output of Estufazores is approximately 250 tons. The company has expanded its market reach through collaborative ventures with local producers, thereby enhancing its

capacity for increased production. The company's principal market is the extra-regional market, which currently accounts for approximately 75% of its revenue. Exportation has become a necessity for the company to maintain its growth trajectory, given the limited domestic market within the Azores (Relatório Final “Vale Exportar Açores,” 2022).

Estufazores has aimed to enter high-value international markets by leveraging its recent organic certification and the appeal of the '*Marca Açores*' (Azores Brand), along with the inherent health benefits of Azores Pineapple, to enhance its product value proposition (Relatório Final “Vale Exportar Açores,” 2022).

Similar to Estufazores, the Government of the Autonomous Region of the Azores wanted to promote the '*Marca Açores*' (Azores Brand) worldwide (*Portugal 2020, 2019*). In this context, the government has initiated the 'Export Azores' initiative with the objective of facilitating the internationalisation of regional SMEs. (*Portugal 2020, 2019*).

The 'Export Azores' initiative is a project designed for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) based in the Autonomous Region of the Azores. It was developed as part of the *Programa Operacional Açores 2020* (Azores Operational Programme 2020) to improve the ability of Azorean companies to enter foreign markets by providing them with the necessary tools and resources for global expansion (*Portugal 2020, 2019*).

In accordance with the 'Exportar Açores' (Voucher Export Azores) programme, accredited consultancies were tasked with providing specialised support. This included the provision of strategic international planning, market intelligence, buyer identification, and international partnership facilitation, among other complementary services (Relatório Final “Vale Exportar Açores,” 2022).

The '*Vale Exportar Açores*' (Voucher Export Azores) may only be used to contract services that are directly related to the export of products and services. The services in

question should be provided by consultancies that have been accredited under the '*Vale Exportar Açores*' (Voucher Export Azores) (*Portugal 2020, 2019*).

The objective of the accredited consultancies under this voucher is to enhance the competitiveness of Azorean companies, thereby enabling them to enter foreign markets. This is of paramount importance in the context of a global economy characterised by intense competition and numerous business opportunities (*Portugal 2020, 2019*).

In this context, CH Business Consulting and Estufazores established contact. CH Business Consulting was properly accredited under the '*Vale Exportar Açores*' (Voucher Export Azores) programme. As part of this initiative, the company provided advice and strategic planning for internationalization, business intelligence, international operations, and identification of international buyers and partners. Furthermore, the consultancy provided training consultancy for international projects and other complementary actions (Relatório Final “Vale Exportar Açores,” 2022).

#### 4.4. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATIONS

This category is divided into three subcategories: Relationship between the two companies, Motivations to export, and Identification and assessment of motivations. For each of these subcategories, quotes from the interviewees and excerpts from the documents analysed are presented, enabling the analysis, interpretation and understanding of the data collected.



#### 4.4.1. Involvement of CH Business Consulting

CH Business Consulting played a crucial role in defining and implementing Estufazores' export strategy. As described in D1:

“We hired an export consultant who (...) provided specialised advice on defining and implementing an action plan aimed at exporting and entering new international markets.”

D2 also highlights the support that CH Business Consulting gave Estufazores in this process:

“(...) it will allow the company, with the help of external specialist consultants, to start its internationalisation process in a more structured way, approaching foreign markets and investing in the valorisation of the “Azores Pineapple”, with a recognised origin and the only PDO in Europe.”

CH Business Consulting provided active support to Estufazores in the implementation of the action plan. In D3, the support provided by CH Business Consulting included assistance with benchmarking, competitor identification, and the creation of a customer database.

“We're helping them to benchmark, identifying competitors, finding out the prices in the destination markets, advising them on how to position themselves in the market, defining the profile of their target customers/public, building an action plan together and gathering other information.”

As I1 and I4 say, CH Business Consulting adopted a collaborative approach, empowering and involving Estufazores at every stage of the process:

“The involvement of our company, of CH in this case, was right from the start, in the application phase for the presentation of this project to Estufazores.”

“(…) a project like this was necessary in order, on the one hand, to train the entrepreneurs themselves in the export component, so many of them didn't have any knowledge or know how to export and we offer support here to help them in that regard.”

“(…) we provided a lot of support and training on how to develop the process of contacting potential importers (…)”

“This work of mutual involvement, I think it was very important for capacity building and overcoming obstacles.”

I1 also points to the main objective that CH Business Consulting had:

“(…) the aim was to help her in this process to develop something more consistent and also to look for channels that would add value to the product.”

I3 also emphasises the role that CH Business Consulting played in identifying and supporting him in overcoming specific challenges faced by his company - Estufazores - such as the need to align production capacity with existing international market demand:

“CH Business Consulting played a role in recognising the crucial need to align our production capacity, but they understood that the lack of production capacity was a significant obstacle to export.”

The consultancy also qualified Estufazores in negotiation techniques and contact strategies with potential importers, as I3 points out:

“(…) we also learnt from them how to make contacts, how to negotiate.”

The involvement of CH Business Consulting was fundamental to the success of Estufazores' internationalisation project. From defining the export strategy to practical

implementation and client training, the consultancy provided essential support that enabled Estufazores to approach international markets in a structured and effective manner. CH Business Consulting helped overcome challenges and seize growth opportunities, highlighting the importance of specialised consultancies in this process.

The consultancy helped create a consistent internationalisation strategy and gather information on potential markets, elements that are crucial for a successful approach. This support was in line with the best practices highlighted by authors such as Hill (2013) and Kuivalainen et al. (2018). Through its expertise, CH Business Consulting mitigated risks associated with exporting and accelerated Estufazores' entry into new markets, as noted by Hill (2013).

In addition, the consultant provided personalised support, using its vast experience and expertise. This type of support, mentioned by Canato and Giangreco (2011) was essential for Estufazores to be able to approach international markets in a structured and effective way, overcoming challenges and taking advantage of growth opportunities.

To summarise, collaboration with CH Business Consulting was decisive in enabling Estufazores to approach international markets efficiently, overcoming obstacles and taking advantage of new growth opportunities. This practical experience clearly demonstrates the importance of specialised consultancies in the process of internationalising companies, as highlighted in the literature.

#### 4.4.2. Motivations to export

CH Business Consulting focused on exploring international markets to increase the margin and profitability of the business, approaching value-added clients in foreign markets. This context has made exporting a mandatory path for the company, as mentioned in D2:

“In the coming years, the company intends to focus on valorising the product and start approaching other customers and markets (...), with the aim of further strengthening its margins and, consequently, the profitability of the business.

The company intends to start approaching value-added customers and, to this end, it needs to approach foreign markets, with the aim of increasing margins and gradually starting to present a premium and differentiated product.”

As also mentioned in D2, Estufazores wants to internationalise in order to enhance its product and create conditions for innovation and differentiation:

“This is the challenge the company has set itself in exploring international markets: increasing the value of the product.

(...) Estufazores wants to create conditions for innovation and differentiation that add value to the company and bring benefits not only to the organisation but also to its customers.”

Market diversification is also one of the main motivations for exporting Estufazores' products, with the aim of reducing dependence on the domestic market and increasing the resilience of the business, as pointed out in D4 and D5:

“Estufazores' main goal with exporting is to diversify markets (...)”

“From the need to (...) grow outside the Azores market (...) this project was designed.”

Estufazores also aims to explore new sales channels, such as specialised grocery stores and online sales, in order to increase the business margin and increase the value of its product, as I1 points out:

“The idea was to target this product at a type of customer who valued it more and who would pay more for it, and this could be done in two ways: either create a channel where you could sell online (...), or (...) explore a more grocery store channel with organic products, with value-added products.”

In addition, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the company faced difficulties in selling products, which increased the motivation to export as a solution to expand to new markets, as I4 mentions:

“The project specifically started during Covid, and, in fact, the company had some problems with product flow.  
(...) there was a motivation to sell products, to expand into new markets, but at the same time, the main issue in the medium to long term was to increase the margin.”

Estufazores has searched for opportunities to expand its operations internationally, with the aim of enhancing its product range and creating the conditions for innovation and differentiation. As previously stated by Kotler and Keller (2015), market diversification is a significant motivator for exporting products, with the objective of reducing dependence on the domestic market and enhancing business resilience, as evidenced by the experience of Estufazores.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Estufazores faced difficulties in selling its products, which increased the motivation to export as a solution to expand into new markets.

This scenario reflects the necessity to mitigate the risks associated with fluctuations in the domestic market through diversification, as discussed by Katsikeas and Morgan (1994) and Eaton et al. (2021).

The multifaceted motivations of Estufazores for exporting, including product valorisation, improvement of commercial margins, diversification of markets and exploration of new sales channels, demonstrate the significance of exporting as a survival and growth strategy, particularly for SMEs such as Estufazores, as Alrashidi (2014) asserts.

#### 4.4.3. Identification and assessment of motivations

The initial phase of the project involved an in-depth diagnostic analysis carried out by CH Business Consulting. The aim of this analysis was to identify Estufazores' strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. According to I1, this diagnosis was the first stage in the process of designing an internationalisation strategy:

“We started the process (...) by making a deep and thorough diagnosis of the company, its strengths, its weaknesses, where it could improve.”

In light of this diagnosis, I1 notes that the main areas for improvement identified were in logistics and sales (marketing and sales), which were crucial to the success of exports:

“It was on the logistics side and on the commercial or marketing and sales side. That's where the company could improve.”

I1 also emphasises that CH Business Consulting has adapted its strategy for identifying potential markets, initially favouring the German, Swiss and Italian markets due to their history of recognition and purchasing power:

“For other markets it was necessary (...) to understand how, logistically and by air, the product could be placed, for example, in the German market, which was one of the main markets to be explored and where the product was already recognised because historically there had already been a company that had exported pineapples from the Azores to the German market in the 1960s. The German market, Switzerland and Italy were three interesting markets because they had already had contact with the product and these are markets where there is potential, especially the German market and Switzerland too, where there is purchasing power for this type of product.”

According to I1, the consultancy also contributed significantly to resolving logistical issues, helping the company to establish contacts with airlines such as TAP, which enabled the company to establish viable export routes to target markets:

“We also helped (...) with the contact the company was already having with TAP, but also with other airlines to find a way to get the product to other markets.”

The methodology used by CH Business Consulting to assess motivations included gathering information through meetings, video calls and questionnaires, culminating in a detailed diagnostic report, as I4 reports:

“From a methodology point of view, we always started with a diagnosis (...). So we'd collect this information, usually in video call meetings (...), or we'd meet with the client in person and collect the information and make a diagnosis, collecting information with a questionnaire we drew up on Google Forms.

Then we had a more open conversation, so to speak. From there, we drew up what we called a diagnostic report, taking into account our client's needs and motivations.”

CH Business Consulting initially carried out an in-depth diagnostic analysis with the aim of identifying Estufazores' strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. This analysis revealed that the main areas for improvement were in logistics and sales (marketing and

sales), aspects that are crucial for successful exports. This practical approach corroborates the importance of consultancies as sources of information and performance improvement mentioned by Canato and Giangreco (2011).

The consultancy helped the company explore German, Swiss and Italian markets, resolving logistical issues with TAP and establishing viable export routes. Using meetings, video calls and questionnaires, the consultancy drew up a detailed diagnosis and developed an internationalisation strategy aligned with Estufazores' capabilities and market opportunities. This intervention reflects the ability of consultancies to provide specific market information and navigate regulatory frameworks, as described by Hill (2013).

The methodology used by CH Business Consulting to assess motivations included gathering information through meetings, video calls and questionnaires, culminating in a detailed diagnostic report. The structured and collaborative methodology adopted by the consultancy was essential in outlining Estufazores' internationalisation strategies, aligning them with its capabilities and market opportunities.

In addition, the consultancy followed the three service phases described by Kuivalainen et al. (2018) motivational, informational and operational. Initially, the consultancy motivated Estufazores to start its internationalisation process. It then prepared an internationalisation strategy and gathered information on potential target markets. Finally, in the operational phase, the consultancy helped find the best and most suitable clients or partners in each market.

CH Business Consulting used its knowledge and networks to facilitate market entry and mitigate the risks associated with exporting, as suggested by Hill (2013).

To summarise, collaboration with CH Business Consulting was decisive in enabling Estufazores to approach international markets efficiently, overcoming obstacles and taking



advantage of new growth opportunities. Estufazores' practical experience with the consultancy clearly exemplifies the importance of specialised consultancies in the process of internationalising companies, as highlighted in the literature by Hill (2013), Canato and Giangreco (2011), and Kuivalainen et al. (2018).

#### 4.5. INTERNATIONALISATION STRATEGY

This category of analysis is divided into five subcategories: strategic planning, components of the plan, adaptation of the strategy to needs and goals of Estufazores, market selection and entry strategy, and challenges of internationalisation.

##### 4.5.1. Strategic planning

Estufazores' internationalisation project focused on developing a clear strategy for penetrating new markets, leveraging the unique characteristics of the “Azores Pineapple” and aiming to project the brand outside the archipelago, as mentioned in D1, D4 and D5:

“We believe that this incentive in the international area will be decisive for the company to access new markets, having a clear strategy of the path to follow and the tools to use, which are indispensable requirements for brand projection, growth and consolidation of the business and increasing the “Azores Pineapple” brand outside the Azores archipelago, taking advantage of its unique characteristics and properties.”

“When it comes to exports, the company is focusing on the best “Azores Pineapple” that it produces, which is a strategy for differentiating the product and enhancing its value.”

“The aim of this internationalisation strategy is to: Diversify export markets; Identify new clients; Grow in turnover; Grow in profitability margin and profitability.”

According to I1, Estufazores has adopted a differentiation strategy, focusing on positioning pineapples as a premium product in niche markets and specialised retail:

“We proposed a strategy for penetrating these markets and we spoke to some importers from these markets.

Focusing on differentiation was also one of the strategies chosen, because we're talking about a product that is PDO, of recognised and protected origin and, at the same time, an organic product with unique characteristics.”

“And on the other hand, a niche market approach (...). Start betting on this higher-value product with clients or distributors or shops, in fine grocery shops or more gourmet shops with products of recognised and differentiated origin.”

I4 also confirms this idea of a strategy to position the product as something premium, aimed only at a niche market:

“From the point of view of contact strategy, it was at an international level to find those who imported either Portuguese products or imported fruit, but who always served those smaller, medium-sized chain shops, but who above all valued quality products and who reached the middle/upper middle class.”

However, the implementation of the plan included research and identification of potential buyers, strategic contacts and logistical support as described in D5:

“This phase included the following tasks:  
1- Research and identification of potential importers / buyers / influencers in the target markets.

In this activity, market intelligence research was carried out, with the following objectives:

- Identify and list 20 prospects to contact within the selected markets;
  - Identify the main characteristics and best commercial practices to increase the possibility of success.
- 2- Contacting prospects and organising business agendas:
- Drawing up the commercial argument for approaching prospects, whether by telephone, email and/or social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram or Twitter, etc.) and in person;
  - Establishing contacts with the 'short list' of companies selected to present the client, obtaining a better understanding of the potential and possible interest;
  - Scheduling meetings in different international markets;
  - Prior preparation and support in developing the commercial 'Value Proposition' for the meetings, in terms of commercial arguments and logistical conditions;
  - Accompanying the client - manager of Estufazores - to the various business meetings.”

The internationalisation strategy of Estufazores has consistently been based on the establishment of structured objectives, as evidenced in D7.

“The entire strategy to be developed for Estufazores will be defined on the basis of the following structural objectives:

- Increase Estufazores' awareness;
- Strengthen the company's digital presence, so that it can assert itself commercially on digital channels;
- Reinforce the communication of services with clients and potential clients;
- Raising awareness of the island of São Miguel;
- To publicise the traditional methods of pineapple production in the Azores.”

I4 also said that logistics is a critical component of strategic planning, including the choice of logistics partners and transportation methods:

“(…) before going into the field and before taking action, we ourselves had to think about various questions and details, namely: What is the logistics? How are we going to do it?

Finding logistical partners for the process. Will it be by aeroplane? Will it be road transport? How are we going to sell to the unit? Will it be on a pallet? Will it be a container?"

Similar to the internationalisation strategy, the communication strategy aimed to increase brand awareness and highlight the unique characteristics of the product and the island of *São Miguel*, as mentioned by I2:

“Once these analyses had been carried out, more so in terms of communication, we then outlined what the objectives were, (...) to increase the brand's awareness, to strengthen its digital presence, the communication of its services, and also to increase the island's potential in terms of pineapple production.”

CH Business Consulting designed an internationalisation project for Estufazores, focused on developing a clear strategy for penetrating new markets, leveraging the unique characteristics of “Azores Pineapple” and projecting the brand beyond the archipelago.

In this way, a differentiation strategy was suggested, which would position their pineapples as a premium product in niche markets and specialised retailers. This approach is underpinned by the idea that internationalisation is not just about expanding abroad, but also about acquiring new resources and skills, as Morales (2020) points out. Estufazores' internationalisation plan included researching and identifying potential buyers, strategic contacts and logistical support, crucial elements as suggested by Serrano et al. (2018) and Ruzzier et al. (2006).

Estufazores' strategic planning for internationalisation was carefully designed to take advantage of the premium quality and exclusive characteristics of the “Azores Pineapple”. The strategy included product differentiation in niche markets, the use of modern tools for customer management and prospecting, and a robust approach to logistics and communication. These activities not only aimed to expand into new markets, but also to

strengthen the digital presence and increase brand awareness, in line with the observations of Eden et al. (2010) and Shane and Venkataraman (2000).

Through this project, CH Business Consulting demonstrated how internationalisation can be a strategic and successful process, capable of providing a significant global competitive advantage, as discussed by Guillén and García-Canal (2009).

#### 4.5.2. Components of the plan

The first step in drawing up the internationalisation plan was to carry out a detailed diagnosis of Estufazores' current situation, focusing on assessing its export potential, as indicated in D2:

“The initial stage is linked to carrying out a Diagnosis of the company's current situation, assessing its export potential (...) orientated towards the relevant points in terms of assessing the company's potential export capacity. Specific information was requested from the company and, at the same time, desk research was carried out on it, allowing financial data, existing publicity materials, prices, company certifications and other data to be collated, which helped to understand Estufazores' current situation.”

This was followed by the preparation of the export plan, based on a detailed analysis that included the strategic definition, the marketing mix and a plan of specific activities as defined in D5:

“Export Plan, which included the following items:

1. Strategic Definition:

- Main Internationalisation Objectives;
- Penetration Strategies;
- Selection of target markets;

- Market Entry Strategies - Commercialisation Model and Targets.

2. Marketing-Mix:

- Product and Pricing;
- Communication and Promotion.

3. Export Business Plan.”

The export plan outlined in D4 included specific actions to ensure identification and contact with potential buyers, agents, logistics partners and influencers:

- “- Action 1: Identify the main gourmet operators (specialised retailers, gourmet shops);
- Action 2: Identify potential brokers or company representatives in each of the target markets;
  - Action 3: Identify potential logistics partners and find out the access conditions that allow delivery to B2B and B2C customers;
  - Action 4: Identify chefs or culinary influencers who promote quality products, possibly sending product samples for publicity;
  - Action 5: Define sales prices for each of the target markets based on the Ex-Works price and the logistical costs of each target market;
  - Action 6: Create a shortlist of buyers to contact with the right profile (around 10 per target market, totalling 20 buyers);
  - Action 7: Schedule 3 to 4 commercial meetings per market with the selected buyers (totalling 6 to 8 meetings in the 2 main target markets);
  - Action 8: Commercial follow-up report and feedback on business opportunities.”

I1 refers to a key element of the plan, which included the preparation of presentation materials and the implementation of a structured commercial prospecting process:

“A whole approach was built around how the process should be defined. In other words, in order to contact these clients, we had to prepare a very well done presentation of the company in which we created an argument, which is almost a pitch for the company: How the company should present itself to other companies. We even helped write contact emails. And then we even prepared the presentation (...) which helped the company to send emails or make the presentation when talking to potential buyers.”

“(…) I started (…) by defining this shortlist of potential interested parties. Then I'd contact these prospects via email, a kind of email in which I'd have the company pitch and also the presentation that we'd put together with the client. The presentation of the company and the product. And then, after sending the email, we would contact those companies that we thought had the most potential by telephone.”

After this commercial prospecting process, I1 also mentioned that another phase of implementing the export plan involved scheduling meetings, sending samples and following up with interested parties:

“Then, as a result, meetings were set up with those buyers or importers who were interested and who matched the profile we had created. These meetings were held and then follow-ups were made because there were, in fact, interested parties who asked for the product. Samples were sent.”

However, I2 says that some additional analysis was carried out to better understand the market, the competition and the consumer profile, which helped to define a more complete strategy:

“We carried out a small SWOT analysis that enabled us to identify our strengths and weaknesses and what we could bet on.”

“After identifying the internal factors, we analysed the competition.”

“We also analysed the consumer, the type of people who consumed.”

The preparation of Estufazores' internationalisation process involved several stages, starting with a detailed diagnosis of the company's current situation, focusing on its export potential.

Following Pickton and Broderick (2005) line of thinking, Estufazores' internationalisation plan identified potential markets based on their history of recognition and purchasing power, prioritising markets such as Germany, Switzerland and Italy.

Estufazores' export plan then included specific actions to identify and contact potential buyers, agents and logistics partners. This structured process of commercial prospection was essential for the practical implementation of the export strategy, as suggested by Calof and Beamish (1995), who emphasised the importance of adapting structure, strategy and resources to the new international environment Calof and Beamish (1995). In this way, the plan detailed strategic objectives, specific marketing and sales actions, and the identification and monitoring of potential customers, ensuring a strong and informed approach to the company's international expansion.

#### 4.5.3. Adaptation of the strategy to needs and goals of Estufazores

Estufazores' internationalisation plan has been developed with clear and specific objectives adapted to the company's needs, with the aim of preparing the company for the export process and promoting its products in the target markets, as shown in D5:

“In terms of specific objectives, the following stand out:

- Prepare and improve the company's capabilities for export processes;
- Promote the company and its products in the target markets identified: Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France and also mainland Portugal as the natural destination market (gourmet shops);



- Helping the company in the commercial prospecting process;
- Generate sales opportunities in markets outside the Azores.”

In order to explore the “Azores Pineapple” as a value-added product, a strategic repositioning was necessary, since the product stands out as something differentiated, as reported in D5:

“It should be emphasised that exploring the “Azores Pineapple” as a value-added product requires a different positioning for the company.”

I1 highlights the size of Estufazores and its lack of experience in exporting, and therefore the need to adapt the strategy and focus initially on a limited number of markets:

“We always advise clients to focus on 2 or 3 markets initially and only then expand to others. This was the adaptation we made given the size of the client and their lack of experience in contacting and exporting to international markets outside mainland Portugal.”

“The logistics phase was still being tested, so we tried to reduce as much as possible the markets on which the company should focus initially, i.e. in order to be successful and test the process, especially in the German market, which was the main market and that's where we focused the most.”

I4 points out that identifying and adapting to customers and markets was crucial, given the previous emotional relationship with Azorean products:

“So, we evaluated with the administration what was different and even, for example, one of the things we have to adapt to is who their potential clients are. And we obviously prioritised companies that import and distribute fruit. Then we had to adapt in terms of who can actually recognise quality in the Azorean product. And then we had to adapt, for example, we identified companies that, therefore (...) distribute Portuguese products and they are aware of this quality, and then we also found, for example, a German who in his past, his

father had already imported Azorean products and had an image of value in relation to pineapples and, therefore, because there has to be a previous emotional connection.”

However, in terms of digital marketing strategy, I2 says that the lack of a clear strategy on the part of Estufazores led the consultancy team to define marketing objectives and strategies independently:

“The client had no objectives because (...) he was a client who had no knowledge, what he wanted was to internationalise, he wanted people to know his brand, but he also wasn't too worried about it because he had a guaranteed business with the market that he had already conquered on his own. So there are no Estufazores objectives here. We set the objectives, but we did it autonomously. In other words, it was a much more individual job, because the client wasn't so aware of this either, he knew, after we shared with him, what he liked and what he didn't like, but he didn't have a strategy himself or join this project with completely defined objectives (...). We had to define these objectives ourselves and so it was easy because we were the ones who outlined the strategy and defined the objectives.”

I4 points out that the market approach has been adapted to the specific characteristics of Estufazores:

“The whole implementation and approach was adapted to the very intrinsic characteristics of Estufazores. Both from a product and management point of view.”

Estufazores' internationalisation plan was developed with clear and specific objectives tailored to the company's needs, with the aim of preparing the company for the export process and promoting its products in the target markets. As Hill (2013) points out, the internationalisation process is complex and can present significant challenges for companies exporting for the first time. In order to exploit the “Azores Pineapple” as a value-added product, a strategic repositioning was necessary, as the product stands out as something differentiated.

As an SME, Estufazores faced limitations in terms of resources and export experience, highlighting the importance of consultancies specialised in helping companies overcome these barriers, as indicated by Kuivalainen et al. (2018). Identifying and adapting to customers and markets was crucial, given the previous emotional relationship with Azorean products. As mentioned by Canato and Giangreco (2011), consultancies can enrich the decision-making process by providing specific information about each market and helping to navigate local regulations.

However, the lack of a clear digital marketing strategy on the part of Estufazores led the consultancy team to autonomously define marketing objectives and strategies. This intervention reflects the crucial role of consultancies in providing personalised support and adapting approaches to the specific characteristics of each business, as indicated by Hill (2013).

The market approach was carefully tailored to the specific needs and objectives of Estufazores, from the clear definition of objectives and initial diagnosis to the adaptation of products and packaging, to the implementation of a digital marketing and promotion strategy, all stages were carefully planned to ensure the company's success in international markets. Even if the company hadn't defined certain objectives, CH Business Consulting was able to build on them, adapting them to the values of Estufazores and to what they considered to be the best solution to improve the brand and its product, thus reinforcing the role that a consultancy can play in this process, as mentioned by Hill (2013).

#### 4.5.4. Market selection and entry strategy

I4 emphasises that the market entry strategy involved identifying the markets with the greatest potential, defining entry strategies and methods of contacting potential customers:

“We identified which markets had the greatest potential and where we were going to operate. What would be the entry strategy, what would we look for from the point of view of the interlocutor, that we would look for large importers or distributors or direct sales within the European Union to the respective shops. We also identified, on the one hand, what actions we were going to take from the point of view of contacts, so whether it was important to take part in fairs, whether it was important to make a selection visit or whether we were going to do telemarketing actions and then use newsletters as well.”

D2 reports that in its internationalisation efforts, Estufazores has identified priority markets based on high value potential, starting with Germany and mainland Portugal:

“In international markets, they intend to take advantage of Azores Export Voucher to prospect high-value channels and clients in some countries, starting with Germany and mainland Portugal.”

CH Business Consulting defined a penetration strategy based on product differentiation and a focus on niche markets such as gourmet shops and customers with high purchasing power, as shown in D4:

“Export penetration strategies:

- Product Differentiation - Focus on Quality and Offer Differentiation; Innovative Product.
- Focus on niche markets. E.g. Gourmet, Natural or Handcrafted Products, etc.”

“This quality “Azores Pineapple” from Estufazores reveals a focus on a niche market, as the company aims to reach gourmet shops and selected customers in international markets, with purchasing power, who recognise the value of the product and are willing to pay for it.”

D4 also reported that market entry strategies included both direct commercial operations and partnering with local agents or representatives:

“Market Entry Strategies (with whom?): Company alone (involves prospecting visits, among others), Local partner (not a partner)  
Market entry strategies (how?): Direct commercial operation, Agent/representative  
Market entry strategies (sales channel: who to target?): Gourmet / specialised shops - customers with purchasing power, e-commerce/marketplace shops.”

In order to ensure the differentiated positioning of the “Azores Pineapple”, CH Business Consulting prioritised direct commercial operations with specialised professionals and the development of strategic partnerships, as mentioned in D4:

“Estufazores intends to focus on direct sales to professionals (B2B) in foreign markets - gourmet shops / specialist retailers, investing in a quality product and a careful image that conveys the distinctive positioning of Estufazores' “Azores Pineapple”, a natural product, harvested at the ideal moment of ripeness, guaranteeing the best characteristics and flavour of the fresh fruit.”

“It makes sense for a company to identify and develop partnerships with an agent or representative who can help it identify potential buyers of its value-added product in its target markets.”

I1 says that in addition to the priority markets, CH Business Consulting identified the potential of additional markets such as France, Italy and Switzerland, which had a suitable customer profile for the higher value product:

“Germany, mainland Portugal, Italy and Switzerland were the main markets that had the corresponding profile and that might be interested in this type of higher value product, with a recognised origin, a differentiated product, an organic product with organic certification, a pineapple that is totally different from the normal pineapple.”

CH Business Consulting developed an internationalisation strategy in which the identification of priority markets was a key step, initially focusing on Germany and mainland Portugal due to their high value potential. CH Business Consulting defined a market entry strategy based on product differentiation and a focus on niche markets such as gourmet shops and high purchasing power customers, in line with the principles developed by Pickton and Broderick (2005) for identifying and exploiting growth opportunities in the global market.

Market entry strategies included both direct commercial operations and the formation of partnerships with local agents or representatives, reflecting the importance of a diversified and adaptable approach described by Calof and Beamish (1995). In order to ensure a differentiated positioning for the “Azores Pineapple”, CH Business Consulting prioritised direct commercial operations with specialised professionals and the development of strategic partnerships. This approach is in line with the need to adapt the company's structure, strategy and resources to the new international environment described by Shane and Venkataraman (2000).

In addition to the priority markets, CH Business Consulting identified the potential of additional markets such as France, Italy and Switzerland, which had a suitable customer profile for the higher value product. Serrano et al. (2018) and Costa et al. (2018) point out that this expansion into additional markets reflects the demand for geographical diversification, which is essential to create new business opportunities and achieve significant profits.

Thus, Estufazores' market selection and entry strategy was based on identifying high-value markets and penetrating them through differentiation and a focus on niches. The aim was to operate commercially directly and develop strategic partnerships, in line with the recommendations of choosing the best locations and structures to minimise transaction costs and maximise global competitive advantages, as mentioned by Kamakura et al. (2012) and Guillén and García-Canal (2009).

#### 4.5.5. Challenges of internationalisation

One of the main challenges identified by I1 was resistance to change, particularly as an SME. There was difficulty in accepting the need for improvement and recognising that they needed outside help to implement it:

“(...) when we're talking about SMEs and family businesses, there's always a difficulty in accepting that something isn't being done well or could be done better.”

“The confrontation of the people who run the company with potential improvements that can be made, but which (...) they are not going to do because they need someone's help, (...) the assumption that they need someone's help to do it, to improve, that was one of the main challenges that Estufazores had to face, but which I think it accepted well, because our stance was also flexible.”

Communication and cultural adaptation were also challenging areas. Estufazores had to understand the needs and expectations of international clients, which meant overcoming cultural barriers and adapting to different ways of thinking, as I1 mentioned:

“One of the challenges for them was to speak directly via the online platform with the purchasing managers on the other side or the managers on the other side. And there's a cultural gap there with which the company had to realise what they needed from the other side and adapt accordingly.”

“Basically, the pineapple from the Azores was going to be sold to someone who then had customers. And realising that and the concerns of that person who is on the other side, in another country, thinking differently, I think that was another challenge that Estufazores had to face and that it wasn't used to.”

“Another challenge they had was adapting to people in other countries, thinking differently and trying to understand how they thought and what worried them.”

On the other hand, another difficulty mentioned by I3 was the lack of production capacity, a significant obstacle to meeting international demand:

“We don't have more customers because we don't have the production to satisfy our customers' needs and the worst thing is to make contacts with companies and then have no product to sell them.”

“During our collaboration with CH Business Consulting, one of the most significant challenges we faced was the lack of production capacity to meet potential demand in international markets.”

The transition to marketing higher-value products required significant changes in the company's mindset, including improvements in product packaging and preparation, as I1 pointed out:



“And then there was the change in mindset of seeing products with more value. How do you sell products with more value? It has to have different packaging, all the preparation has to be different, right from production.”

As I4 points out, Estufazores needed to professionalise its international approaches and gain a better understanding of the target markets and their specific requirements:

“In the first place, they began by better mastering what kind of approach they had to take from an international point of view, they had no idea, they did it in a much more amateurish way and so, after this project, they were able to do it more professionally.”

“Then they overcame the challenge from a logistical point of view, so there was a moment when, particularly in the European markets, they didn't quite know how to handle the logistics component and from then on they managed to overcome that situation.”

“And then from the point of view of markets, they were also able to better realise the potential of some markets, namely the German market and the gourmet channel itself, here in mainland Portugal.”

In the internationalisation efforts of Estufazores, several challenges were identified and faced. One of the main challenges was resistance to change, which is common in SMEs, which often find it difficult to accept the need for improvement and recognise the need for external help, as noted by Tan and Sousa (2015). Communication and cultural adaptation were also challenging areas. Estufazores had to understand the needs and expectations of international customers, overcome cultural barriers and adapt to different ways of thinking, which is essential for companies looking to expand globally, as reported by Alrashidi (2014).

Another significant barrier was the lack of production capacity, which made it difficult to respond to international demand. The transition to marketing higher value products required significant changes in the business, including improvements in packaging and product

preparation. This needs to professionalise international approaches and gain a better understanding of target markets reflects the importance of adapting structure, strategy and resources to the new international environment, as described by Calof and Beamish (1995).

To meet these challenges, Estufazores had to adopt more professional practices and develop a better understanding of the requirements of international markets. The challenges of internationalisation for Estufazores were numerous and complex, including resistance to change, cultural gaps, production capacity limitations, the need for professionalisation and logistical adaptation. Overcoming these challenges required a change of mindset and the adoption of more professional practices, in line with what has been said by Shane and Venkataraman (2000), who emphasise the importance of identifying opportunities and developing and exploiting cross-border ventures.

Estufazores' initial resistance to change and the need for professionalisation are indicative of the difficulties faced by many SMEs in internationalising, as highlighted by various studies (Burt, 1991; Dawson, 1994; Laulajainen, 1991). In addition, the need to understand and adapt to the needs of international customers is a crucial part of the internationalisation process, as suggested by Pickton and Broderick (2005).

These findings highlight the importance of a structured and strategic approach to internationalisation, as recommended by several authors (Buckley & Ghauri, 1998; Üner et al., 2023).

## 4.6. DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

This category is divided into four subcategories: communication, advantage of digital marketing channels in international markets, challenges of digital marketing strategies and online presence.

### 4.6.1. Communication

Estufazores' communication strategy, as expressed in D7, has been carefully designed to effectively communicate the unique values and characteristics of the “Azores Pineapple”:

“In order for the strategy defined for Estufazores to be realised, communication must be aligned with the following values:

- Tradition;
- Innovation
- Sustainability;
- Endogenous products.”

According to D7, the communication focused on highlighting the characteristics of the “Azores Pineapple”, including its superior quality, unique origin, artisanal production in environmentally friendly micro greenhouses and harvesting at the ideal time of ripeness:

“One of the activities was to develop communication tools that would have an impact on the target audience and convey the distinctive value of the “Azores Pineapple”: catalogues and presentations, packaging, website, social media presence, storytelling, highlighting the company's tradition and history.”

“Estufazores should emphasise in its communication its concern for sustainable production, as well as its investment in R&D, as factors leading to the production of better quality pineapples.”

In line with D3, storytelling was another communication strategy used to connect consumers with the company's long history, highlighting the family tradition of pineapple production in the Azores over several generations:

“Develop communication supports that generate impact on the target audience and convey the differentiated value of “Azores Pineapple”: (...) storytelling, emphasis on the tradition and history of the family business (...) which has been producing pineapples in the Azores for 4 generations (156 years).”

As a result, and according to D3, various communication channels were identified to convey the company's key messages, including catalogues, presentations, packaging, website, social networks and newsletters:

“Communication supports were developed that (...) conveyed the product's unique value: catalogues and presentations, packaging, website, social media presence, storytelling, emphasis on the company's tradition and history.”

The communication was aimed at different segments of the target audience, including locals, tourists, health food lovers and people interested in the pineapple production process, and for this purpose persona profiles were created to represent the target audience as expressed in D7:

“This target audience can be represented by the following personas:

Inês Cruz (26 years old)

Resident of São Miguel

Curious about the pineapple production process

Rui Henriques (42 years old)

Resident of mainland Portugal

Loves travelling, seeks out typical island products

Irene Chaves (58 years old)

Resident of France

Regular pineapple consumer, looking for the best of the best”

“Based on the examples of personas described above, Estufazores' communication must be tailored to them, otherwise the company's efforts will be defeated if the content doesn't prove to add value to the recipients of the messages it wants to convey.

Thus, communication should essentially be aimed at the consumer, both local and tourist, who is looking for a distinctive product, recognised for its unique characteristics, such as its flavour, resulting from its origin and the stages that make up its production.”

D6 stated that the content of the website and other digital platforms has been optimised to convey relevant information about the company and to align with the company's core values, the pineapple production process and its health benefits:

“What is communicated on the website: Estufazores is one of the oldest pineapple producers in the Azores, recognised for its history and methods.

What is communicated through the SEO website: Estufazores favours traditional production, although it strives to innovate in order to offer the best pineapple in the world.

What is communicated via social media: Estufazores sells pineapple from the Azores, which has an unparalleled flavour and history

What is communicated through newsletters: Estufazores' products are endogenous to the Azores, whose production process is unique and which give them countless beneficial properties for health and well-being.”

With international expansion in mind, communication has been adapted to include English and reach potential foreign customers, as written in D6:

“Bearing in mind that Estufazores wants to position itself in the international market, the publications will be in two languages - Portuguese and English - thus targeting communication to potential foreign clientes.”

Estufazores' communication strategy has been carefully planned to effectively communicate the unique values and characteristics of the “Azores Pineapple”. This effort is in line with the vision of Pickton and Broderick (2005), who highlight the importance of adapting communication methods due to the increasing movement of people, products and organisations across borders, facilitated by technological advances in information and communication systems. Estufazores' communication focused on highlighting the specificities of its product, such as its superior quality, unique origin, artisanal production in environmentally friendly microgreenhouses and harvesting at the ideal time of ripeness.

One of the strategies used was storytelling, linking consumers to the company's long history and highlighting the family tradition of pineapple production in the Azores that goes back several generations. This method is in line with the need to adapt marketing messages to avoid misunderstandings or communication problems in foreign markets, as discussed by Pickton and Broderick (2005).

Estufazores identified several communication channels to convey its key messages, including catalogues, presentations, packaging, website, social networks and newsletters. This effort reflects Kotler and Keller (2015) recommendation on the importance of adapting both the message and the product to each local market (dual adaptation). The communication was targeted at different audience segments, such as locals, tourists, healthy product lovers

and people interested in the pineapple production process, using persona profiles to represent the target audience.

To ensure that the message was clear and effective, the content of the website and other digital platforms was optimised to convey relevant information about the company, in line with its core values, the pineapple production process and its health benefits. Estufazores' international expansion was also taken into account in the communication strategy, with adaptations to include English and reach potential foreign customers. This point reinforces Kotler and Keller (2015) observation that when entering new markets, messages need to be adapted and brand building work carried out.

Thus, the communication strategy developed by CH Business Consulting was designed to highlight the attributes of the “Azores Pineapple” and effectively communicate its history, quality and values to the target audience. Using a variety of channels and adapted languages, the strategy aimed to reach both local and international consumers, promoting its distinctive product and unique identity, as evidenced by the importance of international marketing and cultural adaptation discussed by Kotler and Keller (2015) and Pickton and Broderick (2005).

#### 4.6.2. Advantage of digital marketing channels in international markets

The effective use of digital marketing channels was crucial for Estufazores to expand its presence in international markets.

The creation of a bilingual website, Portuguese and English, was key to establishing an online presence accessible to potential international buyers, as I2 said:

“The website had an English translation, so I think the main digital tool we developed was the website because it was a place where a potential buyer or partner could enter and have all the company's information translated.”

An active presence on social networks has not only increased the brand's visibility, but has also made it easier to interact with potential customers and build trust, as reported by D6:

“The aim of social media management is to promote the company and the products it offers, to increase its reach to customers and potential customers, and to get to know and build relationships with customers.”

D6 also mentions the importance of sending out regular newsletters, which has enabled the company to maintain and strengthen its relationship with customers, as well as informing them about the origin and benefits of its products:

“The creation of newsletters helps to maintain and strengthen customer relations, publicise the Azores as the origin of Estufazores' products and create engagement.”

The digital strategy has brought several tangible benefits to the company, including increased brand visibility, easier access for potential buyers and stronger market positioning, as shown by I1, I2 and I4.:

“Online helped us to find the shortlist from the start, to find the profile of the clients and it really helped to publicise the company.”

“(…) everyone knows that digital is the best way to communicate with the international market.”



“It made the whole commercial approach easier, because (...) it allowed the Estufazores brand to go up a few levels in terms of quality and classification, and then the whole communication component helped (...) in the contacts that were made because they already knew what Estufazores was, what the Azores Pineapples were and the image itself was already positioning them from the market's point of view.”

“I believe that all digital design has greatly favoured awareness and positioning.”

The effective use of digital marketing channels was crucial for Estufazores to expand its presence in international markets. The creation of a bilingual website in Portuguese and English was key to establishing an online presence accessible to potential international buyers, reflecting the importance of digital marketing in the modern world, as highlighted by Katsikeas et al. (2019) and Kvasova et al. (2023). An active presence on social media not only increased brand exposure, but also facilitated interaction and trust building with potential customers, in line with Zahay (2015) view of the digital revolution in reaching consumers.

In addition, Estufazores highlighted the importance of sending out regular newsletters, which allowed the company to maintain and strengthen relationships with customers, as well as informing them about the origin and benefits of the products. The digital strategy has brought several tangible benefits to the company, including increased brand visibility, ease of access for potential buyers and strengthened market positioning. The implementation of digital marketing strategies, as noted by Melandi et al. (2023), has proved essential for Estufazores in its international expansion.

From creating a bilingual website to effectively managing social media and sending personalised newsletters, each channel has played a vital role in building brand awareness, establishing relationships and generating leads in global markets. These initiatives

demonstrate the power and effectiveness of digital marketing in attracting international customers and sustainable business growth. As highlighted by Katsikeas et al. (2019), a digital presence is a necessity for international success today, and Estufazores exemplifies this reality through its strategic and innovative approach to using digital marketing to drive its global expansion.

#### 4.6.3. Challenges of digital marketing strategies

The challenges faced in implementing digital marketing strategies for Estufazores were significant and varied, reflecting both internal and external barriers, as I1 points out:

“Customers aren't used to it, they don't know about many digital tools, they didn't know about them. Now they know better (...). And they realise how useful they are and how it's done and what steps need to be taken. You'll always need someone dedicated to this area (...) or you'll always need someone outsourced (...) and the client has understood this, but there are more barriers. Initially they say yes, but then they don't know and there's a gap that always exists with more traditional companies, especially Portuguese SMEs.”

“(...) in the beginning what I can say is that there was openness, but then there was that inability to get used to it, which companies often take refuge in (...), but above all what we realise is that (...) they don't feel comfortable messing around with some tools, but then they realise with the support of someone.”

Another challenge highlighted by I2 was customer's resistance to digital and all that it could bring to their business.:

“The client's resistance was probably the main challenge because he was an older client, from the Azores, with that context that he had lived in all his life. He never needed digital to

sell pineapples (...). What's more, it was a process of co-construction, in the sense that the client had to see, analyse and validate, and it wasn't always very easy to get the quick response or the necessary validation in the timings we had planned, and we often had to go back and forth (...) banging our heads a bit until we got to the end result they wanted, whether it was the choice of the name or the name of the product.”

The same resistance was noted in I3's speech:

“We don't really have the marketing that is used today, but the marketing that is used today is for companies that really need to increase their sales volume. And it doesn't apply to us.”

I2 also added the difficulty she felt in relation to the client's opinions, which were mostly divergent in terms of content:

“When it came to publications, they were also very opinionated about the type of content, whether they liked it or not, even the recipes we shared they always gave their opinion on whether it made sense or not.”

The lack of visual content, such as their own photographs, to use as a communication aid and the need to use image banks have created problems in guaranteeing the authenticity of the product, which is essential for communicating the pineapple's endogenous origin, as I2 points out:

“(...) it was also difficult when it came to the photographs, because at first we didn't have any photographs of them and we had to go to image banks and it was difficult to guarantee that we were choosing a photograph that was of a pineapple and not a pineapple, for example, or that was from the Azores and not from somewhere else. And that was clearly a big challenge, because our aim was to show the potential of the endogenous product and if we're not showing the endogenous product, we're contradicting ourselves in the communication itself and that was also a big challenge.”

Implementing digital marketing strategies at Estufazores presented significant challenges, reflecting both internal and external barriers. One of the main challenges was Estufazores' resistance to new digital technologies and methods. Estufazores had a traditional view of marketing, which made it difficult to accept digital approaches. This scenario is in line with the observations of Dethine et al. (2020), who highlight resistance to digital transformation as a common obstacle, especially among SMEs.

Lack of familiarity with digital tools was another key challenge. The transition to digital marketing requires not only the implementation of new technologies, but also the adaptation of internal processes and the acquisition of new skills. CH Business Consulting found it difficult to educate and train the Estufazores team to use these tools effectively, a problem also identified by Dethine et al. (2020) as a barrier to digital transformation in SMEs.

In addition, CH Business Consulting found it difficult to obtain authentic visual content, such as their own photographs, to use in digital communications. The need to use image banks compromised the authenticity of the product, which is essential to communicate the endogenous origin of the Azores Pineapple. This challenge is emblematic of the difficulties many companies face when trying to maintain brand integrity and authenticity in a digital environment, as discussed by Katsikeas et al. (2019).

Estufazores' resistance to new technologies also led to additional challenges, such as different opinions about the digital content produced. They often preferred more traditional approaches and were reluctant to adopt the new forms of communication that CH Business Consulting was trying to implement. This aspect highlights the importance of adapting digital communication strategies to the needs and expectations of traditional clients, a point reinforced by Dethine et al. (2020).

In conclusion, the challenges faced by Estufazores in implementing digital marketing strategies highlight the need for a personalised and educational approach. Overcoming resistance to digital, providing ongoing support and adapting communications to the needs and perceptions of traditional businesses are essential steps. This experience shows that digital transformation, while challenging, is crucial to achieving international success, as highlighted by Kvasova et al. (2023) and Katsikeas et al. (2019).

#### 4.6.4. Online presence

Before the project with CH Business Consulting, Estufazores had no online presence, as I1 confirms:

“The company didn't have an online presence, so this project involved creating a website and getting the company on social networks.”

However, faced with this need, the strategy outlined by CH Business Consulting led to the creation of an online presence for the company Estufazores, which supported it in its internationalisation project, as I1 and I2 reported:

“(...) the digital part (...) has also started to make a very important contribution, with publications on social networks that help to publicise differentiation. It has to do with storytelling and also working digitally to develop a business in other markets in a well-constructed way.”

“We have created some tools that can also be considered to help with internationalisation, such as the website and the English-language website. We also created social networks, so we created a set of tools that could be used by the client in its internationalisation strategy.”

In this way, building Estufazores' online presence was a crucial element in the valorisation and promotion of the “Azores Pineapple”, as D2 reports:

“As the company wants to enhance the value of “Azores Pineapple” (...), its approach to foreign markets is to develop (...) website design and new communication tools.”

As explained in D4, CH Business Consulting wanted to provide support in opening up Estufazores to new sales channels, in order to reach different potential customers:

“On the other hand, the company will start using the Online Channel (online shops or Marketplace) to start responding to end customers / families (B2C) with purchasing power, who recognise and pay more for a top-quality product: Estufazores' “Ananás dos Açores Bio”.”

D6 emphasises the importance of investing in a website and the versatility that this tool can have for both the company and the users, especially when it comes to facilitating communication between the two:

“In order to reach different markets, Estufazores needs to invest in a website tool. It is essential for users to be able to contact the company if they so wish.”

“Creation of a website that presents the company, the pineapple and its unique characteristics. In order to realise the desired interaction, pages will be created on the following social networks: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn.”

“Since the company wants to expand and reach international markets, a website presence is essential, since it can now be present in users' lives, wherever and whenever they may be.”

Another communication tool that was needed to culminate in a complete online presence was the creation of social networks for the company, as described in D7:

“A communication tool like social media can never be overlooked when defining a digital strategy, as it is so essential to the digital affirmation of Estufazores as a brand that offers a quality and reliable product. The strategy designed for Estufazores involves the company's presence on three different social networks - Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram.”

Therefore, the CH Business Consulting team made some changes to the existing social network (Facebook) and created two other social networks, as explained in D7:

“With regard to the Facebook page (...), we updated the profile photo, which represents the Estufazores logo, and the cover photo, which refers to the company's product.

The Instagram page created (...) includes a profile photo in line with Estufazores' visual identity.

The LinkedIn page created (...) continues the profile and cover images defined for the other social networks.”

According to D7, the CH Business Consulting team also created a newsletter that allowed Estufazores to keep in frequent contact with its customers and prospects:

“The main aim of creating the newsletter is to establish a regular line of communication of interest to the recipient, in order to build loyalty.

We will therefore be developing three newsletter campaigns, to be sent to the Estufazores database, with content related to: Company history; Pineapple production process; Pineapple benefits and curiosities.”

However, with the creation of an online presence by CH Business Consulting, I3 shows that Estufazores did not follow up on this strategic aspect.:

“We haven't developed. We've done those and we haven't really developed. We should have had a company website ready and we haven't given it much continuity, because it's like I say, we don't need to publicise our product because we don't have it to satisfy.”

Before the project with CH Business Consulting, Estufazores had no online presence. However, recognising the importance of this need, CH Business Consulting devised a strategy that led to the creation of an online presence for Estufazores to support its internationalisation project. The creation of this online presence was crucial for the valorisation and promotion of the “Azores Pineapple”, in line with the views of and Katsikeas et al. (2019) and Kvasova et al. (2023), who highlight the importance of digital marketing to reach new international markets.

CH Business Consulting helped Estufazores to open new sales channels and reach different potential customers. The importance of investing in a website was emphasised, highlighting the versatility of this tool to facilitate communication. It was also necessary to create social networks to complete the online presence. The CH Business Consulting team made changes to the existing Facebook page and created two other social networks, as well as developing a newsletter to enable Estufazores to maintain frequent contact with its customers and potential customers. These initial efforts are in line with the benefits identified by Melandi et al. (2023), who highlight how digital platforms allow for personalised messages and adaptable campaigns in real time.

Despite these efforts, Estufazores has not followed through on this strategic strand and faces significant challenges in creating and maintaining a consistent online presence. Although investments were made to develop a functional website and social media profiles, the continuity and updating of these tools was limited or even interrupted. This scenario reflects the common challenges faced by many SMEs in adopting and sustaining digital strategies, as discussed by Dethine et al. (2020)

In conclusion, Estufazores' experience illustrates the practical challenges and the importance of an ongoing commitment to implementing digital marketing strategies.



Overcoming resistance to digital, providing ongoing support and adapting communications to the needs and perceptions of traditional customers are essential steps to ensuring an effective online presence and achieving international success.

## 4.7. MARKET ADAPTATION

This category is divided into three subcategories: product adaptation, pricing strategy and distribution strategy.

### 4.7.1. Product Adaptation

The adaptation of the product aspect of the marketing mix has been essential for the promotion and promotion of the “Azores Pineapple” and, in particular, the new “Azores Pineapple BIO”.

To this end, I1 emphasises that a strategy has been developed that includes the recognition of the product through logistical adaptations and the creation of new packaging to meet the preferences of international markets and target consumers:

“But the strategy (...) was very much about valorising the product, adapting the logistics, reducing the footprint and also making a package that would highlight the quality of the organic product, a different package.”

“Another thing we tried to adapt, obviously, was according to the products the client had. (...) What we tried to do and what we adapted was: for the foreign market it was indeed organic products, but they are usually exported in boxes of around 4 to 6 pineapples, but then as the target client was different, we developed an individual box for each of the

pineapples so that the client on the other side, in the Gourmet shop, could present the pineapple as a unique, different piece, and then we developed it graphically. And the client also decided to go ahead with it. So we developed a unit box for a single dose, almost for just 1 pineapple, so that it could then be presented as one. (...) It's one thing to sell it by the box, in transport boxes to a supermarket where (...) then you put it on a shelf and there are 6 or 8 pineapples. It's another thing, in a more gourmet shop, to have the product on display in such a way as to attract people, and if they want to take one, to take just one and put it in a little packet. And we tried to do that as well. It was another adaptation we made. Gourmet packaging, more individualised for the customer to start making this approach.”

D4 also highlights the strategy of adding value to the product by creating new packaging:

“The focus is on valorising the product with a suitable image and packaging. The packaging itself will have to be adapted for delivery to valued customers.”

“The packaging itself will have to be adapted for delivery to valued customers.”

However, I2 reveals that the need to create new packaging has not been met:

“One of the things we needed and continue to need, and which they haven't been able to satisfy us with, is a type of packaging suitable for pineapples.”

As mentioned above, one of the needs to adapt the product would be to increase production and storage capacity, as described in D3:

“In the medium term, the company should consider investing to increase its installed production capacity (...) in order to be able to produce by alternating several production cycles.”

“In the medium term, the company should consider integrating cold storage to increase its flexibility in times of overproduction.”

In order to adapt the product to new markets, it was therefore necessary to develop a strategy of differentiation and added value by investing in a different quality of pineapple, as D5 and I1 point out:

“Find a way for consumers to quickly associate Estufaçor's product with the Azores and the distinctive, intrinsic quality of pineapples. Explore “Azores Pineapple” as a value-added product. Investing in “Azores Pineapple BIO” as the most premium product.”

“The company should focus on its most premium product, Azores Pineapple BIO.”

“(…) we realised that it should be the product with the highest value, that organic products with PDO and BIO certification should be exported.”

The adaptation of the product component of the marketing mix was crucial to the enhancement and promotion of 'Ananás dos Açores' and, in particular, the new 'Ananás dos Açores Bio'. The decision to position 'Ananás dos Açores Bio' as a premium product was central to this strategy. Through its strategic approach, CH Business Consulting realised that Estufazores' product needed to be adapted to foreign markets, according to Kotler and Keller (2015) theory.

Therefore, CH Business Consulting developed a product improvement strategy, highlighting the importance of new packaging. However, Estufazores reported that the need to create this new packaging was not fully met, highlighting a common challenge in product adaptation, as identified by Kotler and Keller (2015). Therefore, Estufazores still faces difficulties in obtaining suitable packaging for the pineapple, a crucial factor for the success of the product's marketing-mix strategy.

Another need identified was to increase production and storage capacity, which is essential to support expansion and production flexibility.

In summary, Estufazores' experience demonstrates the importance and challenges of adapting products for international markets. Creating new packaging and increasing production capacity were key elements, but there were barriers to implementation. This case illustrates the complexity of adapting products for new markets, as discussed by Kotler and Keller (2015) and Keegan (2013).

#### 4.7.2. Pricing strategy

The analysis of the pricing strategy for Estufazores focused on the valorisation of the “Azores Pineapple”, especially in the context of foreign markets, as mentioned in D2 and D4:

“The company wants to increase the value of its product, particularly in foreign markets, and intends to invest in a premium product aimed at gourmet / specialised channels.”

“For foreign markets, the company must take care of transport and distribution costs (including taxes) so as not to be surprised in terms of business margin: pricing by target market will have to be done on the basis of the ‘Ex-Works Price’, transport and logistics costs and taxes (e.g. VAT) that will influence the final selling price of the product at the customer (compare with prices on the market for the same type of product).”

This is why the entire communication strategy has been based on this product valorisation strategy, as described in D4.:

“With a new image prepared to communicate with valued customers in the target markets and with an organic product (...), Estufazores intends to increase the value of the product in foreign markets with gourmet shops and customers with purchasing power, so that this is positive in terms of margins, but also helps to increase the value and price of the “Azores Pineapple” that it currently sells.”

The analysis of the pricing strategy for Estufazores focused on the promotion of the “Azores Pineapple”, particularly in the context of foreign markets.

In order to position the “Azores Pineapple” as a premium product in gourmet and specialised channels, CH Business Consulting implemented a pricing strategy that took into account transport, distribution and tax costs, while ensuring adequate profit margins. Pricing was based on the 'ex-factory price' and additional costs, and compared with market prices for similar products, as recommended by Kotler and Keller (2015).

The new product image and the availability of an organic pineapple were central elements in communicating the high value to customers with high purchasing power. This approach helped to increase the price of the current product, an essential strategy for competing in foreign markets where differentiation and quality are valued, as noted by Kotler and Keller (2015).

However, Estufazores also had to deal with price escalation, a common problem when selling internationally, as Kotler and Keller (2015) pointed out. Estufazores' strategy was to minimise costs in order to maintain a competitive price, without sacrificing profit margins.

In addition, the company had to consider transfer pricing, where one unit of the company charges another unit for shipping products to foreign subsidiaries. As noted by Kotler and Keller (2015), setting inappropriate transfer prices can lead to accusations of dumping. To

avoid this, Estufazores adjusted its prices in line with what competitors would charge for similar products.

In summary, CH Business Consulting helped Estufazores to develop a robust pricing strategy in line with best practice. This included taking into account logistical costs, setting competitive prices and communicating high value through a new image and the introduction of “Azores Pineapple BIO”. This strategy enabled Estufazores to position its product as a premium, overcoming pricing challenges in the global market and ensuring adequate profit margins.

#### 4.7.3. Distribution strategy

Analysis of Estufazores' distribution strategy shows that it is essential to develop an efficient logistics solution to ensure that the product reaches its target markets in good condition for consumption, including online sales and direct delivery to the end consumer.

The export success of Estufazores' products depends heavily on the effectiveness of its logistics. As highlighted in D4, the company needs to develop a logistics solution to reach the target markets:

“Estufazores needs to set up a logistics solution to get its products to their destination markets. As such, it needs to find business partners linked to efficient import/export logistics solutions that enable a satisfactory delivery service to professional and end customers (including a home delivery partner in the case of direct online sales to end customers).”

Given the unique characteristics of the Estufazores pineapple, namely its quality and freshness, it is essential that the distribution channels recognise and value the product in

order to preserve it. In this way, and as explained in D4, the distribution channels must be adapted to the product itself:

“Estufazores' distribution channels have to recognise the value of the company's product, namely the “Azores Pineapple” harvested at the best moment of ripeness and sold fresh. Timely distribution is essential for a fruit that is sold fresh and which, under natural conditions, lasts around 20 days.”

To understand how this distribution process could work, logistical tests were carried out. According to I1, logistical tests were carried out to ship the product to Germany:

“And it was also a logistical test (...) where samples were sent to the German market by air, but a different logistical process was also tested, which was to take advantage of the product that was in Portugal because it was already sent here to the big distributors and that was in a warehouse of one of the client's partners (...). One of the partners (...) in Germany was a Portuguese importer who already came here every week with his lorry, so we did the test of (...) leaving the product right where this Portuguese importer in Germany used to take the products, and the pineapple was also taken. In two days, it arrived in Germany, in two or three days.”

However, for I3, the same logistic test did not work as expected:

“The fruit for us to have sent, actually, we sent it to Germany once, but we had problems, because we sent a quantity by post and when it got there, it wasn't in good condition.”

The analysis of the distribution strategy for Estufazores revealed the critical need to develop efficient logistics to ensure that the product reaches the target markets in good condition, including online sales and direct delivery to the end consumer. As Kotler and Keller (2015) mention, it is essential to consider the international distribution strategy to reach the end consumer. CH Business Consulting focused on developing effective export

logistics, recognising that the success of its products depended heavily on logistical efficiency.

For Estufazores, it was crucial to adapt the distribution channels to the unique characteristics of the “Azores Pineapple”, especially in terms of quality and freshness. As such, distribution channels had to be carefully chosen to maintain the integrity of the product during transport, explains (Hill, 2013).

To better understand the distribution process, CH Business Consulting worked with Estufazores to conduct logistical tests, including shipments to Germany. These tests highlighted the importance of a well-structured and agile process to ensure that the product was delivered quickly and in good condition to the target markets. Logistics had to be efficient, especially given the limited shelf life of fresh pineapples.

CH Business Consulting helped Estufazores develop logistics solutions that addressed the specific challenges of transporting perishable products. The logistics tests highlighted the importance of a well-structured process, despite the challenges faced, such as maintaining product quality during transport.

#### 4.8. BRAND STRATEGY

The restructuring of the “Azores Pineapple” brand was a key strategy to position the product as a premium product on the market, especially in foreign markets, as shown in D6:

“In terms of exports, the company should develop a new brand (...) focusing on a more sophisticated image for a more premium product.”



To this end, a proposal was made by CH Business Consulting to develop a new logo to give the Estufazores brand a more premium aspect, as reported by I1 and I3:

“Another approach we took, realising that there was this potential in terms of branding, was to restructure the company logo.”

“We also did the whole international brand image process, so we came up with some ideas (...) for the logo, which then (...) took on a more premium line, where the logo would take on a golden tone to convey that more premium character.”

The proposal for the new Estufazores logo was also presented at D6:

“Our proposal was based on the Estufazores logo. We kept the graphic structure, with the representation of the pineapple above and the naming below, but gave it a new graphic. This new image is now a little bolder and more modern, and the ‘golden’ colour gives the identity a more premium character, thus positioning and enhancing the Estufazores brand.”

The rebranding of Estufazores has involved a process of updating and refining the brand, which is essential in order to position “Azores Pineapple” as a premium product, especially on the international market. The new image, with a bold and modern logo that uses the colour gold to convey exclusivity, was developed to enhance the product and will be used in all the company's digital communications. The aim of the re-branding was not only to improve the aesthetics of the brand, but also to create a strong and recognisable identity that resonates with high-income consumers.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The conclusions and respective contributions of this study are divided into three distinct sections. The initial section is related to the answer to the problem and the research objectives. The second presents the main theoretical and practical contributions of the study. Finally, the third section indicates the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

### 5.1. ANSWER TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The main objective of this research was to explore the role of CH Business Consulting in the development and implementation of Estufazores' internationalisation strategy, in order to provide practical contributions on the role that consultancies play with companies and how they can or cannot make a difference from a strategic point of view. In order to answer this objective, it was divided into specific objectives and a qualitative methodology was applied, using document analysis and four semi-structured interviews.

According to the **first** specific objective, which focused on understanding the motivations that led Estufazores to expand its business internationally, it can be concluded that Estufazores decided to expand its business across borders mainly to take advantage of a measure of the Government of the Autonomous Region of the Azores: "*Vale Exportar Açores*" (Azores Export Voucher).

However, once in the project, the internationalisation of Estufazores, advised by CH Business Consulting, revealed a series of interrelated motivations that underpinned the

company's expansion into foreign markets. The decision to explore international markets was not only a strategic choice, but also a pressing need for the sustainability and growth of the company.

One of the key motivations for Estufazores' internationalisation was to increase the company's margin and profitability. By targeting value-added customers in foreign markets, Estufazores aimed to increase its margins and, consequently, its profitability. This was in line with the strategy of adding value to the product, positioning it as a premium and differentiated item.

Another key motive was to add value to the product and create the conditions for innovation and differentiation. The aim was not only to increase the perceived value of the “Azores Pineapple”, but also to innovate in the presentation and quality of the product, making it more attractive to demanding consumers in international markets.

Market diversification has been key to reducing dependence on the domestic market and increasing the resilience of the business. Exposure to multiple markets reduces the risk associated with regional economic fluctuations, making the company more robust in the face of crises.

The difficulties experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic increased the motivation to expand into new markets. The interruption in sales during the pandemic revealed the vulnerability of relying exclusively on the local market, and encouraged the search for foreign markets as a solution to increase sales and profit margins.

The experience of Estufazores, mediated by CH Business Consulting, illustrates the complexity and importance of internationalisation for SME's. The motivations for internationalisation were diverse, including the search for higher profit margins, product

improvement, market diversification, innovation and overcoming the difficulties caused by the pandemic.

However, despite all these identified motivations, the data collected and the results presented led to the conclusion that the internationalisation project may have encountered some difficulties in its implementation, as Estufazores did not have sufficient production capacity to expand its business. The discourse of the Estufazores employee indicates that these exports were not carried out due to a lack of production, despite the fact that CH Business Consulting had made a diagnosis of the main needs and motivations for Estufazores to expand internationally.

With regard to the **second** specific objective, which was to analyse the strategy associated with the internationalisation plan proposed by CH Business Consulting, it can be concluded that the internationalisation strategy developed by CH Business Consulting for Estufazores, focused on the promotion of “Azores Pineapple”, proved to be an ambitious approach, but one that was full of significant challenges. The attempt to position the pineapple as a premium product in selected markets such as Germany, Switzerland, Italy and mainland Portugal highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses inherent in such a project.

The focus on differentiating the pineapple as a premium gourmet product was one of the highlights of the strategy. Product adaptation, including the introduction of new packaging and the use of the 'Azores Bio' label, was aimed at meeting international consumer preferences and adding value to the product. However, the effectiveness of this adaptation faced practical obstacles, which led to a divergence of opinions, with the CH Business Consulting team stating that they had developed new packaging and the Estufazores employee pointing out that this need for new packaging had not been met. This adaptation

of the product also led to difficulties in developing suitable packaging and limitations in production and storage capacity.

Logistics also proved to be a major challenge. Maintaining the quality of the pineapple during transport and the need for efficient distribution were critical to success. Logistical testing for markets such as Germany showed both progress and problems, highlighting the complexity of ensuring delivery of a fresh and perishable product under ideal conditions. There were also some differences of opinion at this stage. The Estufazores' employee mentioned that the logistics test for Germany had not had a positive outcome.

The branding strategy involved creating a new image and logo to convey a more premium character, as the final step in communicating the brand as something more premium in international markets.

Despite a detailed and sound plan, there were significant barriers to implementation. Internal resistance to change and the need for significant investment in production capacity and storage were obstacles that Estufazores had to overcome.

The pricing strategy, which focused on promoting the "Azores Pineapple" as a premium product, faced challenges in balancing logistics costs and profit margins. The company had to adapt its pricing practices to compete effectively in international markets without compromising profitability.

Estufazores' experience highlights the complexity and challenges of adapting products for international markets. Creating new packaging, increasing production capacity and managing logistics efficiently were the main difficulties associated with the internationalisation strategy. This case illustrates the need for flexibility and resilience when implementing internationalisation strategies, especially for SMEs with limited resources.

In short, Estufazores' internationalisation strategy, although robust and ambitious, faced significant internal and external challenges. The ability to differentiate the product and penetrate premium markets proved to be a complex task, requiring a delicate balance between effective promotion, logistical management and organisational adaptation. This experience underlines the importance of a critical and adaptive approach to internationalisation projects, demonstrating that success requires both a well-designed strategy and a flawless and adaptable execution.

With regard to the **third** specific objective, which was to study the role of digital marketing and communication in the internationalisation plan of Estufazores, it can be concluded that the internationalisation journey of Estufazores, with the support of CH Business Consulting, revealed a complex scenario in which the challenges were intertwined with the opportunities offered by the digital age.

One of the main challenges was internal resistance to digital transformation. Estufazores' management, rooted in a traditional mindset, found it difficult to embrace the new technologies and strategies proposed by the consulting team. This resulted in limited implementation and under-utilisation of the digital tools available.

In addition, obtaining authentic visual content was another significant obstacle. CH Business Consulting struggled to capture and communicate the unique essence of the "Azores Pineapple" due to a lack of its own photographs, relying largely on generic image banks.

The lack of continuity in updating digital platforms also proved detrimental. Although initial investment was made by CH Business Consulting to create a website and social media profiles, the lack of a maintenance strategy threatened the long-term relevance and effectiveness of these channels.

Despite these challenges, Estufazores' digital journey also offered valuable opportunities. The multi-dimensional communication strategy allowed the company to reach different target audiences, both locally and internationally. The effective use of digital platforms facilitated increased brand visibility, interaction with customers and the building of trust, essential elements for global expansion.

But to maximise the potential of digital marketing in internationalisation, it is essential to overcome organisational resistance, invest in training and adopt a long-term approach to managing online platforms. Estufazores' experience highlights the importance of an adaptive communication strategy that is aligned with the company's values and sensitive to the needs of the constantly evolving international market. Only in this way can companies take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the digital age and achieve sustainable success in the global arena.

However, it is possible to see that the efforts and work carried out by CH Business Consulting have resulted in a weak and inconsistent implementation. The Estufazores employee mentioned several times that there has been no internationalisation of any kind, as the company has a huge obstacle - a lack of production.

## 5.2. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This case study highlights the resistance of SMEs to change, growth and, above all, development. The government comes up with measures to help companies grow and revitalise the regions in which they operate, but companies don't take advantage of them. Especially in the context in which this measure was developed (post-COVID), where

companies were going through difficult and precarious periods in terms of their profit margins.

The theoretical and practical contributions of this research are remarkable, offering a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by companies during the internationalisation process, as well as valuable insights into the role of consultancies in this context.

From a theoretical perspective, this research enriches the literature on business internationalisation by highlighting the importance of understanding the motivations behind global expansion. It also provides a detailed analysis of the strategies adopted by CH Business Consulting and their effectiveness in implementing internationalisation plans for companies such as Estufazores. This contributes to the development of more robust theoretical models that take into account not only external factors such as the target market and competition, but also internal challenges such as resistance to change and resource constraints.

This research also emphasizes both the benefits and limitations that can arise when a firm seeks external support for the internationalisation process. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of consultancies in the development and implementation of internationalisation strategies and accentuates the importance of selecting a consultancy that understands not only the technical aspects of global expansion, but also the organisational culture and specific challenges faced by the client company.

In practical terms, this research provides valuable insights for managers and professionals involved in the internationalisation of companies, highlighting the importance of a holistic and adaptive approach. By examining the challenges faced by Estufazores, such as a lack of production capacity and resistance to digital transformation, this research warns of the need



for careful preparation and a flexible approach when developing and implementing internationalisation strategies.

In addition, this research calls attention to the importance of clear and authentic communication, both internally and externally, for successful internationalisation. The Estufazores' case illustrates how a lack of alignment between different stakeholders and a lack of continuity in the implementation of communication strategies can jeopardise global expansion efforts.

But it also raises questions about the limitations of consultancies, especially when it comes to addressing internal challenges such as resistance to change and lack of production capacity. This underlines the need for a holistic approach that takes into account not only the expertise of the consultant, but also the commitment and capacity of the client company to implement the recommendations effectively.

In summary, the theoretical and practical contributions of this research focus on the complexities and challenges associated with the internationalisation of firms and provide valuable insights into the role of consultancies in this process. The research highlights both the benefits and limitations of external assistance and emphasizes the importance of a collaborative and transparent partnership between the firm and the consultant in order to overcome challenges and achieve sustainable success in the global marketplace.

### 5.3. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Concerning the limitations of this research, three aspects stand out. Firstly, only four employees from the two companies were interviewed, which limits the diversity of perspectives and insights into the case studied. It would be enriching to obtain a wider range

of opinions for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of internationalisation. Time is also a significant limitation, as the research was conducted over the course of only one year. A longer study would allow for a more in-depth analysis of the strategies implemented and their results over time. The third limitation lies in the exclusive focus on the specific case under study, without considering other internationalisation experiences involving CH Business Consulting. Investigating a variety of cases with other companies could provide a broader understanding of the role of the consultant in different business contexts.

As a suggestion for future research, it is recommended to include interviews with potential international clients of Estufazores. This would make it possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy outlined by CH Business Consulting from the perspective of the final recipients of the products. In addition, it would be valuable to increase the number of Estufazores employees interviewed in order to obtain a wider range of perceptions and opinions on the internationalisation plan. Finally, it is suggested that a comparative study be carried out, with the help of CH Business Consulting, between different companies wishing to expand internationally. This would provide insights into the relative effectiveness of the internationalisation strategies implemented by the consultant in different business contexts.

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## **APPENDIXES**

### **Appendix 1 - Semi-structured interview script for CH Business Consulting Employees**

- **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to gain insights into the role of CH Business Consulting in developing and executing Estufazores' internationalization strategy. Your input will greatly contribute to my research. Your responses will be kept confidential and used for academic purposes only.

- **Background and Motivations**

1. Can you provide an overview of CH Business Consulting's involvement in Estufazores' internationalization process?
2. What were the primary motivations for Estufazores to expand its business internationally?
3. How did CH Business Consulting identify and assess these motivations?

- **Internationalization Strategy**

4. Can you describe the strategy associated with the internationalization plan proposed by CH Business Consulting?
5. What were the key components of the internationalization plan?

6. How did CH Business Consulting adapt the strategy to suit Estufazores' specific needs and goals?

- **Digital Marketing Strategy**

7. What role did digital marketing and communication play in the internationalization plan of Estufazores?

8. How did CH Business Consulting leverage digital marketing channels to facilitate Estufazores' entry into international markets?

9. Were there any challenges encountered in implementing digital marketing strategies, and if so, how were they addressed?

- **Additional Insights**

10. In your opinion, what were the major challenges faced by Estufazores during the internationalization process?

11. How did CH Business Consulting support Estufazores in overcoming these challenges?

12. Looking back, what would you say were the key success factors in the collaboration between CH Business Consulting and Estufazores?

- **Conclusion**

13. Is there anything else you would like to add or any further comments you have regarding CH Business Consulting's role in Estufazores' internationalization process?

## **Appendix 2 - Semi-structured interview script for Estufazores Employees**

- **Introduction**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to gather insights into Estufazores' internationalization process and the role of CH Business Consulting in facilitating it. Your responses will be used for academic purposes only and kept confidential.

- **Motivations for Internationalization**

1. What were the primary motivations for Estufazores to expand its business internationally?
2. How did the company identify and prioritize potential international markets?
3. What were the key factors considered when selecting CH Business Consulting as a partner for the internationalization process?

- **Collaboration with CH Business Consulting**

4. Can you describe the collaboration between Estufazores and CH Business Consulting during the internationalization process?
5. How did CH Business Consulting contribute to the development and execution of Estufazores' internationalization strategy?
6. Were there any specific challenges or obstacles encountered during the collaboration, and if so, how were they addressed?

- **Digital Marketing Strategy**

7. How significant was the role of digital marketing and communication in Estufazores' internationalization efforts?
8. What digital marketing strategies were implemented to support the company's expansion into international markets and how did it help the company?
9. Did Estufazores face any difficulties in adapting its digital marketing strategies to suit different international markets?

- **Reflection and Lessons Learned**

10. Looking back, what were the key learnings from the internationalization experience?
11. How do you assess the overall impact of CH Business Consulting's involvement in the internationalization process?
12. Are there any recommendations or suggestions you would make for future internationalization initiatives?

- **Conclusion**

Thank you for sharing your insights and experiences. Is there anything else you would like to add or any further comments you have regarding Estufazores' internationalization journey and collaboration with CH Business Consulting?