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**MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR INTERNATIONAL GASTRO-
NOMY IN LOCAL CONTEXTS**

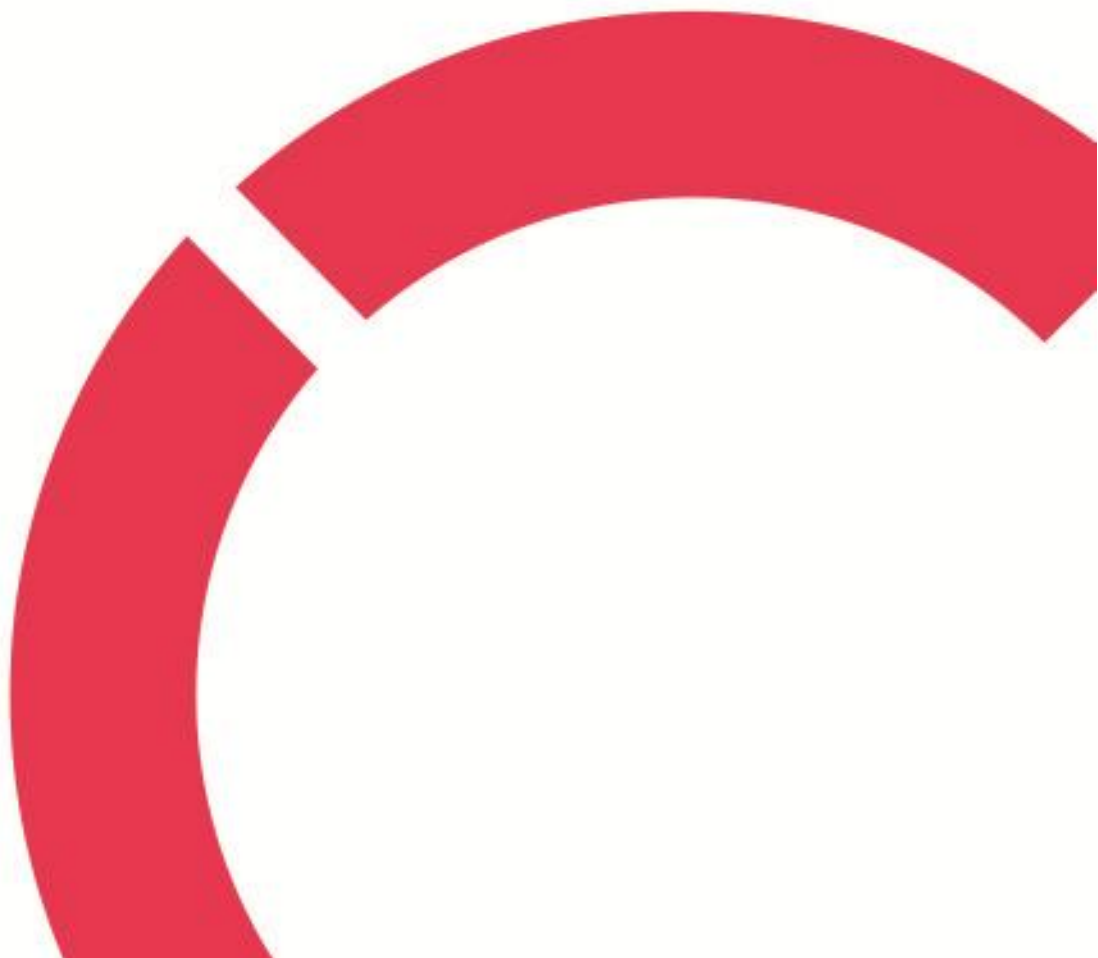
A Marketing Playbook

Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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Name of thesis MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR INTERNATIONAL GASTRONOMY IN LOCAL CONTEXTS A Marketing Playbook		
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The thesis focused on international food businesses seeking to reach an audience different from their own cultural group in Pietarsaari, Finland. This practice-based thesis explored the grounds to promote cultural insights to the local consumers by following a practical playbook, developed for this project's purpose and guiding the business owners to execute marketing actions to boost their awareness among new local audiences. The goal of the thesis project was to create a Micro-Marketing Playbook where international business operators in Pietarsaari follow an easy step-by-step local marketing structure, designed to achieve higher levels of engagement and strengthen their business awareness among local consumers. The theoretical framework of the thesis discussed topics regarding local market understanding of global gastronomical behaviors, preferences, perceptions, and a detailed customer journey of local consumers towards understanding the challenges faced when choosing different products over traditional options. The grounds considered at the time of the elaboration of a two-month marketing playbook given as a tool to local entrepreneurs were explained across the project, emphasizing key aspects of every phase of the customer journey from awareness towards decision, in conjunction with how to address effective communication in every phase. As a result, gastronomic entrepreneurs can strategically market their offerings and simultaneously operate in other areas of business administration.		
Key words Awareness, consumer behaviour, customer journey, cultural adaptation, gastronomy marketing, international gastronomy, local marketing, marketing playbook, marketing strategy, practice-based thesis, small business marketing, SME development		

CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

AWARENESS

Refers to the level of recognition and familiarity that consumers have with a product, service, or brand. In this thesis, the term describes how well local consumers know and identify international gastronomy businesses and their offerings.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Means the way individuals make decisions about choosing, purchasing, and using products or services. In this context, it focuses on how local people decide whether to try unfamiliar international dishes.

CUSTOMER JOURNEY

The path that customers follow from discovering a product or service to making a purchase and becoming loyal users. Here, it is used to understand how local consumers get to know, evaluate, and experience international food options.

CULTURAL ADAPTATION

The process of adjusting marketing actions, communication, or presentation to fit local cultural norms and expectations. It helps international food businesses connect more naturally with new audiences.

GASTRONOMY MARKETING

Refers to marketing focused on the food and restaurant industry to promote culinary products, dining experiences, and the story behind them.

INTERNATIONAL GASTRONOMY

Represents culinary offerings that originate from other countries and are introduced into a new local environment, often bringing cultural diversity and new dining experiences.

LOCAL MARKETING

Means promoting products or services to a specific community or geographic area. For small restaurants, it involves focusing on nearby customers and creating visibility within the local area.

MARKETING PLAYBOOK

A practical framework serving as a guide that includes simple, ready-to-use marketing actions and examples. This thesis refers to the Two-Month Micro-Marketing *Playbook* created to support international food businesses in Pietarsaari.

MARKETING STRATEGY

A planned approach to reaching business goals through marketing activities. It includes identifying target audiences, defining goals, and using actions that create visibility and engagement.

PRACTICE-BASED THESIS

A type of thesis where the main outcome is a practical product or process developed by the student, supported by a theoretical framework and reflective analysis.

SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING

Marketing efforts are created for small enterprises with limited resources, usually focusing on personal interaction, local promotion, and community connections.

SME DEVELOPMENT

Refers to the growth and improvement of small and medium-sized enterprises through innovation, marketing, and adaptation to market needs.

ABSTRACT
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1 INTRODUCTION

In small towns, local businesses tend to underestimate marketing, perhaps under the thought that everyone already knows the local commercial environment. However, international gastronomy firms face a particular challenge; although their target markets are culturally diverse and globally diversified, their promotional strategies often remain limited to their immediate local surroundings. Local businesses may rely mostly on word-of-mouth and social media activities, which are beneficial but limit their growth potential. This is a mismatch between the international scope of their audience and the localized nature of their marketing efforts, hindering their capability to scale effectively in a competitive global yet local market.

This thesis addresses the challenges and barriers when business operators try to gain visibility and market advantage of the offerings by international gastronomy enterprises located in small towns, as the central angle of this field work, beyond discussing the visibility of a firm, furthermore, in the development of the project, exploring the best practices to escalate the level of familiarity with specific cuisines, ingredients, or flavours expected from consumers.

The main objective of this practice-based thesis is the development and evaluation of a Two-Month Micro-Marketing Playbook designed to overcome local market boundaries, specifically in small market contexts. This guide is designed to support international gastronomy business operators to increase their visibility and strengthen their engagement with local audiences. The playbook's purpose is to explore marketing manoeuvres that entrepreneurs can plan, implement, and follow themselves to identify key findings from the guide for the benefit of its further optimization.

A reason to specify this study to be performed in small towns is that every single group of cohorts residing in the town is highly valuable for the entrepreneurs, the issue arises when the communication of firms' core values can be different to the cultural groups, and that will be an aspect to discover in the development of the project.

The theoretical chapters of this thesis aim to explore marketing tactics and other known practices that

suit locally-based firms, analyzing the nuances of international gastronomy and cultural adaptation, and examining the outcomes.

The project will be carried out in collaboration with food businesses operating in Pietarsaari. Each firm will be handed the playbook. The operators were asked to weave recommended marketing actions into their everyday operations. Once the implementation time ends, they will report their observations and outcomes through a questionnaire. In parallel, a separate survey will be sent to consumers probing their perceptions, awareness, and the decision-making pathways they follow when dealing with international food options in the area.

Divided into six chapters, this thesis opens with chapter one, which sets the stage by outlining the topic, its purpose, and the study's objectives. Chapters two and three provide theoretical foundations of marketing strategies adapted to global gastronomy, together with cultural adaptation and consumer behaviour. Chapter four then steps back to give an overview of the project while describing the landscape of the gastronomy market of Pietarsaari. Chapter five dives into how the playbook was crafted, trialled, and fine-tuned. Chapters six and seven analyze the findings and weave together feedback gathered from participating businesses and their customers. Ultimately, chapter eight gathers the conclusions while outlining recommendations for future development.

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR MARKETING IN INTERNATIONAL GASTRONOMY

Global gastronomy requires special attention when it comes to advertising the offerings due to its diverse nature (De Mooij, 2019; Sims, 2009). Understanding how marketing principles can be implemented to maximize local visibility is the purpose of this chapter, which outlines the theoretical foundations that support this practice-based project. Localized strategies, cultural adaptation, community engagement, digital presence, and grounding core values such as authenticity and trust are the main elements for efficiently communicating cultural identity to foreign communities.

2.1 Marketing strategies for small and local gastronomic businesses

Lemoine Quintero et al. (2023) argue that local marketing as a channel potentially benefits ventures' visibility due to the coverage of the area where they operate, making it possible for owners to gather data to discover insights of their audience and, at the same time for the audience to easily find the available offerings and features, boosting businesses progress within the different customer journeys (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Jones & Rowley, 2011). However, the authors examined how content marketing strategy impacts the business value proposition, emphasizing the content towards the local context due to the complex markets rich in cultural beliefs, preferences, and traditions.

Regarding the sizing of ventures, Jones & Rowley (2011) state that marketing in SMEs displays distinct behaviours compared to large firms, as it often merges entrepreneurial orientation, innovation, and customer engagement into its core marketing processes. For this reason, determining the different phases a consumer goes through during the journey in a broad sense, initially at the awareness stage, followed by consideration, purchase, and loyalty, it is essential to consider every stage as an individual, as a centrepiece for the strategy.

Jones & Rowley (2011) affirmed that SMEs' businesses differ in marketing strategies to prioritize, due to the different objectives compared to the available resources to reach their goals, not to mention the differences in target audiences, in addition to complex customer journeys, splitting into other journeys with other barriers, such as competition, prices, advantages, and disadvantages. Nowadays, thanks to technology and the availability of information firsthand, there are methods to spread out the reasons of

becoming a preferred option among consumers by embracing the digital tools that help to strengthen their digital presence (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

2.2 International gastronomy and cultural adaptation

When the context becomes specific, it is necessary to analyze every aspect of the niches, such as industry, sector, place, and the value contributing to the market with the unique offerings; every business is still authentic in its proposition, as Sims (2009) explains. On top of that, Usunier and Lee (2013) affirm that gastronomy is diverse, and cross-border adaptation becomes a key factor in its success. If the adaptation fails, increasing the reach becomes difficult, causing the business to stagnate.

The elements to consider when adapting to international markets in the food sector are selected to be the flavours, textures, costs, and potential food intolerances; that being said, the Finnish consumer tends to value balance, mildness, and familiarity in food. Studies such as Dinh (2013) indicate that Finnish customers show interest in international cuisine but often prefer dishes that maintain harmony in flavour rather than extreme seasoning or spiciness. This suggests that successful adaptation does not mean changing authenticity but communicating it in a way that aligns with local taste preferences and expectations.

Another group to consider is the different local and international consumers, with other preferences, barriers, and behaviours, yet achieving a full reach of the town's population is essential, according to Kotler and Keller (2016), as understanding each phase of the customer journey is key to aligning strategies and tactics to deliver communication effectively and at the appropriate time. De Mooij (2019) supports that it is challenging to align with the communication to fulfil every cultural group's preferences; however, it is still a complete marketing strategy when everybody is targeted accurately from their angles, touch points, and triggers.

2.3 Local marketing and community engagement

Looking at every group's behaviour as a basis to determine the different journeys, Kotler and Keller (2016) explain the stages of the customer journey and how to tailor the strategies to the right audience at the right moment, arguing that it is easy to think that the strategy can be perceived as a formula to

gain new customers, and that is far from being the intention of this thesis. The point in this section is to clarify that understanding to whom the communication is addressed makes it easier to understand what the obstacles are that the target audience faces when moving towards the purchase (Kotler and Keller, 2016; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Awareness, as the first phase of a customer journey according to Kotler and Keller (2016), involves consumers knowing that a business sells a specific type of food, which is not so difficult in small-town contexts. The issue begins when the audience ignores that the proposal is beneficial to the consumer, and there begins the real strategy when finding the menu online, publishing opening hours, or simply showing good photos of the dishes already gives an advantage to those paying keen attention to these details (Jones and Rowley, 2011).

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) add another strategy to increase awareness of the offerings is to attend events where the target audience is located and offer samples complemented by storytelling or attractive presentations. Expanding the visibility of the offerings can be done in many ways, even by offering less preferred products to existing customers or embracing local platforms to gain visibility of the specifications of the businesses.

According to Usunier and Lee (2013), the consideration phase is essential to advance in the journey. This is the part where consumers are aware that there is something they want to try out; the high point of this moment is to defeat the barriers holding their progress. These can be due to high costs, unclear offerings, fear of being disappointed or choosing incorrectly, and allergies. According to Chua et al. (2020), the customer journey in restaurant selection is shaped by psychological and social elements, including convenience, perceived value, and past dining experiences.

To address this consideration, the strategy suggests implementing copywriting techniques in product menus and/or descriptions, emphasizing key values, addressing common barriers, and adapting to international markets, as proposed by Usunier and Lee (2013). On the other hand, Sims (2009) explains that for international gastronomy businesses, attracting their audience must include actions that boost the decision to purchase by reducing uncertainty and conveying trust. Finding similarities between their products and the culture in which they operate can be a wise tactic to finally penetrate the market.

2.4 Local marketing and engagement

Kapferer (2012) defined values, mission, and vision as concepts that every business should state to perform accordingly. Sims (2009) adds that in the food sector, this also gains even more relevance in the context of international companies; otherwise, miscommunication of values affects the trust. Failing to fulfil the mission of promoting cultures sets back market adaptation, and failing to clarify the vision may cause opportunities to go overlooked.

As an engagement method, the principle is to listen to the audience by interacting with them and making it easier for them to be heard (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy, and Pervan, 2018). This way, communication is enhanced and the business's core values are effectively conveyed; indeed, the same audience contributes to developing the concept. This creates a snowball effect: value is transmitted, customers are heard, business grows, and the cycle starts over again, resulting in a strong relationship and a meaningful brand (Kapferer, 2012).

2.5 Digital Presence and Local Visibility

Today, being present digitally is essential to beat the competition, affirmed Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015); even in small towns like Pietarsaari. Digital visibility can be considered a challenge and an opportunity; the difficulties can arise when customers can openly comment and share their thoughts, making public those times when perhaps things did not go as expected. On the other hand, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) support that the overall good reputation becomes public, and the reach that digital channels allow is an excellent opportunity to scale the ventures.

Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015) explained that the use of digital marketing channels by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) directly affects customer relationships. Their study showed that resources are no longer the central issue in developing marketing strategies when entrepreneurs embrace the benefits of digital tools. For local gastronomy businesses, tools like Google Business make it easy to reach local consumers in a few clicks, thanks to the clear information the tool provides about companies (Google, 2024).

The documentation of Google Business (2024) lists the elements that an optimized business profile should contain, for the culinary industry, an ideal profile of any digital platform should contain everything necessary to build trust and engagement, the content involved is the accurate location, images from the place, menu information, costs, opening hours, and all possible information of the consumer's interest. Google Business Profile directly shares these recommendations in its documentation, which is constantly updated to the current trends.

According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), the use of social media platforms for commercial purposes allows businesses to build a strong brand awareness regardless of the industry or sector. Moreover, in the gastronomy sector, businesses can be highly visual and rich in content, making it possible to incorporate social media strategies even with limited resources. Storytelling as a social media strategy, in addition to well-elaborated visuals, is a powerful match. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) suggest that social media marketing allows small businesses to build brand awareness, foster dialogue, and humanize their identity.

To summarize this point, Taiminen and Kirjaluoto (2015) emphasized that a solid digital presence may contain a well-structured digital ecosystem that may include local search optimization, social media presence, strong storytelling, and good content overall. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) explain that these aspects take special importance when they can be considered an extension of the physical business. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) add that digitalization should not be taken as optional; indeed, it is essential to achieve sustainable growth.

2.6 Consumer Trust and Authenticity in Ethnic Food Marketing

According to Lu and Fine (1995), authenticity and trust as values in ethnic or international cuisines can be decisive in standing out from competitors. When local customers take into consideration high levels of these important factors, a meaningful part of deciding to go and consume is done. Lu and Fine (1995) affirmed that the perception of authenticity, particularly in ethnic restaurants, is not a necessary inherent feature but a social accomplishment thanks to the food presentation, flavours, serving, place, concepts, and, once again, storytelling. Authenticity, then, is the consequence co-created with the business and their audiences. As an example, Dinh (2013) proved that Finnish consumers tend to prefer familiar flavours, specifically when trying international cuisine. Therefore, if the menu is descriptive, but unfamiliar dishes are strategically simplified using copywriting techniques, ensuring to keep the

essence of the identity. This overcomes the uncertainty, promoting the emotional and cultural connection, and strengthening confidence (De Mooij, 2019; Usunier and Lee, 2013).

After discussing how authenticity honours ethnical and cultural identity in gastronomy, Sims (2009) agrees on the authenticity as an identity enhancement when explaining that indeed consumers often seek experiences that make them feel genuine while offering a glimpse into the roots of specific cultures, more importantly, still recognizing shades of consumers' own contexts. Clarifying a key point, the theories discussed do not imply changes to recipes, concepts, or any actions that could compromise global heritage; the suggestion by Usunier and Lee (2013) is to transcreate the culture with the help of local marketing strategies focused on local consumers' expectations.

Furthermore, Usunier and Lee (2013) affirm that consistency and transparency always benefit and strengthen the trust, logically, this refers directly to the complete information of ingredients, flavour scales signalization, and adjusted to the tastes of the local market, complemented by insightful storytelling about the dishes or products. The level of transparency should always aim to reduce any perceived fear or risk, so customers feel ready to come back and try another dish.

Sims (2009) emphasized that customer trust and authenticity are fundamental pillars of international gastronomy marketing, as they enable other elements to support cultural exchange between businesses and consumers, reinforcing loyalty and cultural promotion.

To conclude the bases of marketing strategies tailored to international gastronomy, Taiminen and Kirjaluoto (2015) support elaborating a complete strategy where the main aspects to point out are the trust and the authenticity of the business concept, those are the starting point dividing into offline and digital visibility manoeuvres by organically developing and optimizing a market adjusted branding, tone of voice, concept, offerings and above all core values, to finally transfer them to a solid digital ecosystem (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

3 CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN FOOD MARKETING

Conveying authenticity and trust can be challenging across cultures, particularly in multicultural, multilingual settings, as Sims (2009) explains. As the cornerstone of effective communication, this chapter explores a theoretical framework in cross-cultural communication, emphasizing how cultural dimensions affect consumer perceptions, engagement, and acceptance, i.e., the audience's response to international gastronomy ventures' offerings (Sims, 2009; De Mooij, 2019).

3.1 Understanding Cultural Dimensions in Customer Perception

In international gastronomy, food becomes a communication bridge between cultures, according to Sims (2009). In local contexts, when audiences encounter intercultural hubs, they find it easier to understand each other's traditions. Emphasizing the identity of values through the offerings plays a fundamental role in international food marketing.

According to Hofstede (2011), cultural dimensions like uncertainty avoidance, in addition to individualism, directly impact how messages are conveyed and received across societies; in Finland's case, consumers often prioritize values as clarity, modesty, and practicality, which is why straightforward marketing based on clarity in messaging, clean visuals, and insightful content is more effective than heavy or overcharged communication (Hofstede Insights, 2024). In contrast, subjectivity, abstract visuals, and over-emotional language can be perceived as overreaction or even exaggeration; therefore, it is recommended to maintain transparency and authenticity while simultaneously highlighting the good storytelling behind every dish (Sims, 2009; Fog, Budtz, & Yakaboylu, 2005).

Cross-cultural marketing brings interesting theories regarding local environments to the table. Usunier and Lee (2013) suggest that instead of translating concepts, lean towards transcreation. The intention is to adapt the communication through messages that evoke the same emotion while also responding to the local market. De Mooij (2019) agrees that to succeed in the transcreation process, it is essential to adapt a product to simple descriptions or even to create organic labels that resonate with both the offerings' roots and consumers' expectations.

The goal is far from diluting cultural identities; as clarified by Usunier and Lee (2013), the perspective is to consider communication elements to adjust them so that other cultures can better understand each

other's traditions. Non-verbal communication elements such as color, fonts, and other visuals are an excellent way to showcase a brand's values. Furthermore, Hofstede Insights (2024) illustrates that the Finnish population values nature, natural tones and looks, authenticity, tending towards a minimalistic style where real images of a product are preferred over highly edited versions of images.

3.2 Listening to a cross-cultural audience

According to Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy, and Pervan (2018) every aspect of belief, such as opinions, thoughts, suggestions, and criticisms, is of interest to business operators, due to the meaningful insight they offer in support of business development. In this sense, the channels to use to collect the voices of a cross-cultural audience are key to understanding the message they wish to transmit. Some cultures are more sensitive than others when leaving feedback; however, every single opinion or comment is a golden opportunity for improvement. To provide an example of this scenario, like a negative opinion of a Mexican over a fajitas dish in a Mexican restaurant in Pietarsaari, complaining about how the dish did not meet the expectations due to its mildness in taste, and to the same dish another customer from a different cultural background who also leaves a negative opinion due to the high level of spiciness. The solution of the problem may be in the kitchen, but its root comes from a marketing perspective, and this practical project aims to solve it with copywriting techniques directly working out the adjustment to an international audience (Usunier and Lee, 2013).

Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy, and Pervan (2018) defend that to achieve effective cross-cultural communication, the feedback should be bidirectional, which is listening to the audience beyond the words, understanding their feelings about the experience they had with the concept, and the adaptation the operators can implement after getting those insights as an answer to the feedback. For this reason, the communication must be continuous, as Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy, and Pervan (2018) emphasized, “listening to consumers is essential to understanding perceptions, correcting misconceptions, and improving brand positioning.” To avoid cultural mismatches, it is necessary to consider communication as a tool to face the gaps. In multicultural environments, what is much for one person might not be enough for others; this is a natural consequence of the diversity of experiences, preferences, and backgrounds.

3.3 Cultural Sensitivity and Ethical Communication in Marketing

Cross-cultural marketing requires a high level of ethics, responsibility, and respect towards cultural values; De Mooij (2019) goes beyond the core values of a multicultural organization. This chapter discusses all the angles of effective communication in international gastronomy ventures, including the features and challenges; however, considering ethics while planning strategies is essential to preserving the integrity of all parties involved in the messaging process.

About cultural sensitivity, De Mooij (2019) argues that it can be compromised when ethical communication is overlooked, leading to stereotypes, misrepresentations, and inappropriate behaviour that alienate potential audiences. De Mooij (2019) explained that considering cultural sensitivity in marketing is far from avoiding cultural identity; it resonates more with the respect and certainty of the facts that support the facts behind the history of heritage. Ensuring objectivity in elements such as food, language, or symbols is an ethical communication practice, avoiding their use just to fit in. In international gastronomy businesses, ethical communication should be part of the values if the goal is authenticity and trustworthiness.

Within the gastronomy marketing, communication transcends a mere business instrument; it functions as a cultural showcase. De Mooij (2019) comments that the slogans, all visual and phrases employed to promote an international cuisine, bring along a fragment of a nation's DNA. Consequently, cultural sensitivity is indispensable to ensuring that promotional tactics honour the food's origins while remaining approachable and resonant with audiences. Ethical communication, then, is not a box-checking exercise for standards or a showcase of transparency; it is an act of responsibility and a commitment to depict culture honestly with respect and, in an inclusive way. De Mooij (2019) argues that cultural sensitivity in marketing means tuning into how values, beliefs and social norms steer the way messages land in societies.

Moreover, Jamal (2003) suggests that the marketing context requires a balance between authenticity and roots while embracing inclusivity. According to Sims (2009), firms should steer clear of exoticizing or othering their cuisine by presenting it as odd or foreign and instead frame it as an invitation to cultural exchange. Interestingly, this approach lets consumers forge connections driven by emotion and curiosity, sidestepping any sense of distance or unfamiliarity. These modest gestures position international food enterprises as integral, responsible members of the community rather than distant outsiders (Sims, 2009).

Regarding the palette you choose to work in, the visuals you display need to echo the essence of the cuisine while also aligning with the visual tastes of the local crowd, said Jamal (2003). In Finland, for instance, people tend to appreciate design, earthy hues, and a spare minimalist look; those are signals that convey honesty and quality (Hofstede Insights, 2024; De Mooij, 2019). Singh and Pereira (2005) support that when companies blend those design principles with cultural details, such as symbols or patterns rooted in the cuisine's origins, they can convey their identity in a way that feels both respectful and relatable.

De Mooij (2019) affirms that for international gastronomy ventures, ethical communication is more than a best practice; it is a clear strategic edge. By unveiling their products with honesty, attentive sensitivity and heartfelt care they can nurture lasting trust among local audiences and serve as cultural-diversity ambassadors, within their own communities (De Mooij, 2019; Sims, 2009; Jamal, 2003).

3.4 Storytelling as a bridge between cultures

According to Fog, Budtz, and Yakaboylu (2005) storytelling can be a powerful tool to communicate interesting stories that support the roots and grounds of the products; they can be entertaining, educational, or emotional. Therefore, storytelling impacts audience and customer connection. Cultural identity is the core behind storytelling. In multicultural contexts, the purpose is to convey traditions and heritage that consumers demand when visiting a restaurant.

Fog, Budtz, and Yakaboylu (2005) suggest that helping customers to understand the origins and features of a culture contributes to practicing and developing core values, even strengthening authenticity, especially when curiosity is involved. Fog, Budtz, and Yakaboylu (2005) support storytelling as a powerful tool, thanks to its impact on cultural identity and values. They emphasize that rational explanation is not as moving as storytelling.

Fog, Budtz, and Yakaboylu (2005) affirm that storytelling can highlight emotional elements of culture and traditions if it is conveyed ethically, as a reflection of this, a good way to address the fears and challenges of the target audience. This can be a wise way to convey trust and authenticity if the focus is on moments and flavours, while evoking familiarity with the offerings that become remarkable.

According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), creativity is essential to draw the different perspectives on how this way of communication can be done, but it can be present in several formats, as an experience while consuming, as a visual content, or in curious facts, slogans, recipes, and the storytelling of endless opportunities. The focus is always on building trust and enhancing authenticity.

The suggestion that storytelling should always be part of the strategy is supported by Fog, Budtz, and Yakaboylu (2005), besides the powerful impact on the business's core values and culture promotion, it is due to how it benefits customer engagement while being inclusive towards an international audience. Fog, Budtz, and Yakaboylu (2005) also argue that the different narratives considered to build a good story in international gastronomy contexts must convey transparency and sincerity to be genuine, the authors suggest. Sims (2009) adds that transparency and sincerity aspects strengthen the perception of authenticity, which is key in cross-cultural environments.

3.5 Summary of theoretical insights

This theoretical framework examines how international food businesses in small towns can effectively build a strong presence and gain a meaningful market share despite the challenges inherent to these businesses. It discussed why the sole factor of the high quality of their offerings is not enough to reach new audiences. Furthermore, the emphasis on communicating efficiently to different groups can be the shortcut to success if it is complemented by diverse marketing channels and platforms, after understanding the phases where an individual walks towards choosing their products (Kotler and Keller, 2016; De Mooij, 2019).

Customer behaviour can be segmented to improve the overall business operations strategy. These key points were considered to establish the foundation of the playbook, designed to test the performance of all statements and hypotheses that arise during the development of this study, in a practical, easy, and simple way, to contribute to the food industry (Jones and Rowley, 2011).

4 PROJECT OVERVIEW

This chapter outlines the implementation terms of the marketing playbook designed for business owners in international gastronomy in Pietarsaari, to guide them in identifying cultural and communicative barriers among diverse local audiences and, to communicate their products accurately at the ideal moment. Furthermore, the playbook can also be implemented in other locations that meet the same criteria, a global or ethnic gastronomy in small or medium-sized towns.

Pietarsaari, also called Jakobstad among Swedish speakers, is the study site; it is a bilingual town on the western coast of Finland, known for its strong local identity and multicultural community (City of Pietarsaari, 2024). The town has approximately 19.000 residents, mostly speaking Swedish and Finnish, where both are official languages and commonly used, which makes possible a contrast in communication, commerce, and consumer behaviour.

The size of the city and its genuine sense of community make Pietarsaari an ideal testing field for a local micro-marketing strategy. In smaller markets, word-of-mouth and reputation remain influential factors in consumer decision-making. However, limited foot traffic and dependence on regular customers can restrict growth. For this reason, implementing simple and low-cost marketing tactics, such as those included in the playbook, provides valuable insights into how these methods perform in a real local context.

The main instrument to put this project into practice is a marketing playbook designed for this thesis purpose; with local-international businesses from Jakobstad, where they are collaborators from different types of offerings, such as a restaurant, a mini-market, and a food truck. The aim is to overcome barriers and enhance cultural understanding among diverse audiences in Pietarsaari by implementing targeted local marketing strategies, both online and offline.

The playbook is tailored to small and medium-sized businesses with international culinary products that operate in small towns, including restaurants, café or markets with international offerings. The target audience is local consumers aged 18+. An essential aim of this project is to encourage the business operators to focus on highlighting their offerings to expand their reach to existing and new customers.

In conclusion, the city of Jakobstad offers an appropriate ground and scenario to set this project thanks to its size in population, diversity of cultures, bilingual characteristics and openness to cross-border traditions, which reflects challenges that other towns with similar set-ups might face, making this project ideal to analyze the potential of local marketing strategies focused on international gastronomy businesses.

5 PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter presents the outline of the practical phase as a practice-based project, in which the marketing playbook developed as a central instrument for this project was tested in real business environments. The implementation objectives were to implement digital marketing strategies and offline marketing tactics in line with best practices in the field. The two-month marketing playbook included a specific action, an illustrative explanation of how to start by setting a baseline and clear short-term objectives, material support for platform documentation, and, lastly, a checklist for tracking progress.

5.1 Development of the two-month micro marketing playbook

A marketing playbook was designed to cover the main aspects of visibility enhancers, providing business operators with a list of tools and instructions to implement the actions themselves. The strategies are hybrid, combining digital and offline marketing to reach new audiences and increase visibility for their key products.

Business owners were first invited to participate in the project by email, with an explanation of the project's objectives, the benefits they could derive, and the approximate time required to implement the strategies. They were also informed that the management insights and access to any platform were not needed for this. At this point, they did not have access to the playbook, which was sent to those committed to participating.

The playbook in question was elaborated in two months, while building a clear idea of how to achieve a structured approach to follow. The idea was to tailor an insightful guide for busy business operators who were missing easy-to-find opportunities to grow and strengthen their baseline. The time to test the playbook and gather the outcomes was from September 2025 to November 2025.

Complementary to the project, two questionnaires were prepared to gather data: one for firm operators on the playbook's results, and the other for consumers aged 18+ in Pietarsaari to obtain precise, specific data on their perceptions and behaviour towards local gastronomy commerce. The development has been written in Word, the marketing playbook was designed in Gamma, and the surveys were prepared in Webropol.

5.2 Challenges, observations, and adjustments during the process

It was observed that there is a high resistance to diving into more complex marketing perspectives. During the waiting period after business owners were invited to collaborate, it took longer than expected to receive responses. Still, only a few of them accepted to participate, making this the first of the challenges. Finding collaboration from business owners, even when they accept, can be difficult, since they are usually overloaded with the responsibility of the administrative tasks of their business operations.

A perspective discussed during the development of this project is that business operators of international gastronomy businesses in smaller contexts may underestimate local marketing efforts. It was found during the practice that even when they accepted the collaboration after explaining the objectives of the practice, they did not put the playbook into practice, and they never responded to the survey designed for them.

They were contacted up to 3 times to kindly answer the questions, and to thank them for their collaboration, they were going to receive the outcomes of the consumer survey where their business was mentioned, and where they would find useful data for their business. Despite all the contact efforts, no answer was received by the deadline given to them.

6 THE TWO-MONTH MICRO MARKETING PLAYBOOK

This chapter presents the Two-Month Micro-Marketing Playbook as the practical instrument created to put into practice in this thesis project. The objective of the playbook in question is to provide actionable guidelines of key marketing steps for small international gastronomy businesses operating in Pietarsaari, resonating with Jones and Rowley (2011), mentioning the market adaptability to the strategies. As a main purpose, the angle is demonstrating the simplicity but accurate localized marketing strategy in the gastronomic sector, specifically with an international scope to identify important aspects of their customers’ journey, awareness levels, engagement, and loyalty, regardless of limited resources or deep or specialized knowledge in marketing.

International gastronomy businesses operating in Finland, Dinh (2013), specifically in small towns like Pietarsaari, might face challenges in expanding their customer base while heavily relying on word-of-mouth. For this reason, the Two-month Micro-Marketing Playbook was designed to help them reach new audiences within the local community. The starting point was to identify the offerings to highlight in order to establish clear objectives, as seen in Figure 1. It was easy to notice the issue in this sector since it was found difficult to understand these businesses' offerings or even get accurate insights about their way of operating, such as communication ways, opening hours, confusing product information tags, and together with discussions held among other residents.

Playbook Overview: Goal & Approach

This playbook aims to increase awareness and trial of lesser-known international dishes and products within your local food business in Pietarsaari. We'll achieve this through simple in-store actions and light digital amplification over approximately eight weeks.

Goal Increase awareness and trial of unique international dishes.	Duration Approximately 8 weeks.	Control You retain full control; no access to your systems needed.
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FIGURE 1. Playbook Overview: Goal & Approach

6.1 Structure of the Playbook

The framework of the playbook is divided into three important phases, each with a purpose. Phase one focuses on understanding the current situation of firms in terms of sales, customer relationships, audience awareness levels, and engagement, to set short and medium-term goals by identifying offerings and aspects to highlight over the next two months. Phase two illustrates the execution in a step-by-step setup, and lastly, phase three includes collecting and analyzing the results to find key data to optimize the strategy and continue with the execution. This way, the loop continues until engagement is enhanced and new audiences are conquered.

The importance of phase one is to understand the current flaws wisely by determining the most profitable offerings that are least popular among clients or unknown in the community. This is supported by Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015) when illustrating the importance of setting a clear starting point to set appropriate SMART goals. Business operators were instructed to measure their current baseline and record the data they consider relevant, such as average order value, least popular offerings, social media engagement, and any other important metric, ensuring clarity on the actionable phase as instructed on Figure 2. Moreover, businesses were instructed to use some tools and platforms to collect key data, for instance, QR code tools to collect customers' feedback and facilitate the conduction of the questionnaire. Business operators were advised to focus on two or three products or dishes that best represented their brand authenticity and cultural heritage to start with, and tagging or labelling the most important facts of those offerings, or by briefly storytelling about their origin, which could be done physically in the establishment or simply shared on social media. The storytelling was listed as a meaningful strategy emphasized by Sims (2009), therefore, as a key strategy in the Playbook, given that it is an authentic action evoking emotions and potentially engaging the public. In phase one, businesses were also advised to be observant and aware of their customers' behaviours and reactions towards their offerings while maintaining a friendly and open approach to strengthen communications and therefore engagement.

Step 0: Baseline & Focus Items

Step 0: Baseline Data

Before starting, record key baseline data to measure your progress, if possible compare to the previous year and the current season. This includes weekly customer counts, sales figures for your focus items, current reviews, social media followers, and your busiest hours. This initial snapshot will help you quantify the impact of your micro-marketing efforts.

Step 1: Choose Focus Items

Select 2-3 lesser-known dishes or products that you want to highlight. Prioritize items that are tasty, offer consistent quality, and are easy for customers to sample. These will be the stars of your micro-marketing campaign.

FIGURE 2. Baseline & Focus Items

The second phase encouraged businesses to strategically offer samples of their offerings on occasions they considered the most appropriate, in addition to including cultural facts by the use of creative story cards and ensuring that the staff conveys a friendly attitude while observing consumers' reactions, as seen in Figures 3 and 4. According to the questionnaire conducted among local consumers in Pietarsaari (2025); however, ideas were given such as local events, at their own establishments, or throughout special offers. Importantly, they had to previously market the happenings of tasting sessions on social platforms and spread the word-of-mouth with the help of their customer base; the idea was not to digitalize the communications but complement it in a hybrid way, both offline and online. Moreover, Chua et.al (2020) argue that experiential marketing activities, like the tasting session, have a positive impact on consumer perceptions. For this reason, holding micro tasting sessions is to reduce the uncertainty of local consumers, as this is proven from the questionnaire conducted during this practice-based thesis, to be a barrier when trying new things among Finnish consumers, in this case, the residents of Pietarsaari, while giving more exposure to the lesser-known products.

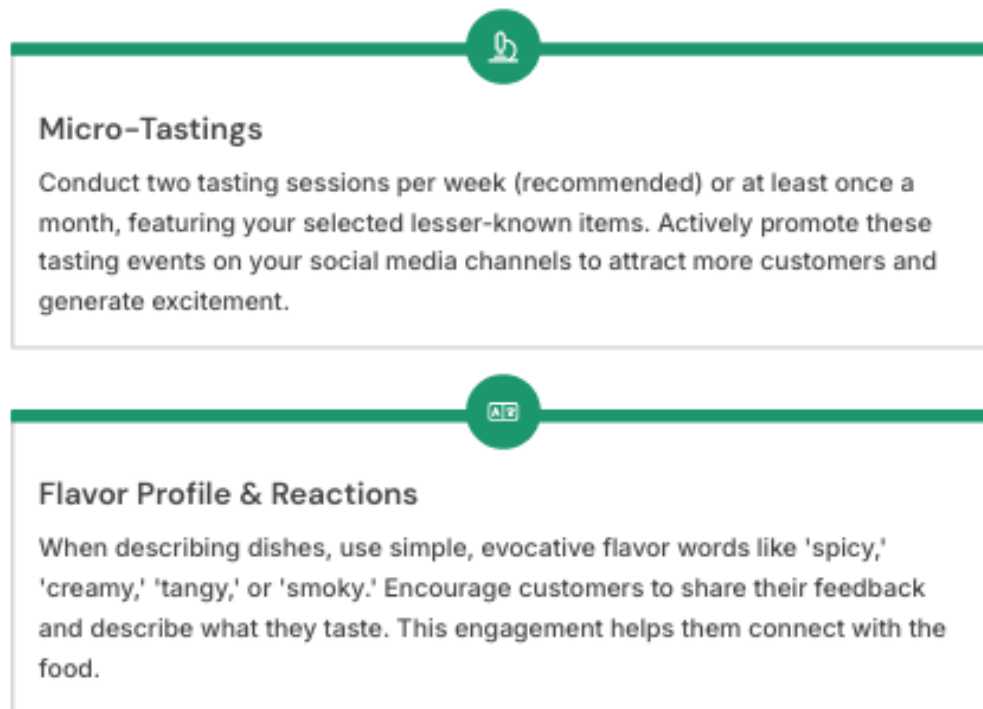


FIGURE 3. Micro-Tastings, Flavor Profile & Reactions

Step 4: Story Card

Create small, printed story cards for each focus item. These cards should include details about the dish's origin, its flavor profile, suggestions on how to best enjoy it, and any allergen information. Include a QR code linking to a quick survey for customer feedback.



Step 5: Staff Script

Equip your staff with a friendly invitation script. For example: "Would you like to try this? It's a sweet-and-sour chicken." Encourage them to ask for immediate feedback after customers try the sample. This personal touch enhances the customer experience.



FIGURE 4. Story Card & Staff Script

Parallel to offline actions, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) agree that digital visibility should be emphasized, being a field to explore, test, and exploit. Participants were encouraged to optimize their visibility in the Google Business platform to enhance their digital visibility. Thanks to this tool, local

consumers can get important information in several formats, like the restaurant's menus, where operators were simultaneously invited and guided to implement copywriting with the help of artificial intelligence, if necessary, on the descriptions of their offerings, with no additional costs, as they have the chance to visually showcase how their dishes look.

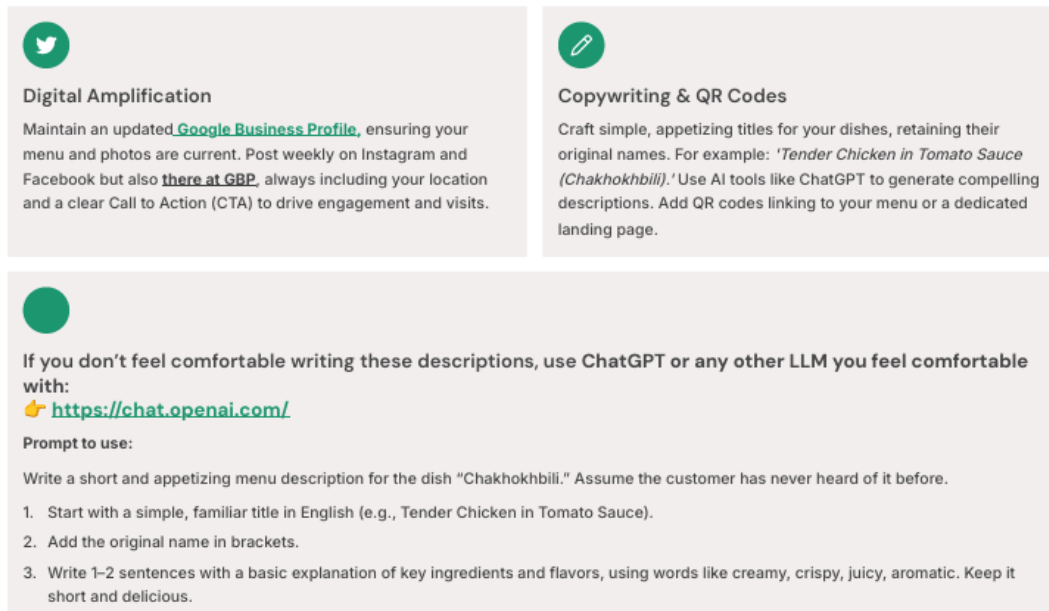


Figure 5. Digital Amplification, Copywriting & QR Codes

Moreover, to align the strategy businesses should transcreate business concepts as Usunier and Lee (2013) defined, some call-to-actions like “Discover this flavour” or “Test and enjoy (...)” were provided to stimulate curiosity among consumers, additionally finding collaboration with local social media accounts like Visit Jakobstad Pietarsaari, Jakobstad Pietarsaari Region, or Kultur Kultturi, by requesting them to reshare their posts, as illustrated in Figure 6, thanks to the local culture of supporting local businesses. This way, the strategy gets more consistency among the community, expanding the visibility of businesses and their offerings. Furthermore, the most important element is setting a difference in what has been done as marketing, upgrading the strategy to gain visibility and convey proposals beyond the business name or the daily menu. At this stage, the firms are highlighting their brand authenticity throughout techniques of storytelling about their least known offerings.



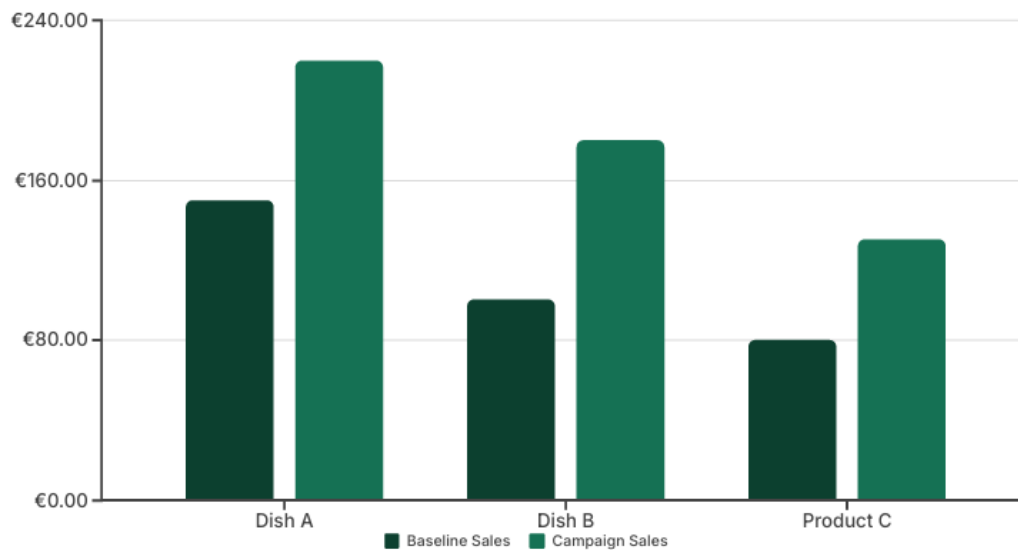
FIGURE 6. Menu Highlights & Buddy Boost

At this stage, it is essential to consider that part of the audience in the tasting sessions tried perhaps for first time the selected dishes or products, consequently, firms should share through diverse and accurate channels in conjunction with copywriting techniques tailored to increase curiosity among local consumers and finalizing with intriguing call-to-actions to accelerate current and new consumers decision to finally go and take the firms hidden offerings.

To wrap up the first test of the playbook, participants were asked to focus and reflect on the results by evaluating the outcomes since phase one, evaluating since the beginning of the process when selecting the offerings and possibilities to extend the execution for a couple of months or deciding of starting over other offerings as shown in Figure 7. At some point of the communications with operators they were advised to take into account the variations of the season demands, for instance, comparing the two months against the same two-months period of the previous year, in fact as a utilized example was illustrated the contrast of the commerce in December and January, to avoid misleading of insights. Operators were encouraged to provide feedback about the clarity of instructions to also develop the strategy further and make it possible for other international sectors in town to participate and support more businesses to finally contribute to the commerce growth of the community of Pietarsaari.

Step 12: Results Summary

After the two-month campaign, compile a comprehensive results summary. This report should detail which items were featured, the observed changes in sales for those items, overall customer reactions, any shifts in digital engagement (reviews, followers), and key lessons learned throughout the process.



This chart illustrates potential sales increases for featured items, demonstrating the impact of the micro-marketing playbook.

FIGURE 7. Results Summary

6.2 Key takeaways

The aim of the Two-Month Marketing Playbook was to obtain results to demonstrate that minimal, yet relevant marketing actions can generate significant changes in the level of awareness of hidden offerings among consumers. The Playbook intends to highlight a low-cost and effective method to increase businesses' customer base and therefore, sales while honouring their cultural heritage. The purpose of these small-scale actions had been planned beyond the firm's market presence; in fact, the objective was to strengthen their marketing communications and elevate business owners' awareness of the importance of well-planned and structured localized strategies, as summarized in Figure 8, even when resources are limited. The core of the structure aligns with Jones and Rowley's (2011) observation about the combination of entrepreneurial creativity focused on local market demands and customers' preferences.

Key Takeaways & Next Steps

Engage & Educate

Micro-tastings and story cards are powerful tools for customer engagement and education about new dishes.

Amplify Digitally

Consistent social media presence and an updated Google Business Profile are crucial for reaching a wider audience.

Measure & Adapt

Regular logging and customer surveys provide valuable data to refine your strategy and identify successful items.

By implementing this playbook, your local international food business can effectively introduce new flavors to Pietarsaari, fostering a more diverse and engaged customer base.



FIGURE 8. Key Takeaways & Next Steps

To reflect the conclusions of Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015), about SMEs achieving market advantages by complementing powerful marketing strategies with digital tools, the Playbook was designed to be easily executed with no major costs and short-term investment, while still pursuing consistency over time. Taking over consistency as a key aspect of the strategy suggested and resonated with Hofstede's (2011) regarding cultural dimensions like reliability, modesty and straightforward communication to work out the uncertainty. Another angle to mention is the authenticity conveyed through the tasting sessions and storytelling, as Sims (2009) emphasized, in the gastronomy sector, the authenticity of food experience allows consumers the opportunity to connect emotionally with both place and culture. Business operators were given an implementation checklist, shown in Figure 9, to facilitate the follow-up of the structure.

Implementation Checklist

Preparation ☐ Record baseline data (sales, followers, reviews) ☐ Select 2-3 focus dishes/products ☐ Create story cards with QR codes ☐ Train staff with friendly script
Weekly Execution ☐ Conduct 2 tasting sessions per week ☐ Post weekly content on social media ☐ Update Google Business Profile ☐ Log metrics weekly ☐ Collect survey responses
Optimization ☐ Highlight focus items on menu/shelves ☐ Add descriptive flavor tags ☐ Perform "buddy boost" with local business ☐ Monitor digital engagement
Wrap-up ☐ Compile results summary ☐ Analyze changes in sales ☐ Document lessons learned ☐ Plan next steps

FIGURE 9. Implementation Checklist

In conclusion, the Two-Month Micro-Marketing Playbook intends to reflect both local market and international gastronomic businesses' demands by providing an adapted framework focused on empowering international gastronomy operators and their autonomy of executing meaningful plans to outstand their offerings and cultures with the help of different channels including digital platforms; as noted by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), explaining the effectiveness of interacting with customers in the digital scope while fostering the authenticity of communications and the brand recognition. The playbook is meant to be simple to follow, execute, and conclude under the principle of providing relevant and simple tactics to perform in the entrepreneurial and consumer benefit, even in small contexts, to reach the maximum potential of success in markets with a diversity of cultures.

7 EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the theoretical foundations and connect them to the empirical key findings gathered from the consumers' survey and the observations made throughout the implementation process to reflect responses to the statements and hypotheses about how the current marketing of international gastronomy businesses established at the beginning of the process, in contrast to the local marketing strategies proposed on the marketing playbook here discussed.

7.1 Summary of key findings

Before key findings are analyzed, it is important to summarize the main features of the project. The consumer survey was conducted among 21 residents from Pietarsaari, between 26 and 56+ years old, mainly females (62%), who provided important information about their consumer behaviour, awareness levels, and perceptions of the local ethnic and international gastronomy. The results have confirmed that the levels of business awareness are high, in contrast to their offerings, which remain limited. Most respondents answered that they discover restaurants by word-of-mouth or simply passing, placing as secondary roles digital platforms like Google Maps or social media, as shown in Figure 10. This preference matches a previous study about small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that may often rely on informal marketing or non-strategical approaches, underestimating structured digital marketing practices (Jones & Rowley, 2011; Taiminen & Karkaluoto, 2015). Moreover, the awareness about the offerings gained special attention of consumers using digital platforms when they responded to the possible reasons preventing them from trying new international food are aspects increasing the uncertainty avoidance, which is highly scaled in Finnish societies according to The Culture Factor Group tool, while evaluating Hofstede's Dimensions.

How do you usually find new restaurants to visit? (Select up to 3)

Vastaajien määrä: 21 , valittujen vastausten lukumäärä: 44

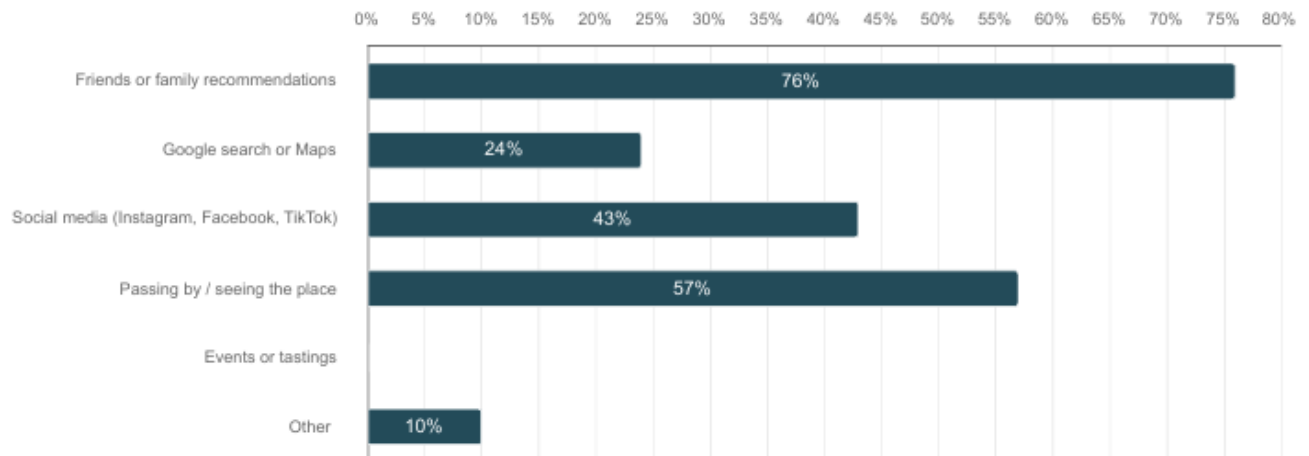


FIGURE 10. Consumers' Survey, Finding New Restaurants

Furthermore, an important share of respondents admitted to avoiding certain cuisines from an international approach when they are unsure what is offered or what to expect, as seen in Figure 11. This finding resonates with Dinh (2013), who found that Finnish consumers prefer mild, familiar flavours and often hesitate to experiment with unfamiliar dishes due to uncertainty about ingredients or taste. Therefore, the results reinforce how important it is to address clear communication, neat visual presentation, and meaningful storytelling as an essential marketing tactic for the gastronomy sector.

What usually prevents you from trying new international foods? (Select all that apply)

Vastaajien määrä: 21 , valittujen vastausten lukumäärä: 40

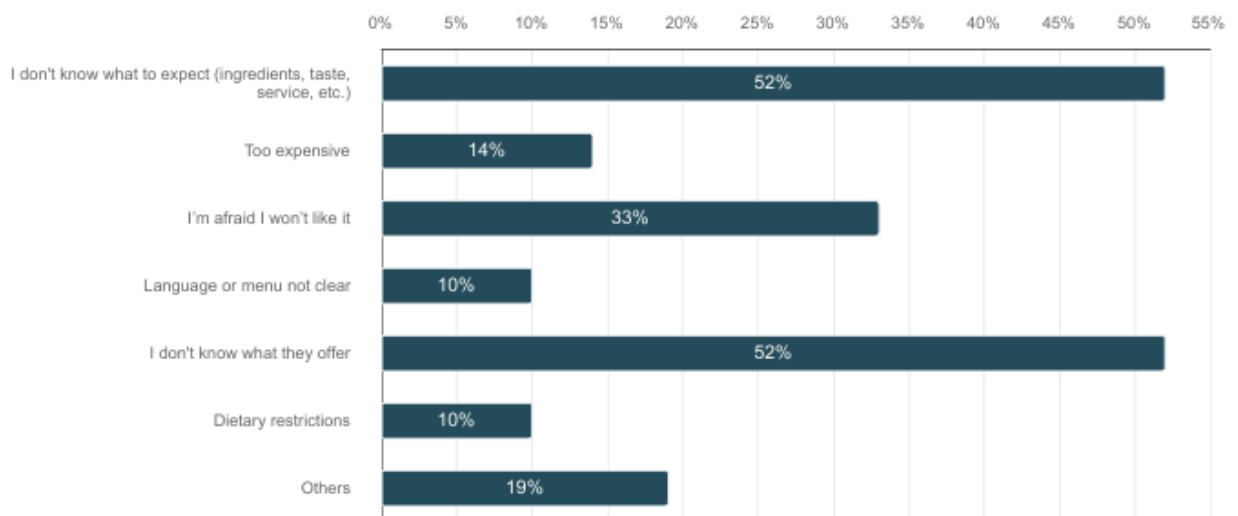


FIGURE 11. Consumers' Survey, Avoidance Reasons

On the other hand, businesses lacked commitment despite repeated contact; this behaviour supports the perception among operators that local marketing efforts are unnecessary, as they assume their current customer bases are sufficient or fully reached, while the local audience demands more visibility on their offerings, as reflected in Figure 12. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) explained that digital marketing is being neglected by SMEs due to their limited resources, especially in time, in addition to the limited marketing awareness, even though it can be a cost-effective and essential way to scale their businesses, regardless of the local context or even the levels of their market demands.

Have you noticed any recent improvements in how local international restaurants promote themselves?

Vastaaajien määrä: 21

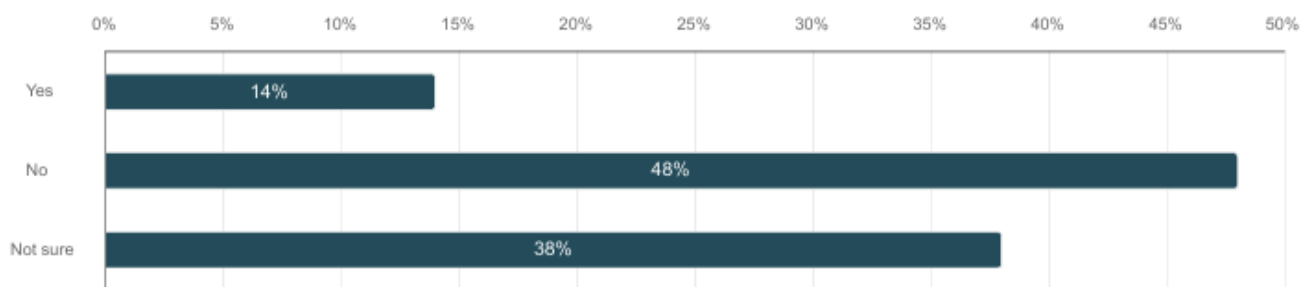


FIGURE 12. Customers' Survey, Local Restaurants' Current Marketing

7.2 Key answers to research and development questions

In this section, the key responses and compelling findings of the research are provided to guide this practice-based thesis, while combining insights from the theoretical chapter and the data-driven results. Firstly, local consumers of Pietarsaari were asked in general terms, about how they consider local marketing strategies to be adapted to enhance international gastronomy businesses in small markets like Pietarsaari; the conduction revealed that local marketing must please the cultural dynamics of the town as suggested on Figure 13, which aligns with the marketing playbook by aligning actions that resonate with the community such as publishing clear menus, making it easier to understand the diverse businesses offerings by creating or optimizing their digital profiles throughout the platforms like Google Business profile, using effective storytelling and clear descriptions of the products. As a result, they can strengthen customer relationships by consistently and strategically using digital channels, as affirmed by Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) in their discussion of SMEs' digital strategies. In this context, the two-month micro marketing playbook provides a flexible framework for small businesses to make it feasible even for overloaded entrepreneurs with limited marketing knowledge.

How familiar are you with the types of food offered by these restaurants?

Vastaajien määrä: 21

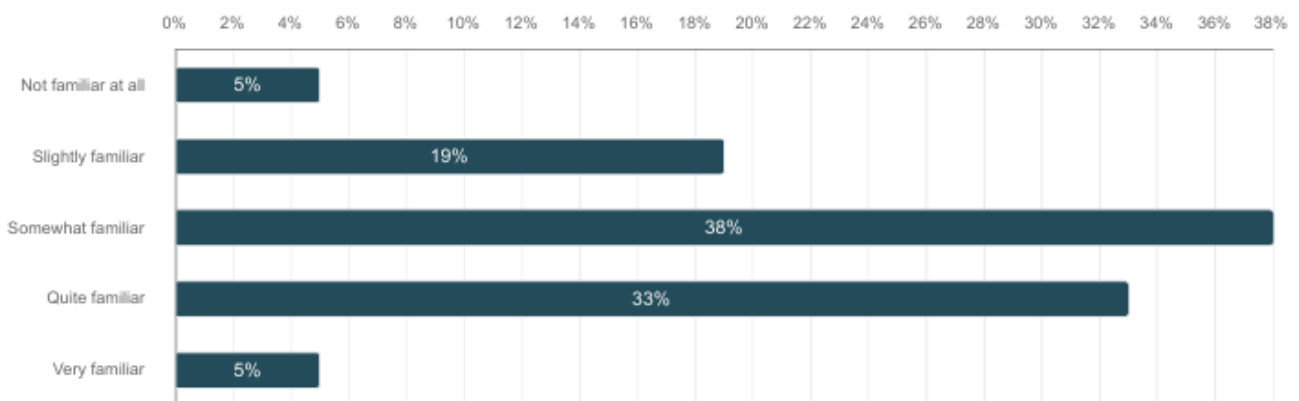


FIGURE 13. Consumers' Survey, Restaurants Familiarity

To summarize the key findings of the local consumers' survey and reiterate the main purposes of this practice-based thesis to understand local consumers' awareness, perceptions, and behaviours in order to align the findings with the relevance and effectiveness of the marketing playbook. A total of 21 responses were collected, representing a sample of local consumers across the different age groups and cultural backgrounds.

According to the time of residence, the majority have lived in Pietarsaari for more than 10 years, showing the level of familiarity with the gastronomic environment of the town and commerce in general. They were asked about their dining frequency, where most of the respondents reported eating occasionally, typically a few times a month, while very few dine out weekly, suggesting that visiting restaurants is enjoyed as a special occasion more than a routine habit, reinforcing the need for visibility and emotional connection in marketing communication.

When discovering new food places, 76% of participants affirmed that word-of-mouth is more effective than passing by, as shown in Figure 10. Social media was not ignored, however showed to be ranked third with 43%, while Google searches of Maps were just mentioned by 24% of respondents. This data matches with previous studies that emphasize that SMEs, specifically in the food sector, often lack a strong digital presence. This reflects the limited use of processes and structures involving marketing actions in small market contexts, where the firms rely heavily on informal communication and reputation (Jones & Rowley, 2011).

The locals were asked about their willingness to try international ethnic food, and over 80% gave a positive response, showing openness to multicultural cuisine as illustrated in Figure 14. However, the openness can be conditioned to uncertainty and lack of knowledge when 52% of participants responded they avoid trying new international offerings if they do not know what to expect in terms of flavours, ingredients, services, etc., and an equal group representing another 33% simply stated avoiding it if they do not know what to expect. These barriers reinforce Dinh's (2013) conclusions about Finnish consumers' cautious approach toward unfamiliar food.

How open are you to trying food from a different culture?

Vastaajien määrä: 21

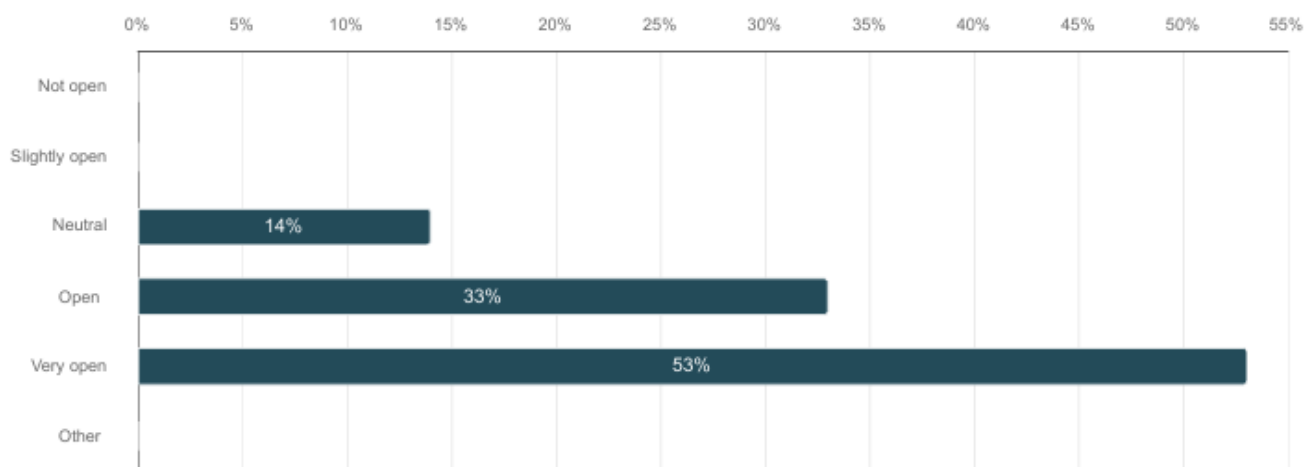


FIGURE 14. Consumers' Survey, Willingness to Try International Cuisine

To contribute to the development of local marketing strategies, the participants were asked how to facilitate their journey towards discovering new international establishments and their offerings. The results showed that 71% prefer local recommendations, 57% events or tasting opportunities, 43% an active social media presence, and 33% mentioned clearer online menus and visibility as decisive factors when selecting where to consume. These results clearly indicate how important it is to consider the local engagement and digital communications as a core among the marketing strategies addressing international cuisine.

As final reflections about what consumers suggested to make the local international gastronomy market more accessible to them, they would like to know more about the origins of the food, and specifically the meats. Regarding digital platforms, they also include Lounastauko Pietarsaari, which is considered a publication destination on menus during lunch hours. Another factor mentioned by consumers was the cost, it is true that currently the prices are rapidly increasing, however to a person deciding

to spend a significant amount of money they need to be certain that what they are going to consume will be good, additionally they also requested to have more visibility about the food or products such as pictures and better advertising campaigns; as repeatedly mentioning how much they would like to attend a tasting event. Local consumer opinions, previously discussed, are reflected in Figure 15.

Please share any suggestions or ideas that could help make international gastronomy more visible in Pietarsaari:

Vastaajien määrä: 8

Vastaukset
I would like to know the origin of the food and, for example, where the meat comes from.
Lunch campaigns, visibility at Lounastauko Pietarsaari.
I love to eat lunch in a restaurant during my working days. But it is little bit too expensive nowadays (compare that just for some year ago a lunch cost 10€ and now it's 13,5€.). I am happy that Pietarsaari have so many different and delicious restaurant. Even the guest that visit out office in Pietarsaari are happily surprised for the great restaurants.
Outside of lunch hours, I use Wolt quite a lot because of convenience and time-saving. At least for me, to be available in Wolt, would the barrier be lower to try.
Jotenkin näkyvyyttä katukuvaan enemmän. Mitä listalta löytyy jne.
Some events that promote or have tastings, even with small fee to try different things
Advertising, promotion, visibility.
Food samples and food images of the food

FIGURE 15. Consumers' Survey Opinions

8 CONCLUSION

During this project, the focus was how to enhance local marketing strategies oriented to the visibility of offerings of local international gastronomy in Pietarsaari, and small towns throughout the local consumers' journey, willingness, and perceptions, by implementing a two-month marketing playbook where such tactics were explained in detail to overloaded business operators. The findings of the practical approach revealed the real barriers of local consumers to be related to communication issues; as a matter of fact, it was confirmed that consumers are open and willing to try new international cuisine; indeed, they showed a high level of curiosity about gastronomy and other cultures in general.

The barriers emerged among consumers' traditions, in relation to communication as an essential factor of any local marketing strategy of the gastronomic sector. Local consumers are certainly willing to try new cuisines if the communication is clear, transparent, complete, and adapted to their culture. Moreover, the visual communication took on relevance as it found its effectiveness when it was perceived as appealing to the audience, meaning once again transparent and authentic. In other words, communication is key to achieving an accurate local marketing strategy, and that should always aim to mitigate all elements that can cause any uncertainty avoidance of possible consumers and reinforce engagement with existing customers.

Analyzing the results, it was indirectly confirmed that the initial assumptions of this thesis about entrepreneurs of international gastronomy businesses in small contexts, overlooking the potential of localized marketing structures. While consumers are interested in exploring new gastronomy, the results of the questionnaire indicate a gap in the communication between firms and consumers, not in the demand. It was confirmed that Finnish consumers are curious and open to trying new offerings; however, their decision over international cuisine depends on how offerings are communicated, especially if the proposal in question is completely unknown, as Hofstede (2011) and Hofstede Insights (2014) confirmed about the dimensions in terms of communication styles prioritizing clarity and straightforward messaging.

It was observed how business operators underestimate marketing structures due to the lack of strategic awareness and limited resources, since it was suggested to implement low-cost actions, where the main investment was the time. Furthermore, deeper knowledge of marketing was not required to execute the tactics provided in the playbook, they counted on personal support if required, and clear instructions

were provided. Overlooking their marketing approach returned as a response of local consumers not finding major recent changes; however, they have expressed how they perceived the ethnic and international business approach and how they believed it could accelerate their decision to try their offerings, most of them referring to how firms are currently communicate to them at every phase of their journey towards the final decision, trying new offerings.

Innovation and testing are important to succeed regardless of the instrument used when the market demands are taken into account, in effectively communicating a business's value proposition; however, the results of the practice from the business's perspective were that no major action was taken by any of the businesses that accepted to participate. As a recommendation for future studies, it is encouraged to find a committed commissioner willing to execute local marketing strategies in the international gastronomic sector in small market contexts with the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the two-month marketing playbook designed during this project.

For more insights about local marketing strategies, the marketing playbook could also be implemented in other business sectors where the cross-border factor could play a special role, to optimize, improve, and discover new actions for the benefit of local businesses' scaling.

In conclusion, the data obtained from local consumers in Pietarsaari demonstrated that international gastronomy businesses have significant potential for growth by implementing simple, low-cost, and accurate local marketing strategies. Therefore, they fully support that occasional tasting events or sample offerings could directly impact their decision-making when selecting their gastronomic provider.

Ultimately, it was discovered that beyond local marketing strategies in the international gastronomy sector, the most complete marketing structure is the one that considers the organization's core values, the audience voice, and conveys accurate messaging to the target audience, which means that after discussing local marketing strategies, the ideal mindset as operators would be designing a local-communication marketing structure.

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APPENDIX 1

Two-Month Micro-Marketing Playbook

<https://d.docs.live.net/d79383d740217126/Documents/Thesis%20-%20Centria/Two-Month%20Micro-Marketing%20Playbook.pdf>

APPENDIX 2

Business Owners Survey

[https://d.docs.live.net/d79383d740217126/Documents/Thesis%20-%20Centria/Business%20Owner%20Survey%20\(1\).pdf](https://d.docs.live.net/d79383d740217126/Documents/Thesis%20-%20Centria/Business%20Owner%20Survey%20(1).pdf)

APPENDIX 3

Consumer Survey

<https://d.docs.live.net/d79383d740217126/Documents/Thesis%20-%20Centria/Survey%20for%20Customers.pdf>

APPENDIX 3.1

Consumer report

https://d.docs.live.net/d79383d740217126/Documents/Thesis%20-%20Centria/Survey%20for%20Customers_Perusraportti.pdf