

MASTER'S THESIS

Course code: BE309E

Name: Mie Løkken Haugerstuen

Cracking the code to Italians heart and plates:

- Unveiling a strategy for Norwegian seafood exporters to target the Italian niche market for cod filets.

Date: 23.05.23

Total number of pages: 61

Abstract

Norway has a long history of exporting seafood to the world, and there is long traditions and strong relationships with Italy due to this export. However, over the last few years, there have been some changes in consumption behavior in Italy, so there is a gap in the market. In this thesis, I am looking at the potential for Norwegian seafood exporters to target the Italian niche market for high-quality fresh cod fillets. My research questions are:

How can Norwegian seafood exporters target the Italian niche market for high-quality cod filets?

I am using a qualitative approach where I interview relevant respondents, basing much of the thesis on secondary data that I have gotten from a rapport about whitefish in Italy, made on behalf of the Norwegian Seafood Council. The theoretical framework used in the thesis is niche marketing, specialization, relationship marketing, positioning, and the marketing mix.

The thesis emphasizes the importance of niche marketing in establishing a foothold in the Italian market. It suggests starting with a smaller group of key customers and gradually expanding to a larger market. The Lombardy region is identified as a geographical specialization mainly due to its lack of strong traditions with other types of cod & its openness towards new products. Educating the target group and building awareness about Norwegian fresh cod is crucial. Creating a brand name, such as “Merluzzo Norvegese,” exclusively for approved exporters is suggested to protect the Norwegian product’s advertising efforts.

The strategy proposes focusing on fresh cod loins, or “cuori,” as a specialized product line. It is recommended to position the Norwegian fresh cod by highlighting its attributes, such as country of origin, healthiness, ease of cooking, and sustainability. There are many ways to promote these attributes. However, it acknowledges that implementing such a strategy requires time and a substantial marketing budget.

Preface

This master's thesis is the final assignment of my master's in science of business at Nord University, specializing in international business and marketing.

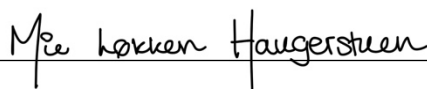
This thesis aims to find a good strategy for how Norwegian exporters of fresh cod can target the Italian market. The first assignment I wrote after I started my bachelor's in 2018 was about the export of mackerel. So, it feels good to close this chapter by writing about the cod export. I hope that this thesis can help Norwegian exporters, in addition to being a good contributor to the limited literature there is about niche marketing.

The process of writing this thesis has been done over one semester. It has been a challenging period writing the thesis, but it has also been interesting, fun, and enlightening. I have been able to use the knowledge I've learned during the last five years, and it has been interesting to use it more practically.

I thank my supervisor Frode Nilssen for the guidance, support, and great knowledge about the theory and the seafood industry. I also want to thank my respondents for taking their time and providing helpful information. And a big thank you to Cod Cluster and The Norwegian Seafood Council for inviting me to their meetings and giving me useful information and insights. I would also like to thank my family and friends, who have been a great support both in the highs and lows during this process – and who have helped me to take breaks and reminded me that there is more to life than this master thesis.

Lastly, to my fellow students, thank you for your ideas, inputs, discussions, and collaboration – I have learned much from you. And thank you for some great years at Nord University. Good luck in your career.

Bodø, May 2023.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mie Løkken Haugerstuen", is positioned above a horizontal line.

Mie Løkken Haugerstuen

List of content

Abstract	i
Preface	ii
List of content	iii
List of figures	1
1.0 Introduction	2
<i>1.1 Background</i>	2
<i>1.2 The research question</i>	3
<i>1.3 Reading guide</i>	3
1.3.1 Dictionary	4
2.0 Theory	4
<i>2.1 Niche marketing</i>	6
2.1.1 Specialization	7
2.1.2 Relationship marketing	8
2.1.3 Positioning	8
<i>2.2 Marketing mix</i>	10
2.2.1 Product	10
2.2.2 Place	10
2.4.3 Price	11
2.2.4 Promotion	11
<i>2.3 Model</i>	12
3.0 Methodology	13
<i>3.1 Choice of methodology</i>	13
<i>3.2 Research design</i>	14
3.2.1 Case study	14
3.2.2 Primary and secondary data	15
<i>3.3 Data collection</i>	16
3.3.1 Choice of respondents	16
3.3.2 Interview guide	16
3.3.3 Conducting the interview	17
3.3.4 Transcription	18
3.3.5 Data analysis	18

3.4 Secondary data.....	18
3.5 Validity and reliability.....	19
4.0 The line of business	19
4.1 The cod.....	19
4.2 The Norwegian fisheries history.....	20
4.3 The history of export of Norwegian cod.....	21
4.3 Italy.....	21
4.4.1 Lombardy region.....	22
4.3.1 The relationship between Norway and Italy.....	23
4.4 Italy's whitefish market.....	23
4.4.1 SWOT-Analysis.....	24
5.0 Summary of the data collection.....	25
5.1 Summary from respondent A.....	25
5.2 Summary from respondent B.....	28
6.0 Analysis	29
6.1 Niche marketing.....	29
6.1.1 Specialization.....	29
6.1.2 Positioning.....	29
6.2 Marketing mix.....	31
6.2.1 Product.....	31
6.2.2 Promotion.....	32
7.0 Discussion	33
7.1 Model.....	33
7.2 Specialization.....	34
7.3 Relationship marketing.....	35
7.4 Positioning.....	36
7.5 Marketing mix.....	38
7.5.1 Product.....	38
7.5.2 Promotion.....	38
8.0 Conclusion.....	40
8.1 Limitations of this thesis.....	43
8.2 Further research.....	44
References	45

Appendix	50
<i>Appendix 1: Interview guide</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Appendix 2: Information letter to Respondent A.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Appendix 3: Information letter to Respondent B.....</i>	<i>54</i>

List of figures

Figure 1: Theoretical framework.....	12
Figure 2: Theoretical framework with factors	33
Figure 3: Marketing strategy	40

1.0 Introduction

For a long time, I was unsure what to write for my master's thesis. I have been fascinated by marketing since the first time I had it in high school, and one of the things I find most interesting is everything related to planning and implementing a marketing strategy. In addition to that do I think that the seafood industry is very interesting, with good opportunities for growth and development – and especially among other species than salmon.

The research questions were a question from Cod Cluster. Cod Cluster is a national whitefish cluster that, through collaboration, research, and innovation, shall contribute to year-round activity in the industry, increased exports, and viable coastal communities (Egga, n.d).

1.1 Background

Norway is known for black oil – the gold. However, Norway is also known in many countries for “The gold from Lofoten.” The gold from Lofoten is what they call skreien in Germany (Sørli, 2021). Skrei is cod that belongs to the Norwegian-artic cod stock, which travels to the coast of Norway (mainly in Lofoten and Vesterålen) during the winter and spring to spawn. Cod is a popular product in Germany, Spain, and France; however, it has long traditions in Italy. Norway has old traditions of exporting cod to Italy, with the main product being stockfish.

Nevertheless, the consumption of stockfish in Italy has had a negative trend. One of the reasons the consumption decreased is because, traditionally, stockfish is a whole, fresh product you buy at the fish store. It takes some time to prepare, and the younger generation in Italy needs more time to prepare it. Some of the measures taken are to sell the fish in supermarkets. The consumption of stockfish is now better, but this shows that Norwegian exporters of cod should find a way to keep the consumption of Norwegian cod in Italy steady.

As mentioned, Italians have a long tradition of eating Norwegian seafood, especially stockfish and salted fish. These have become products with solid traditions, like fårikål, lutefisk, and skrei in Norway. Even though they have a strong position in the market, there is a change in the typical family in Italy, leading the Italians to ask for different types of products. Studies show that Norway has a small market share in Italy, only 0.3%. This shows an opportunity for Norwegian suppliers to target the Italian market. However, with the large variety of seafood available, it is critical to deeply understand the position of Norwegian whitefish products to determine the best strategic options going forward. So, in this thesis, I want to investigate how to outline possible strategic approaches for Norwegian cod filets in the Italian market.

1.2 The research question

Even though salmon is the biggest seafood export, cod steadily grew during the past years (Norges Sjømatråd, n.d.). This is because cod has excellent market potential in general, and the Norwegian government aims to increase the export, excluding oil and gas, by 50 % by 2030 – where seafood represents an important pillar. In addition to that, the value of frozen and fresh cod is increasing. During the last months, these products have reached the highest level of export ever for frozen and fresh cod (Martinussen, 2022; Bye, 2022). Drawn from this simple reasoning, fresh and frozen fillet products of cod have significant export potential.

Some contend that these product categories represent a very marginal market in the Italian market for seafood today, where salted and dried cod represents the dominating products of the Norwegian cod export to Italy. Fillet products may, however, represent a future opportunity for growth and a sustainable position in the Italian white fish market. One possible strategy is to pursue a stepwise development from a narrow, niche approach toward a broader marketing strategy. With niche marketing, Norwegian exporters can first target a small group of consumers in Italy. There are few studies about niche marketing. However, one says that niche marketing is suitable when a company can create a new differential advantage in pockets within the total market (Hooley et al., 2020). By targeting a niche, the exporters may focus only on this one niche, build a strong relationship, and direct the resources to a targeted marketing segment.

Drawn from this, my research question is as follows:

How can Norwegian seafood exporters target the Italian niche market for high quality cod filets.

1.3 Reading guide

The thesis is structured in the following way:

Chapter 1 is this chapter, where I introduce what I will write about, the research question, and why I have chosen to write about this topic.

Chapter 2 concerns the theory and relevant literature I use in this thesis. The theory I am presenting is niche marketing, specialization, relationship marketing, positioning and the marketing mix (the four P's).

Chapter 3 is the methodology chapter, where I explain the choice of methodology, research design, and data collection.

Chapter 4 is to give a better understanding of the context for the thesis. I present the line of business, the market (Italy), the history of export, and other essential things to understand the thesis better.

Chapter 5 summarizes the information I have gotten from the data collection, including the data from the rapport and the expert interview.

Chapter 6 is the chapter where I analyze the findings.

Chapter 7 discusses the finding and analysis; I use the model presented in the theory chapter (2.3) to see the coherence between the theory and data.

Chapter 8 is the final chapter, where the conclusion and answer to the research question are presented.

1.3.1 Dictionary

In this thesis, am I using some Italian words and acronyms. So, in this chapter, I will explain them and why I have chosen to use some particular words.

- **NSC:** Is an acronym for Norwegian Seafood Council.
- **Merluzzo:** Is the Italian word for cod.
- **Baccalá:** Is the word the Italians are using for dried and salted cod.
- **Cuori:** Is the Italian word for heart, but in this context is it the same as a fish loin.
- **Exporters:** When writing about Norwegian firms, do I always refer to them as *exporters*. This is a conscious act, to not mix up different terms – because that could have been confusing. But it doesn't necessary mean that they all are exporters, it can also be Norwegian producers, suppliers, marketers, agents etc.

2.0 Theory

In this chapter, I will explain the theoretical concepts related to the task in more detail. To better understand how these theoretical concepts are relevant to this thesis, we need to look at the research question:

*How can Norwegian seafood exporters **target** the Italian niche market for high quality cod filets.*

Targeting can be defined as a marketing strategy that breaks a market into segments and then concentrates your marketing efforts on one or a few key segments, consisting of the customers

whose needs and desires most closely match your product or service offerings (Ward, 2022). If I put this in the RQ, will it look like this:

How can Norwegian seafood exporters make a marketing strategy that breaks the market into segments and then concentrates the marketing efforts on one or a few key segments consisting of the customers whose needs and desires most closely match your product or service offerings in the Italian niche market for high quality cod filets.

The definition says that targeting is about breaking the market into segments, which can be seen as the same as niche marketing: “the process of carving out, protecting and offering a valued product to a narrow part of the market that displays different needs (Toften & Hammervoll, 2012, p.280). Therefore, is niche marketing a good choice of strategy to use when finding a good strategy for the Norwegian exporters to target the Italian market.

Going back to the research question with the definition of targeting implemented, but looking at a different term:

How can Norwegian seafood exporters make a marketing strategy that breaks the market into segments and then concentrates the marketing efforts on one or a few key segments consisting of the customers whose needs and desires most closely match your product or service offerings in the Italian niche market for high quality cod filets.

Marketing efforts are activities conducted by companies to promote their products and services (Marketing Efforts: Definition, Examples & Types, 2021). The four most common activities in a marketing strategy can be found in the marketing mix model.

Therefore, this thesis's theoretical aspects are niche marketing and marketing mix. Both these aspects have other related theories, but I will come back to these and why they are included in the thesis later in this chapter. But to summarize the theories:

- Niche marketing
 - Specialization
 - Relationship marketing
 - Positioning
- Marketing mix
 - Positioning
 - Promotion
 - Price

- Product

2.1 Niche marketing

There are few studies about niche marketing, and as mentioned earlier, Toften and Hammervoll (2012, p. 280) have one definition: “the process of carving out, protecting and offering a valued product to a narrow part of the market that displays different needs.” They also say that successful niche marketing requires specialization, relationship marketing, developing internal dynamic capabilities, and building protective barriers (Toften & Hammervoll, 2012, p.274). We may conclude that a solid reputation in the customers’ minds is essential to succeed as a niche marketer (Dalagic & Leeuw, 1994, p.43).

There are many perspectives and opinions about niche marketing and many criteria on how to succeed with niche marketing. I have already mentioned Toften and Hammervoll’s perspectives on how to succeed with niche marketing, and I will use their point of view in this thesis. They wrote that successful niche marketing requires specialization, relationship marketing, developing internal dynamic capabilities, and building protective barriers. Therefore, this chapter will explore specialization and relationship marketing (including protective barriers) and why it is crucial for niche marketing. The reason why I do not include the aspect about developing internal dynamics is that dynamic capabilities is defined as the firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external resources/competencies to address and shape rapidly changing business environments (Teece, 2010, pp. 679-730). This is about the internal dynamics in the firm, and in this thesis, do I not look into the internal activities of the business.

Some suggest that niche marketing can be seen as a type of segmentation, but some differences are significant to consider. Some of the most important differences are that a niche is usually smaller in size, it focuses on individuals – in a segment, we focus on a so-called homogenous group, and a niche fulfills a specific need in contrast to a segment where the emphasis is on being a manageable part of the market (Dalgic & Leeuw, 1994, p.42) Chalsani and Shani said that segmentation is the process of breaking a large market into smaller pieces, it is a top-down approach. Moreover, they meant that niche marketing is a bottom-up approach where the market starts from the needs of a few customers and gradually builds up a more extensive customer base (Shani & Chalsani, 1992, p.59). So, to successfully enter a new niche market, it is vital to find a need among a few groups of people – and then build it up to be a larger market.

Mass marketing has many advantages; for example, it is cost and time efficient, and the business can target a large group of people and vary in channels. But there are many benefits to niche marketing as well. Since the niche marketer knows the target customer group well, it is easier to deal with changes in customer behavior and be more profitable since they meet the needs better than other firms that are randomly approaching and selling to the selected niche. Due to its fragmented character, old traditions, regional differences, and different nationalities, Europe could be a breeding ground for niche markets (Dalgic & Leeuw, 1994, p. 50).

2.1.1 Specialization

When specializing, the business focuses on one or a few elements in the strategy, for example, one type of product or a segment. A company can match unique needs by specializing along a market, customer, product, or marketing mix line. (Tamagnini & Tregear, 1998, p.228). In addition to becoming more efficient and increasing productivity, gaining better knowledge, and focusing all the resources in one place.

Kotler says that the most important thing in niche marketing is specialization, and he provides nine different ways to specialize (Kotler, 1989):

End-user specialization: targeting a group with the exact specific needs and preferences, for example, grocery shoppers who buy ecological food.

Vertical-level specialization: Focusing on a part in the distribution channel, for example, the wholesaler or retailer.

Customer-sized specialization: Targeting a group of customers with a particular size, for example, big business or on an individual level.

Geographic specialization: Targeting a group based on geography, for example, a whole country, a city, or a district.

Product or product-line specialization: Focus on one product or product line. For example, a furniture store that has an extra focus on sofas.

Job-shop specialization: Giving services or products customized to each customer's unique needs. For example, a tailor makes clothes based on size and preference for each customer.

Quality-price specialization: Producing products and services with high quality for a group that is willing to pay a higher price for it. For example, luxury cars, watches, and wines.

Service specialization: Having high customer service and support.

Channel specialization: Focusing on one distribution channel, for example, online or direct sales.

When a company decides to use a niche marketing strategy, have they already made some decisions about specialization. This is because if you choose a niche marketing strategy, you have already chosen to focus on a small segment in the market and therefore specialize in it.

2.1.2 Relationship marketing

Relationship marketing can be defined as “a marketing strategy that seeks to establish an ongoing business relationship with customers whereby the product becomes the total relationship,” and in niche marketing long-term, strong relationships are key (Dalgic & Leeuw, 1994, p. 43).

If you have a close business relationship with the partners, will it be as a resource. This is because a good relationship is sustainable and cannot quickly be taken over by competitors (Toften & Hammervoll, 2010, p.746) - you get a strong barrier against potential competitors. Furthermore, it could be assumed that the frequent use of relationship marketing can contribute to the limited need for additional marketing communication efforts (Toften & Hammervoll, 2010, p.747). This means the firm can limit marketing communication and instead concentrate on selecting and developing a limited, good customer relationship. Finally, if the niche firms have a good relationship with the wholesalers, can they get essential knowledge and information about the market they are operating in. This can save the company time, money, and effort from gathering this information.

2.1.3 Positioning

Positioning is an essential element of niche marketing (Dalgic & Leeuw, 1994, p.42). Positioning refers to the place you want your product to have within a particular target market (Square, n.d.).

The essential factors when creating the advantage are that it must be based on customer value (lower prices, superior quality, or better service), and it should be a skill of a company that competitors find hard to copy. Positioning depends on the consumer: how they perceive the quality, attributes, value, price, and image of the brand/product (Panwar & Patra, 2017, p. 121).

Product positioning depends on the attitudes of the target marketer, and the marketer either tries to change product specifications according to the target market’s attitude or tries to change the market’s attitudes (Panwar & Patra, 2017, p.122). Berkman and Gilson (Berman & Gilson

Panwar, 1987, referred to in Panwar & Patra, 2019, p.122) stated that positioning is an emphasis on product features, attributes, and or benefits. Based on this, six positioning options have been identified:

Features/attributes: When a firm position its product by features or attributes, do they focus on what is unique about the product. It could be product attributes, features, or benefits with the product. The firm uses one or more product attributes, features, or benefits as the basis for positioning its product. One example can be if a company sells computers, can they position their product as faster and lighter than the competitors.

Product class/benefits: If there are several substitutes in the market, does the firm focus on benefits the competitors do not have. Benefits are advantages that a product offers to consumers that fulfill their needs and enhance their comfort, happiness, and well-being (Panwar & Patra, 2017, p.122). Companies that use this strategy can often take a leadership role in the market and uses statements like “We are the best in our business.”

Use/application: With this positioning, the approach is focused on how the consumers use the product. Products can be positioned as the right product to use for a particular occasion or purpose (Panwar & Patra, 2017, p.122). For example, can Kvikk Lunsj is positioned for consumption on hikes.

User/usage: This positioning strategy is based on certain products being suited for certain users (Panwar & Patra, 2017, p.122). One example is Tine God Morgen Yoghurt which has positioned itself as a small filling snack between meals to keep the hunger away.

Competitors: The firm compares itself to the leading brands (competitors) in this approach. They do this to gain the desired position for their product in the mind of the consumer (Panwar & Patra, 2017, p.122). An example of this approach is KIA Motors that have positioned some of its cars as being comparable in design, gas mileage, and price to some leading import cars (Oghojafor & Ladipo, 2012, p.49).

Price and quality: The most common approach is price and quality. Some firms use a high price (premium pricing) strategy to indicate that their product is superior in quality. Other firms use a lower price (Oghojafor & Ladipo, 2012, p.49). Examples of brands that use price – the quality approach is BMW, Mercedes, and Apple. They are high quality so that the customers will pay a high price.

A firm can use aspects from the different approaches and therefore use a mixed positioning approach. However, there is a risk that this can confuse the consumers since the message they are trying to communicate combines many different advantages.

2.2 Marketing mix

The marketing mix, also known as the four Ps of marketing, refers to the four key elements of a marketing strategy: product, place, price, and promotion (Yasar, 2022). It is how the business combines and uses its competitive tools to achieve competitive advantage and add customer value (Sander, 2021). By paying attention to the following four components of the marketing mix, a business can maximize its chances of a product being recognized and bought by customers (Yasar, 2022).

The four Ps are, as mentioned, key elements in a marketing strategy, and, therefore, it is an essential part of this thesis – since the purpose is to develop a strategy to enter a market. In addition is the use of a marketing mix important when targeting a new market. This is because a company can match unique needs by specialization along the market, customer, product, or marketing mix lines. Furthermore, in today's fragmented market, we must tailor our products and marketing mix to suit the different tastes of the customers (Dalgic & Leeuw, 1994, p.41). So, let us take a closer look at the four P's.

2.2.1 Product

Product is what the business is selling – it can be a physical product or a service. In the context of the marketing mix is about the item or service being sold that must satisfy the consumer's need or desire (Yasar, 2022). Who needs this product, and why do they need it? It is as simple as if the consumers do not like the product or see its value, they will not buy it.

When it comes to the product, it is crucial to consider which needs the product covers for the consumers. What attributes does the product have that the competitors do not have?

2.2.2 Place

Place is about where the product is available for the consumers to buy and how it is displayed. The goal of business executives is always to get their products in front of the consumers who are most likely to buy them (Twin, 2023). Therefore, they must place the product where the consumers in the segment are. For example, if a high-end luxury make-up brand wants to target the Norwegian market, is Hennes and Mauritz the wrong store to sell the make-up.

2.4.3 Price

Price is how much the consumers are willing to pay for the product. The exporters must find the right price balance linked to the product's real and perceived value. It is important to put the right price on the product. If they price it too high, won't people buy it, and if it is too low, people can start to question the quality of the product. In addition, as mentioned in an earlier subchapter, price is often linked to quality. So, if a product has a high price, it is expected to have high quality. A high price can also position the product as exclusive and only available for a particular group of people. Therefore, it is important that if a product has a high price, the business must be able to deliver a product with the same high quality.

In some cases, business decision-makers can raise the price of a product to give it the appearance of luxury or exclusivity (Twin, 2023). Alternatively, they may lower the price so more consumers will try it (Twin, 2023). If the product is seasonal, can this also impact the price strategy. If there are seasons where the product is better or a higher demand for it, is it an excellent strategy to raise the price in these times.

It is important to understand how much the target customers are willing to pay for the product. Some questions to ask when setting the price can include (Coursera, 2022):

- What is the price range of the product's competitors?
- What is the price range of your target audience?
- What price is too high for the audience? What price is too low?
- What price best fits your target market?

2.2.4 Promotion

Promotion is a very complex element in the marketing mix, and because of that, it is often called a promotion mix. A promotion mix is a set of different marketing approaches the business develops to optimize promotional efforts and reach a broader audience (SendPulse, 2023).

Promotion is about communicating between the business and the consumers and how the product is advertised. Promotion can be everything from public relations, word of mouth, marketing on TV and social media, only to name a few. When promoting a business can the business use a promotion strategy that only combines many or few elements, depending on what is more suitable for the product and the target group.

When planning the part of the strategy that includes promotion, are there several things to consider. The most important is identifying the target audience and determining which

marketing channels are the most efficient to reach the target group. First, they need to understand the target group. This includes knowing which marketing channels to use, when are they most acceptant for advertising, and what type of communication they prefer (informal, funny, or emotional?). Only to name a few of the many aspects they need to consider. Many elements in the promotion mix can be pricey; therefore, the business needs to decide how much money they want to spend on the promotion and make a budget.

Because of the limitation of this thesis, I have decided to focus on only some of the four Ps. For this research question, the product and promotion are the most critical elements. This is because the product is the main thing in this strategy, and if the product does not cover the needs of the consumer, will they never buy it. Promotion is important because this includes the communication between the exporters and the consumers. They cannot target the market by just selling it – they need to communicate that this is a new product and why consumers should buy from them, not the competitors.

2.3 Model

In this chapter, I will present a model that explains the coherence between the different elements in this thesis.



Figure 1: Theoretical framework

This model shows the connection between the theory and RQ – what I will find out and present in this thesis. Right now, at the beginning of the thesis, I have only an opinion on what kind of theoretical aspects will influence the marketing strategy that I will present in the last chapter of this thesis. These theories are presented in the box to the left in the model.

Based on what I have learned during the last years at the University, are more factors affecting the marketing strategy. However, I need to find out what they are, so right now are they represented by the questions marks in the squares to the right. It is the combination of the theory and other factors that make the foundation for how the strategy should look.

The last part of the model is the circle in the middle, which is the strategy on how to target the Italian niche market for fresh cod, and it is this strategy I will present at the end of the thesis.

3.0 Methodology

The methodology is among other things, about how we can proceed to investigate as far as possible whether our assumptions (in this case, the research question) agree with reality or not (Johannessen et al., 2011, p.33). There are several ways to investigate these assumptions. So, in this chapter, I will take a closer look at the methodological part of this thesis. This includes the choice of methodology, the research design, and some relevant terms.

3.1 Choice of methodology

There are two ways to investigate the assumptions, to do a study: in a qualitative or quantitative approach. Quantitative information consists of specific numbers that give you a broad overview in the form of general points. Qualitative information is more in-depth, providing more details that allow you to understand the implications of the numbers (SurveyMonkey, n.d). Qualitative studies collect and register data in text, sounds, and images, and quantitative studies collect and register data in numbers (Johannessen et al., 2011, p.103).

So, what determines the choice of methodology? The obvious answer is that the research question determines the course of the procedure. So, let us look at my research question again:

How can Norwegian seafood exporters target the Italian niche market for high quality cod filets.

Using the word “how” in this context indicates that I want to understand something more profound, and it will be hard to ask this by gathering many data in a numeric form. For my thesis, does this mean I want to determine the connection between Norwegian seafood exporters and how they can target the Italian market. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable if we are to investigate phenomena that we do not know very well, which there has been little research, and when we are studying a phenomenon that we want to understand better (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.28).

I want to look deeper into what Norwegian seafood exporters must do to enter the Italian niche market successfully. I want to understand the Italian market on a deeper level. This includes different segments, an understanding of the market, consumer trends, traditions, etc. This is more suitable for a qualitative study, where I can talk to different people who understand the market and the business.

One advantage of choosing a qualitative study is the possibility of asking follow-up questions. For example, suppose a respondent is saying something interesting that the researcher wants more information about or needs clarification on what the respondent means. In that case, they can ask questions to clarify it. In addition, data from observations and interviews will usually materialize in text in a qualitative study and as sound or image recordings. The advantage of such data is that they register conditions that can be difficult to capture in a text (as quantitative data usually is), such as tone of voice, pauses, movements, and facial expressions (Johannessen et al., 2011, p.104).

There are mainly two ways to do a qualitative study: observations or interviews (Johannessen et al., 2011, p.104). Observation is when the researcher is in the field being studied, where the data is based on the researcher's sensory impressions of actions and interactions in those concrete situations (Johannessen et al., 2011, p.105). In an interview, the data comprises what informants say in conversations with the researcher (Johannessen et al., 2011, p. 105). The researcher can mix these two ways to do a qualitative study.

3.2 Research design

This chapter presents the research design for this study. A research design is how a survey is organized and carried out so that the research question can be answered (Johannesen et al., 2016, p.419).

3.2.1 Case study

There are several types of research designs depending on what the problem or research question is. This thesis is a case study. What characterizes a case study is that it is limited to one particular case and has a detailed description, where the aim is to analyze, interpret and report to give the reader an understanding of the topic explored (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.80). Case studies analyze issues within a specific environment, situation, or organization (BRM, n.d). There are three different purposes for a case study: it can be descriptive, explanatory, or exploratory.

A descriptive case study aims to answer questions such as what, which, how, who, and why (Sander, 2022a). In other words, are the descriptive design used when the researcher wants to

find a connection between one or more variables. To do a descriptive study, the researcher must have a defined research question, an idea of which variables and terms can explain the phenomenon being studied, a hypothesis on how these phenomena and variables affect each other, and a defined population (Sander, 2022).

An explanatory design is used when the researcher wants to find a statistical relationship between two variables (Sander, 2022b), in other words: how one thing affects another or how they have a coherence. In addition, an explanatory design is often used when a business wants to measure the effects of something, for example, a change of the packaging or the effect of sales in different distribution channels.

Lastly, an exploratory design is used when the researcher wants an understanding and insight into an unclear problem (Sander, 2022c). Finally, it is often used when there needs to be more information about the subject being studied, where the goal is to learn more and get a better understanding.

This case study is a combination of a descriptive and exploratory design. It is a descriptive study because I want to find out which and how (which is variable) exporters can target the Italian market (the phenomena being studied). In addition to this thesis and strategy, I present a hypothesis on how the phenomena (the Italian market) and variables (theoretical aspects) affect each other. Nevertheless, my thesis also has elements of an exploratory study, mainly because I want to get a better insight and understanding of the Italian niche market. Furthermore, this niche has few earlier studies; therefore, more information and past data must be collected.

An explanatory study can be more relevant when the product has been in the market for a while and is established. Then, the exporters can do a study to see if they can improve what they are doing and gain some market share. This can they do by testing other distributing channels, placement in the store, and how they present the product in-store. This chapter presents the research design for this study. A research design is how a survey is organized and carried out so that the research question can be answered (Johannesen et al., 2016, p.419).

3.2.2 Primary and secondary data

This subchapter is about how I have gathered data for this thesis. However, first, I am going to explain some terms.

There are two different types of data: primary data and secondary data. Primary data is given by someone who has first-hand knowledge of the event or phenomenon about which

information is given (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.427). Secondary data is second-hand information, i.e., accounts given by someone who has not personally experienced the phenomenon or event about which information is given (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.429).

This thesis consists of both primary data and secondary data. I will use secondary data mainly from a rapport about fish in Italy made by Meros Consulting on behalf of the Norwegian Sea Council. The rapport still needs to be published, but I was lucky to get access to it to use it for the thesis.

3.3 Data collection

This chapter is about collecting the primary data for the thesis. The primary data for this thesis is an interview with one respondent and written questions with another. In this chapter, I am going to explain the interview process.

3.3.1 Choice of respondents

There needs to be a correct answer on how many respondents are needed for a qualitative study. It is more important to have a relevant selection of respondents than to have many respondents. For my thesis, I only have two respondents. This is because of the limited time for my thesis, in addition to the use of data. My thesis is mainly based on secondary data, but I am using expert interviews to better understand the rapport from which I am getting my secondary data. One-to-one interviews are also perfect when you want a complete and detailed description of the informant's understanding, feelings, experiences, perceptions, opinions, and reflections related to a phenomenon (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.146).

3.3.2 Interview guide

An interview guide lists topics and general questions to be reviewed during the interview. The various themes emerge from the research question the study is studying (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.421).

I have two different respondents. One will answer questions in writing, and the other I am having a digital interview with. I will call these respondents A and B in the rest of the thesis.

- Respondent A: The one I'm interviewing digital.
- Respondent B: The one answering the questions in writing.

I have based both "interviews" on the interview guide in the appendix. The information that Respondent A got verbally about the thesis, their rights, and other relevant information was also

sent to Respondent B by e-mail. I talked to Respondent B before sending the information and questions.

Respondent B answered the questions in writing rather than through an interview because of the lack of time. This is a respondent I got in touch with late in the process, but a respondent with excellent and relevant knowledge about the Italian market that would be very helpful for my thesis. Therefore, it was easier for me and the respondents to do it in writing.

As mentioned, am I having an interview with respondent A, and there are three ways to do an interview:

- Unstructured interview: An unstructured interview is informal and has questions about a topic. However, the questions and the order of the questions must be prepared in advance. The interview is more like a conversation (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.148).
- Semi-structured interview: A semi-structured interview has an overarching interview guide as a starting point, while questions, topics, and order may vary (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.148).
- Structured interview: In a structured interview, the topic, questions, and order of the questions have been determined in advance (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.148).

The interview with Respondent A is going to be semi-structured. This is because I want to listen to what the respondent is saying, so I can pick up any new themes I have yet to think about. In addition, then also be able to ask follow-up questions during the interview, so I can get more valuable information about things I did not consider and include in the thesis at the beginning when designing the interview guide (Haugerstuen, 2022, p.7).

The rest of the interview guide is in the appendix.

3.3.3 Conducting the interview

The interview was planned by e-mail and carried out on Teams. The respondent wanted to have the questions in advance to prepare, so I sent the questions I had the day before. In the same document, I wrote a little about the thesis, asked if I could record the interview, and promised anonymity for the respondent. This document is included in the appendix. The interview took about 40 minutes. During the interview, did I scribble down keywords from the essential things the respondent was saying.

3.3.4 Transcription

The transcription must be done right, and the process is vital ensuring that I understand the respondent correctly and do not lose any important data during this process.

The whole interview was recorded and transcribed using the program, Teams. Right after the interview, I got through the transcription from Teams to check that everything was transcribed correctly while the interview was still fresh in mind.

3.3.5 Data analysis

When analyzing the data, do I divide and look into the details from the data collection to find and understand the meaning behind it. I already started to analyze the data when interviewing by writing down keywords connected to the theory when the respondent said something interesting.

After transcribing the data from the interview and the questions, did I go through it and mark different parts in different colors – where each color represented something from the theory chapter or the chapter about Italy from the rapport from NSC. This made it easier to see which subject from the theory and literature was repeated, and which elements was connected and how it is connected.

3.4 Secondary data

As mentioned earlier, I am basing much of my thesis on chapter four, “The Italian Market for Fresh Cod,” in the rapport “Exploring the market potential for Norwegian whitefish in Italy.” The rapport was published on the 6th of January and was made by Meros Consulting for the Norwegian Seafood Council. The background of making this rapport is that NSC wants to better understand the Italian market for certain vital products (fresh cod, salted cod, and clip fish).

The best thing for the thesis would have been that I got to travel to Italy to interview people with good knowledge about the Italian market, such as people working in the retail sector. Unfortunately, for different reasons, could I not travel to Italy for this thesis. Luckily, the rapport from Meros Consulting covers many of the topics I am addressing in the thesis. Therefore, does it contain much valuable information for answering the research question. I got much helpful information from reading the report; in addition the data collection and secondary data used are previous research reports and literature from other relevant. This which means that I have enough information to answer my research question.

3.5 Validity and reliability

Validity is how well, or relevant, data represent the phenomenon to be investigated (Johannesen et al, 2016, p.433). I have chosen respondents that have good knowledge about the line of business and market. I asked open questions so that the respondents (that are the experts) could say the thing they thought were most important and relevant. The rapport I used for gathering the secondary data is made by a company that have worked with NSC for many years and have good knowledge about the line of business and the work with making this kind of rapport.

Reliability is whether the data collected is reliable, and if I will get the same result if a did the research again at another period of time. I establish reliability by making sure that I understood the informants, by asking follow-up questions and asking if they could repeat when if I was unsure of what they meant. I also made sure that they understood me. To secure the data did I record the interview and did my own transcription in addition to the one the tool in Teams did for me. The informants also showed interest with wanting to read the thesis when it was done, which also improve the reliability of the thesis. The data that can be checked with other sources, have been checked to show that they are reliable.

When using secondary data, one must be more critical of quality and validity, which I have been. I have used literature from well-known authors and organizations. The information gathered from organizations that could be more well-known has been checked with other sources.

I have also chosen to write the thesis in English and not Norwegian, which also improves the validity and reliability for the thesis. All the literature am using is in English, in addition to the data collection. This makes the transcription easier and safer - so nothing gets lost in the translation. The last reason is that when the thesis is in English, can the foreign contributors such as the respondents read it.

4.0 The line of business

In this chapter, I will write a little about the history of the seafood industry in Norway. This is important to have in mind to get a better understanding of the rest of the thesis and my thoughts about it.

4.1 The cod

Cod is a white fish found only in the northern Atlantic Ocean, between Vizcaya in the south and Spitsbergen in the North. You can also find it on the Island, Greenland, Newfoundland, and

the east coast of the USA (Vøllestad, 2021). There are two main types of cod: sea cod and skrei. Skreien travels in extensive stocks along the coast and is often bigger than the sea cod. However, the season for fishing and eating skrei is short; it only travels along the coast to spawn from January to April. The sea cod stays in one place their whole life, and you can fish it the whole year. However, it is smaller than the skrei and stays within smaller stocks.

As mentioned, there are different types of cod; you have “regular” cod that you fish all year round, and you have the skrei. Different products are made of cod, stock fish, salted and fresh being the most common ones. Because of this, it can be hard to differentiate the different product categories, and it can be difficult for the consumers to understand the difference between them.

The cod is a very versatile product. Consumers have many choices when buying cod: fresh, frozen, salted, dried, stockfish, or clip fish. It is easy to cook and does not have to be time-consuming. The cod can be used in many different types of food: in soups, with potatoes and other vegetables, in bacalao, in tacos, as fish sticks, in skreimølje, and many other options – you can even make a meal with the tongue. And in addition to being a versatile product, it also has an excellent quality.

4.2 The Norwegian fisheries history

The fishing history in Norway goes back to the stone age (Hallenstvedt & Dørum, 2021). From around the year 1100 did, fish become a more important branch of trade for Norwegians. It became a change for the household, where the man was out fishing for cod and herring while the woman was at home taking care of the farm. During the 19th century, the fishing industry in Norway experienced a big growth, and stockfish, clip fish, and salted herring became essential for Norwegian export (Hallenstvedt & Dørum, 2021).

Since the beginning of the export of fish from Norway during the 10th century, has Bergen been an essential part of trading. Fishermen traded the fish with corn, credit, and other goods with tradespeople in Bergen (Hallenstvedt & Dørum, 2021). However, this trading decreased during the beginning of the 18th century, and the fishermen stood more freely. After the second world war did, the Norwegian Fish industry got more modernized and professional, and they could fish for the whole year around (Hallenstvedt & Dørum, 2021). During this time, it also became fewer fishermen and bigger boats.

The cod fishing was organized in Hanseatic leagues like this until the early 19th century, but when the Napoleonic wars broke out in 1813, did this end. The industry changed to now local

fishmongers along the coast. During the 19th century, the Norwegian fish industry changed significantly with new investments and implements. This led to the fishing becoming financially independent, and the fishers could do it full-time and follow the fish along the coast. In 1870 did export of seafood stand for ¼ of all the export from Norway (Hallenstvedt & Dørum, 2021). And at the end of the 18th century, a new business arose in Norway – the business of fish farming (Hallenstvedt & Dørum, 2021).

The fish export from the farming industry has grown significantly during the last few years. 2022 was the best year to export Norwegian seafood, with a total export of 2,9 million tonnes to a value of 151,4 billion NOK. To put this in perspective, that is 40 million meals daily for a year (Aandahl & Brækkan, 2023). During the last few years, Norway has had an increase in seafood export, and in 2022, Norway exported over 154 billion (Norsk Sjømatråd, n.d). Cod stood for 8,1% of this, while salmon is the biggest export, with 69,9% of the total export in 2022 (Norsk Sjømatråd, n.d).

4.3 The history of export of Norwegian cod

There are sources (Egil's saga among others) that cod (stockfish) was a highly valued export product already during the iron age, but maybe already long before that (Høberg, 2022). The first objective evidence of cod export from Norway goes back to the 12th century (Hallenstvedt & Dørum, 2021) when they exported cod and herring from Northern Norway to England. The export of stockfish was, for a long time, the essential product for the Norwegian economy, and during the 12th century, the stockfish accounted for 80% of all Norwegian export (Høberg, 2022).

The fishing of cod and herring is seasonal during the winter, so the fishing could be combined with farming which was very important for the economy. The fish was sold from Bergen, and it was mainly the Hanseatic league who oversaw the export. The king banned foreigners from traveling north to buy stockfish, so the tradespeople in Bergen did earn goods from the export. In 1755 could not The Hanseatic League deliver anymore, and Norway took over the trading and export of stockfish (Lokalhistoriewiki, 2022).

4.3 Italy

Italy is a country in southern Europe, where Rome is the largest city and capital. Italy is one of the most populous countries in Europe, with 60 million citizens (Lima, 2023). Italy was, in 2017, the eighth-largest economy in the world and the fourth largest in Europe (Lima, 2022b). Italy has a good economy, with the average per capita purchasing power being 16 % above the

average in Europe (Nuremberg, 2022). And like most developed markets, Italian consumer preferences are changing, with people increasingly choosing convenient ways of preparing seafood over time-consuming traditional methods.

I have decided to focus on the Northern part of Italy, more concretely, the Lombardian region. Northern Italy has a much higher income and level of education than the South of Italy. The industrialization and economic growth in the North after 1945 led to large parts of the population moving from the South to the North. All the 10 ten regions with the highest purchasing power are in the North, with the province of Milan taking the highest spot – and this region has capita purchasing power almost 43% above the national average (Nuremberg, 2022). Maybe most importantly, they have long traditions as the part of Italy that eats most seafood (Andreassen, 2020). They aren't one of the regions that eat the most stockfish – so there is an excellent opportunity to establish some new traditions with the consumption of Norwegian seafood.

Trust is something that is highly valued in Italian business relations. For example, in the industry of stockfish, trust is one crucial factor for the business to happen (Nygård & Ingebrigtsen, 2019, p.36). One of the reasons why trust is so important in Italy can be the high level of corruption. The UN has a scale that shows the level of corruption in different countries, where 0 is a high level of corruption, and 100 is the lowest level. In 2020 Italy rated as 53, while Norway was 84 – a big difference (FN-sambandet, 2020).

4.4.1 Lombardy region

Lombardy is an administrative region located all the way north in Italy, next to the Swiss border. With its eleven regions is it the most populous region in Italy, and the largest conurbation is the capital Milan (Lima, 2022).

Lombardy is a region with many different businesses, so many Italians move to Lombardy to work. This makes the people in Lombardy more open to try new things, and they are not locked in old traditions.

Milan is one of the largest industrial centers of Italy, here do they make iron and steel, automobiles, trucks, in addition to it also being a center of banking, wholesale and retail trade (Tikkanen, 2023). The population is concentrated in the industrial cities, and Lombardy is the leading industrial and commercial region of Italy (Tikkanen, 2023). The Lombardy region is also Italy's leading agricultural area, where they produce rice, wheat, corn, vegetables, fruit trees and much more (Tikkanen, 2023).

4.3.1 The relationship between Norway and Italy

There are long traditions with export of stock fish from Norway to Italy. The Italian people (often “Nonna” - the grandmother) bought the whole stock fish at the fish market, before they soaked it in water for over a day and then cooked it for hours (Norsk Sjømatråd, 2022). Nonna then serve it to family and friends, and they can sit for hours talking, laughing, drinking wine, and enjoying themselves around the table. And the stockfish they are eating, it is Norwegian. Italians are only eating Norwegian stock fish, and they have done it for hundreds of years (Norsk Sjømatråd, 2022).

It is said that Italians only eat Norwegian stockfish, and we can almost say that Norway only exports stock fish to Italy. In 2022 did Norway export stock fish for a total value of 722 million NOK. Almost 65% of this income came from Italy, with the value from export to Italy being NOK 468 million. To comparing is USA the second largest market for Norwegian stock fish, with a total value of NOK 80 million.

Italy buys more than 2/3 of the stock fish that are produced in Norway, and there are the regions Veneto, Liguria, Campania, Calabria, and Sicilia that has the highest consumption of stock fish (Fiskerinæringens Felles Kompetansestyre, n.d.). The history between Norway and Italy goes way back, and there are a strong relationship and trust between the exporters in Norway and importers in Italy. This is one of the main reasons for why I have chosen Italy for this thesis. In addition to that this is a good foundation to expand the product-portfolio that Norwegian exporters export to Italy, especially if they use a niche marketing approach. Italy is as also seen as the country with 8th biggest growth potential for Norwegian seafood, behind big countries as USA, Great Britain, and China (Norsk Sjømatråd, n.d).

Even though Italy buys all stock fish from Norway, are the awareness among the customers not that good. The Norwegian Seafood Council has done a survey, that shows that only 38% have total unaided awareness of Norway as the country of origin (Norwegian Seafood Council, n.d., slide 16). So even though stock fish is a good, implanted product in the Italian market, does this show that they can't use the knowledge about stockfish when introducing the new product.

4.4 Italy's whitefish market

A lot of the data in this thesis is from the rapport “Italy's Whitefish Market” that Mero's Consulting did for the Norwegian Seafood Council. It is a new rapport; it was finished in February and the data was collected last year (2022). I will go through the findings about the consumption of cod in Italy, which are the most important for this thesis.

The most important finding for Norwegian exporters wanting to target the Italian market is that Norway has a small market share in Italy (0,3%). Even though stockfish is a well-known product with long traditions, more is needed when introducing a new Norwegian product in Italy. The Italians do not know or do not care that the stockfish is from Norway, so they will not buy fresh cod mainly because it is from Norway.

The rapport shows that 85% of the volume of cod that is distributed in Italy is distributed through retail. With retail, do they mean supermarkets, fishmongers, and e-commerce. The packaged fish section is popular in Italian retail, following the global trend toward convenience and fast, easy-to-use products for busy shoppers. These sections are especially popular in urban centers and the northern part of the country. As mentioned earlier, there is a hundred-year-old history of the export and consumption of cod from Norway to Italy, but this has been dried (stockfish). Therefore, is fresh cod a relatively new category in the cod market.

According to the rapport is one of the reasons why consumers in Italy do not buy Norwegian cod, that they don't know what is unique about it. As we mentioned, this is because it is a relatively new product. So, the exporters of Norwegian cod must work on raising awareness and knowledge and communicating the quality of Norwegian cod to Italian consumers. As mentioned in the chapter about cod, it is a product of high quality that is versatile and inexpensive to cook. So according to the rapport, should we build an image of "easy-to-cook, premium fish for creative home chefs".

The rapport also showed that the northern part of Italy is the best region to begin targeting an Italian market. The findings in the rapport show that since the south of Italy is where the coast is, and therefore has access to the sea and more locally caught fish, will the consumers there prefer to eat local. In addition, northern Italy is more accepting of cod and imported fish in general, and they are more open to embracing imported and not-that-well-known products like fresh cod.

4.4.1 SWOT-Analysis

They also presented a SWOT analysis in the rapport, so in this sub-chapter, I will present what they found: the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for Norwegian exporters of fresh and frozen cod in the Italian market.

The strength they found is that Norwegian seafood (salmon in particular) has a good image among Italian consumers. In addition, Norway is the only country that does marketing concentrating on seafood in the Italian market. As an exporting country, Norway is known for

having a solid and sustainable fish-catching practice. On top of that has Norway a unique product – skreien. That just recently has started to get promoted in Italy.

Even though the excellent reputation for solid and sustainable fish-catching practices and Norwegian seafood has a good image among Italians, the country of origin matters little in the fresh cod market, which is a significant weakness. In other words, Norwegian cod has no competitive advantage compared to other suppliers and origins. They also discovered that increasing prices for fresh cod, low consumer awareness, and no seasonal change in consumption are weaknesses.

According to the rapport, Norwegian producers must raise awareness about their product – the cod. One way to do it is through the other seafood products from Norway that are already in the market (salmon and stockfish). They also write that they need to take advantage of different consumer trends, for example preference for wild fish, sustainability, and healthy nutrition. Furthermore, with modern retail is there several opportunities for collaboration, different types of campaigns, and potential growth. As I have already written, northern Italy seems more open to trying new food. Lastly, having no high and low consumption season can also be an opportunity in addition to weakness.

The threat they discovered is that competitors can take advantage of the marketing conducted on seafood done by Norwegian companies. It is also essential to explain the differences between the different product categories (for example, soaked baccalá); if not, can it create a dispensable competition? Increased prices can make consumers choose fish filets that are more suitable for them, given their economy and what they are familiar with.

5.0 Summary of the data collection

In this chapter, I present a summary of information I have gotten from the two respondents. I have written everything as closely and direct as they said and wrote, so that all information is correct and nothing gets lost in the transcription.

5.1 Summary from respondent A

Respondent A is the respondent I did a digital interview with through Teams. The person has good knowledge about the content from the rapport made for the Norwegian Seafood Council.

The respondent started the interview by telling me more about the rapport and the consulting company that made the rapport. Then the person told me about how the rapport was made, how the data was collected, and the main objective of the rapport. The objective was to provide

comprehensive information about the cod market in Italy. In this part of the interview, the respondent also clarified that this was not research that covered consumer insight. So, all information about consumers is secondary data. The respondent explains that Norway is one of the key players in the Italian market but not the biggest one. Therefore, they wanted to figure out what Norway could do better to solidify its place in the market to increase its market share.

Norway has a long history and traditions with stockfish in Italy. And even though fresh cod and stockfish are different types of products, history can be helpful in awareness and combining and tying products. However, it is a challenging and clear process. It requires careful and strategic marketing planning because of the fear that one product may cannibalize. Stockfish is an excellent example of a high-quality Norwegian product, but it is only a product that can grow a little in Italy since it is very regional. However, it can be used as social capital like it is already in the minds of consumers.

Italy is a very regional country, where regions are very different from each other, and each region has a lot of specifics. Because of this, the rapport includes information from Milano, Genova, Veneto, Rome, and Sicily – so it is a good representation of the different regions.

The Italian industry is very aware of the different product types of cod – stockfish, fresh and salted. However, the respondent does not think that is the case for the consumers and that the reason for that is regionalism. Some regions have long traditions of cooking with stockfish and baccalá. So, if there are any mistakes in the head of the consumers, will they mostly be between baccalá and stockfish. Both baccalá and stockfish are used in traditional cooking, so people associate Sunday lunches and Christmas feasts with this type of cod. One important thing is that if you have a family recipe that uses stockfish, can it not be changed to some other fish – this recipe will always use stockfish. Therefore, does the respondent think choosing the Lombardy region is a good idea, because it is one of the regions (especially in Milano) with no strong traditions of these fish products. This is because people in this region come from all over the country; they bring their traditions but are open to new things.

Another thing that the respondent said was that even though the consumers know the differences between the different products of cod, it is easy to get distracted in the supermarket. This is because everything is very clearly labeled regarding fresh cod or baccalá. But the baccalá is not dry and salted fillets; they are soaked in water and ready to be cooked. So visually, can these products (fresh cod and baccalá) look very similar, even though they are very different. So, this is something to be careful of in the market because these two may eat each other.

One of the key findings in the rapport was generally about the consumers' awareness and knowledge about what is what and what is specific for what. Because if you come from a family using baccalá, you might be more informed, but the younger generation is not really into cooking, so everyone is looking for things that are easy to prepare. So, the differences between the products are not very different, and the unique points of the fish are not very clear in the minds of consumers.

The good thing about fresh cod is that it is a relatively new product, it is the youngest product in the market, and has a shorter tradition and history than the other products. So, it is much easier to experiment with it. When it comes to increasing market share, especially in supermarkets, it goes this hand in hand with educating consumers. To teach consumers how to cook this, and not only how to cook it, but to cook it in a very creative and modern way. And the respondent says that they have seen other countries conducting such kind of promotion with great succession.

I then asked if Norwegian exporters put up the price, will the Italians think that a high price equals high quality - so that Norwegian cod can be positioned and differentiated as a high-quality product. The respondent said that the first challenge with this strategy is that the retail buyers may not be willing to take it in because the margin that retailers make from selling fillets is 50%. So, to sell it for €12.00, do they need to buy it for €6.00 to make money. The respondent does not see a retail buyer agreeing to this because they will not be able to sell it to the consumers - because price matters for consumers as well. On the other hand, it can work for a product like salmon because the image of Norwegian salmon is very heavy and well-designed – a result of years of work. So, one suggestion in the rapport is to try to include cod in the umbrella of seafood marketing so that the consumers start learning that merluzzo comes from Norway and that it is better than other origins. So, in a market like Italy, it can be difficult to base on price, like you can do in another market, for example, in Asia.

But the main thing is to teach consumers how to cook with this product (fresh cod filets from Norway). And in Italian retail, there is a leading product that people associate with merluzzo, and frozen cod is usually not the real cod; it is some other species. It is cheaper, but it disintegrates in the pan. So, you really need education. It is also essential to remember that you do not necessarily compete with other cod suppliers but with other fresh/frozen fish fields. And the consumers choose what they know, what is safe. The campaign and screen have been accepted very well by the consumers. But the thing about fresh cod is that there is nothing

special about it. It is white fish, and there are different countries that supply it, but there is no difference between the products. It has good qualities like lean meat, is very high in protein, and is a wild catch. It is from Norway, which is an added value because it has a good image as a seafood supplier. But other countries like Iceland and Faroe Island (so it is from the same sea) is also a supplier, so without spending money on marketing, it is hard to differentiate. So, the consumers need to be educated, but there is a threat that if Norway does it, it can be easier for other suppliers to benefit from that education. Fresh cod is a very tricky product.

One potential advantage is that Norway is the only country with an organization like the Norwegian Seafood Council that can do some marketing—for example, consumer education, different campaigns, promotions, etc. For example, one important activity they can do is campaigning about why the fillets are yellow. Because the Norwegian fillets are more yellow than the Icelandic, and consumers' minds prefer white. So, campaigns like the ones they have done in Portugal, for example, where they emphasize that yellow is good and natural, can be a good idea.

5.2 Summary from respondent B

Respondent B is from a company based in Milano and knows white fish and the Italian market well. I sent them some questions to see if I have the same understanding of the Italian market as they do and to confirm if my thoughts are correct.

Respondent B told me that based on their knowledge is loins that are skinless and boneless best product when targeting the Italian market. Quality is essential, but it is crucial with proper pricing positioning as well. They also added that quality is for long-lasting positions. Regarding the differential advantage Norwegian can use in their positioning, do they say that environment, respect for nature, and sustainability is vital for the Italians? They also think the image of “easy to cook, premium white fish for creative home chefs,” suggested in the rapport, is an excellent topic for a strategy. They think it is possible to change Italian buyer behavior, but it must be done with a good advertising campaign, and the penetration must be slow and gradual. They say the Italians are attracted by the Norwegian world and listen well mentally. Lastly, did they add a suggestion to not look only into cod. Tusk (brome), which has a white and firm texture, might be a product that, well supported by a good advertising campaign, might be appreciated by chefs.

6.0 Analysis

In this chapter, I will analyze the data I got from the interview with Respondent A and the questions from Respondent B. I am basing my analysis on the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. Therefore, this chapter will not include theories not mentioned in the data collection with Respondent A and Respondent B.

6.1 Niche marketing

The respondents say little about niche marketing. One reason for that can be, as I mentioned in chapter 2.1, that niche marketing is a relatively new term in marketing. However, they said some things that indirectly can be connected to niche marketing and a marketing strategy.

Respondent A said this about targeting the Italian (niche) market “*It requires very careful and strategic marketing planning because of the fear that one product may cannibalize.*” This was said because Norway has a long history and traditions of exporting stockfish to Italy. Since the niche is small, it is much easier to be careful and strategic with a niche strategy. Hence, the exporters know the customers better and therefore know how to communicate carefully without taking a market share from other Norwegian cod products. This can also be connected to why specialization is essential in niche marketing.

6.1.1 Specialization

In chapter 2.1.1, I present the term specialization and different ways to specialize. Specialization is when a business focuses on one or a few elements in the market strategy. In this sub-chapter, I will present how these different specialized methods were mentioned in the data collection.

One of the types of specialization that was presented was geographic specialization. When talking about Italians' awareness of the different types of cod (stockfish, fresh, baccalá), respondent A said, “*Choosing the Lombardy region is a good idea.*” The respondent then told me that the reason for that is that Lombardy is one of the regions where there are no strong traditions of eating other types of cod products. Therefore, it is more likely that they will try this new product since they do not have the traditions of eating stockfish or baccalá if Norwegian exporters specialize based on geography.

6.1.2 Positioning

Positioning is about the placement the product or service has in the mind of the consumer or your target market.

Respondent A talked a bit about the position Norwegian cod already have in the minds of some Italians, which is stockfish and baccalá. Many Italians use this in traditional cooking, and the respondent said that many associate it with Sunday lunches and Christmas feasts. Since stockfish and baccalá already have this position in the Italian market, can it be heard to change the consumer behavior for the people with these traditions. However, respondent A said stockfish and baccalá could be used as social capital. This means it can be possible to use the current position for stockfish and baccalá to establish a new position for fresh cod. Respondent A also said that the differences between the different products of cod are not very clear in the minds of consumers. This means it needs to be an excellent job positioning the fresh cod filets from Norway. So that the differences and uniqueness are apparent to the consumers, so there are no questions about why they should buy this specific product.

I asked respondent A about the possibility for Norwegian exporters of fresh cod to position themselves as a high-quality product by setting the price higher than the competitors. The respondent said the first challenge would be that the retailers will not take in the product because it is too expensive and will not sell. However, the price also matters for the consumers, and with their knowledge about the cod, won't they choose the Norwegian cod over the cheaper options just because a high price could mean high quality. Respondent B said quality is essential, especially if they want long-lasting positioning. Nevertheless, it is crucial to position right when it comes to pricing. So, it takes much education for the Italians if the Norwegian exporters want to position their product as a higher quality product – but it can be worth it if they want to stay in the market for a long time.

Both the respondents said something about using Norway as their country of origin as a positioning strategy. Respondent A said that Norway as a country of origin is an added value because it has a good image as a seafood supplier. However, didn't the respondent think tht this would be a considerable added value. Respondent B said that the environment, respect for nature, and sustainability are important for the Italians. Therefore, this can also be a way to position the product – if they are a sustainable production that cares about the environment.

Regarding Norway, respondent A said that one advantage is that Norway is the only country with an organization like the Norwegian Seafood Council. This can also be used as a positioning strategy by positioning the product as a trustworthy and safe choice.

Respondent A said that fresh cod is a new product in the market; it is the youngest product and therefore does not have long traditions and history like many other products. This means that

the exporters of Norwegian cod can experiment with the positioning in the market. They do not have a history that keeps them in one position. They can try one positioning strategy; if that does not work, they can change it and try another.

6.2 Marketing mix

Marketing mix – or the four Ps in a market strategy is product, place, price, and promotion. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, am I going because of the limitation of the thesis only going to focus on two of the Ps: promotion and product. Since I have talked a little bit with Respondent A about the price, and Respondent B mentioned it, I decided to include the price as well. Price came up when discussing positioning, so I have decided to only write about price as a strategy. So, I have already mentioned price in the last chapter about the positioning as a high-quality product with a higher price.

6.2.1 Product

Product is what the business is selling, and in the matter of the marketing mix must, the product satisfy the consumer's need and desire. The product in this context is high-quality cod files from Norway. However, the data collection shows that “a high-quality cod fillet from Norway” may not be enough to target the Italian niche market.

Respondent A said, “*Everyone is looking for things that are easy to prepare.*” This could mean that Norwegian exporters of cod could benefit if the product they are selling is almost ready to eat, with little cooking needed. Respondent A could tell me that the exporters of stockfish and baccalá already do this by soaking the product in water, so it is ready to be cooked. Since fresh cod from Norway is a new product, can the exporters experiment and test with different types of products to see what is most suitable for the Italian market.

Respondent B said that “*loins that are skinless and boneless is the best product for the Italian niche,*” in their opinion is the best product when targeting the Italian market. This supports Respondent A's statement that everyone is looking for things that are easy to prepare. Since, removing the skin and bone from the fillets saves the consumers much time, and they can put the fillets straight in the oven.

But even though both respondents seem to agree that the product needs to be easy to cook, respondent A said that “*the main thing is to teach consumers how to cook with this product.*” The reason for this statement is that in the Italian retail market, product consumers often call other types of fish for merluzzo. This species is cheaper, but it disinterests in the pan. If the consumers have learned that cod does not disinterest in the pan, they might buy the real

product. So, according to this, should the products presented in the Italian markets both be easy to prepare and a product they can spend some time in the kitchen and learn how to prepare.

6.2.2 Promotion

Promotion is the other P from the marketing mix I use for this thesis. Promotion is about how the product is advertised, and as I wrote in Chapter 2.2.3, it is a very complex element in the marketing mix.

Promotion is, among other things, about how the product is presented in the store. According to respondent A, this is something that the exporters of Norwegian cod should be aware of in their strategy when targeting the Italian market. Because as I mentioned in the last chapter, do the exporters of stockfish and baccalá soak the product so it is ready to be cooked. Respondent A said that even though consumers know the difference between the different types of cod products, they can be visually very similar in retail. The labels are clear about whether it is fresh cod, but there can be some confusion.

In the last chapter, respondent A also mentioned that *“the main thing is to teach consumers how to cook with this product.”* Educating consumers is a big job, but Respondent A mentioned that several times during the interview. One of the ways to educate was, among other things, to teach consumers how to cook the product in a creative and modern way. The respondent has seen this being done in other countries with similar products, and it has succeeded.

I did discuss the strategy presented in the rapport with both respondents, with the image of “easy to cook, premium with fish for creative home chefs”. Respondent B said that this *“can be an excellent topic for a strategy”* and that changing consumer behavior in the Italian market is possible. However, they said that that must be done with a good advertising campaign and that the penetration into the market must be done slowly and gradually.

Respondent A talked about NSC and its role in promoting Norwegian fresh cod. The respondent pointed out that Norway is the only country of origin with this type of organization, which can be used in consumer education, campaign, and other types of promotion. One specific example that the respondent said is a campaign like NSC has had in Portugal about why the fillet from Norway is more yellow than other countries. This type of promotion can also affect specialization and positioning compared to other countries of origin.

7.0 Discussion

In the last two chapters, I have presented and analyzed the data I have gotten through my primary data collection. I analyzed the data against the theoretical framework, but a big part of my thesis is secondary data I got from the rapport from NSC. So, in this chapter, I will discuss all findings against each other – the theoretical framework, the data from the rapport, and the data collected from the respondents. First, I will present a model based on the model from the theory chapter (Ch. 2.3), where I show the connections between the theoretical framework and the data collection. And then am I going to explain these in more detail. To follow the same structure that I have had in the whole thesis are the names and order of the sub-chapters based on how it was in the theory chapter, but without the chapter about niche marketing. The reason is that niche marketing is the strategy I will present in the conclusion chapter (Ch.8.0).

7.1 Model

In chapter 2.3, I present a model of which theories would affect the strategy for how Norwegian exporters could target the Italian market. After collecting data and more research about Italy, I have now developed the model and made it more complex:

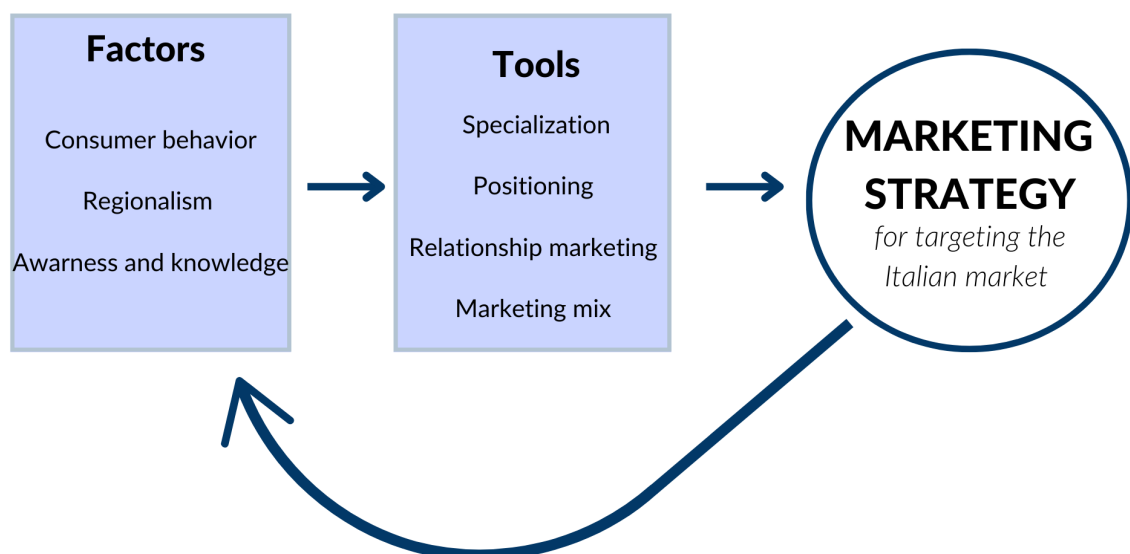


Figure 2: Theoretical framework with factors

The model stills show the theories, but now I have called them *tools*. This is because the exporters of Norwegian cod can use these theories to make the best strategy when targeting the Italian market. Of course, they can make a strategy without them, but based on the knowledge I have gained during this thesis, the strategy will be much better when using these tools.

As the model shows, these tools are affected by what I have called factors. These factors are themes I have encountered several times when working on this thesis, both in the data collection and when I have read other relevant literature. These themes are conditions that they need to evaluate before using the tools (theories) to make the strategy. For example, it is essential to know how much knowledge the market has of the product before making a marketing campaign and advertisements. These themes will be mentioned in the rest of this chapter so that I will explain each.

Consumer behavior: Consumer behavior is what the consumers do and how they decide when they are choosing which product or service they want to buy. The exporters must understand the buyer behavior in the Italian market, why it is like that, and how they can affect it.

Regionalism: Italy is a country where there are significant differences between the regions of the country. This is something that the exporters should take into consideration, both when targeting the market and if they are later going to expand to other parts of the country.

Awareness and knowledge: Italian consumers must learn more about fresh Norwegian cod. This means that the exporters can't just start selling the product without doing any educating and promoting first.

The last part of the model is the marketing strategy that I will present later in the thesis. This suggests what the exporters should include when targeting the Italian market. This strategy is based on the other parts of the model, the theories, and the discoveries presented in the thesis. Moreover, if the marketing strategy is successful, can it affect the different factors in the long term. For example, can a good marketing strategy raise the awareness and knowledge of the consumers – and then do they might need to change some of the elements in the marketing mix. Now that I have explained the model, including the different factors, will I explain this in more detail based on the theory, data from the rapport, and other literature I have presented earlier in the thesis.

7.2 Specialization

Specialization is when the business focuses on one or a few elements in the market strategy, and there are several ways to do it. Could all the different specialization methods be relevant to the strategy for Norwegian fresh cod exporters targeting the Italian niche market? Yes. But based on my findings, I have chosen to focus on these three:

The first type of specialization is geographical, presented indirectly in the research question. Because it says that this thesis is about targeting a niche market in Italy, but since this will be a niche strategy, should the niche be smaller. The rapport described the northern part of Italy as the best region for the Norwegian exporters to target, and this did. I also got confirmation from one of the respondents that said that Italy is a very regional country.

The Lombardy region is the best geographical place to target because it is not on the coast, so they cannot fish the fish itself. In addition to Milan being a city that many Italians move to, are they more open to trying new things. Lombardy does also have a strong economy and purchasing power. This means that if Norwegian exporters want to position themselves as a high-quality product with a high price, these consumers can afford it. But if it is a good idea to position the fresh cod with a high price, I will return to it later.

Another way to specialize is vertical-level specialization. This is when the business focuses on one part of the distribution channel. The retailer has been mentioned several times in this thesis, and it is the best strategy at first to sell the fresh cod from retailers. This is mainly because as the rapport showed is 85% of the volume of cod that is distributed in Italy distributed through retail. As I discovered from the data collection does the Italian market needs to be educated about this new product. Therefore, is it better to focus on only educate the Italians, and not changing their buying behavior at the same time by wanting to increase the volume of cod being sold at restaurants.

The last way to specialize that I will discuss is product-line specialization. This thesis is only about one product, fresh Norwegian cod fillets. But as I discovered in the analysis, can a good strategy be to focus on different product lines. As one of the respondents said, should the cod be positioned as an easy-to-cook product but also teach the consumers different ways to cook with this product. Therefore, is there different ways to specialize when it comes to the product. They can teach the consumers that cod is a very versatile product, and that the same product can be both easy and quick to cook, but it can also be used in more advanced cooking. They can enter the market with two products – one for each need.

7.3 Relationship marketing

At the start of this thesis, did I think relationship marketing would have a more significant impact on the marketing strategy than it does. Because as Chapter 4, “the line of business,” presents, Norway exported cod for many years, and Italy has long traditions of being an

importer of Norwegian stockfish. This has taught the exporters of stockfish about how vital trust and good relationships are for the Italians.

However, data collected from this thesis show that history, traditions, and these existing relationships that have developed will not help Norwegian exporters when targeting the Italian market for fresh cod. But I have learned that Italy has a high level of corruption, so having a solid and trustful relationship with the retailers is advantageous. In addition, a strong relationship with partners creates a sustainable resource that cannot easily be taken over by competitors. This can be very important for the Norwegian fresh cod exporters since there are few differences between the product, country of origin, and positionings between the competitors.

Furthermore, can having a good relationship with the retailer selling the product in Italy make it easier for the Norwegian exporters to have control over the market especially if the marketing is done from Norway. If they have a good relationship with the retailers, can they give feedback and first-hand information on the market. This can include the effect on different campaigns if they see a change in the type of consumers, trends, needs, behavior, and more.

7.4 Positioning

Positioning is about where you want your product in the target market's mind. In this case: what place should the Norwegian fresh cod have in the minds of the market in the Lombardy region? So how can Norwegian exporters of fresh cod create an advantage that is a value to the customers? I wrote about the six different positioning options in the chapter about positioning (Ch. 2.1.3). Businesses can use aspects from the different approaches. However, there is a risk that this can confuse the consumers if they try to communicate different things. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on three of the positioning options.

The most common positioning strategy is price and quality. The fresh cod from Norway has a high quality, in addition to the product's characteristics (healthy, from the fresh oceans of Norway), gives the product both a social and functional value. Usually, businesses use a high price to indicate the product has good quality. But respondent A said there would be some challenges with setting the price high, one being that the retailers do not want to take in the product. But both respondents agreed that quality is essential in the positioning strategy. One problem with implementing the Norwegian cod in the Italian market is that many competitors. But, if they fight for the consumers only by price, will it be a hard fight to win.

The second option is the use/application option, a strategy based on how the consumers use the product (Panwar & Patra, 2017, p.122). In Chapter 4, I learned that consumer behavior in Italy is changing. Consumers want something easy and fast to prepare, and cod is a viable product that is easy to cook. Therefore, can one positioning strategy be to position fresh cod as a product that is easy, fast, and healthy to cook when you come home after a long day at work. The cod can potentially be the consumer's go-to product in everyday life.

Conversely, with cod being a viable product, can it also be a product to use for special occasions. For example, when you are having guests over and want to spend some time in the kitchen preparing a high-quality dinner. So, there are several ways to position based on use/application, but as I wrote at the beginning of the chapter, doing too much is a risk of confusing the consumers. But with a comprehensive market study based on the consumers, it is easier to say which of the two strategies I presented is most suitable. The fast & easy for the weekends, or slow & advanced for the weekends.

The last option is going to discuss the feature/attributes option. This is when the firm bases the strategy on what is unique about the product. This might be the hardest to implement for the exporters of Norwegian fresh cod because, as I have already established: the different products in the market are very similar. Fresh cod has many good qualities and attributes; for example, it is healthy, has sustainable production, high in protein, and is a very viable product. Respondent B said attributes like environment, respect for nature, and sustainability are essential for the Italians. These are attributes that are similar for all the suppliers of cod. But this can be used when positioning fresh cod from other attributes – for example, meat.

But if they want to position themselves from other suppliers of cod, they might need other features in the positioning. One advantage that the exporters of Norwegian Cod have is that NSC has offices in Italy. With their help and promotion, they can position themselves as a trustworthy and safe choice since NSC has long experience in seafood export and the Italian market.

Respondent A said that since fresh cod is a new product in the market, can they experiment with its positioning. They can try one positioning strategy; if that works, they can change it and try another. To draw a parallel to the theory, can this be seen as the same as choosing different strategy options. So, it can be a risk of it confusing the customers.

7.5 Marketing mix

The marketing mix consists of four key elements in a market strategy, but as I already have explained, am I in this thesis just focusing on the product and promotion.

7.5.1 Product

Product is what the business is selling, and in the context of the marketing mix is it about the item being sold must satisfy a consumer's need or desire (Yasar, 2022).

Respondent B said that boneless and skinless loins are the best product for the Italian market. This is consent with the information about the product from the rapport, which says that curio (hearts) from the back of the fish are the most premium and popular in the Italian cod market. The cuori is almost completely boneless and skinless.

From the data collection came information about the product that is being presented in the Italian market should be easy to prepare, but they can also be more advanced if the consumers want to spend some time in the kitchen preparing them. And as I discussed in the last chapter about positioning, can it be a risk of confusing the consumers when testing different strategies.

But there might be a way to have two types of products without confusing the consumers. This is because cod is a versatile product that can be used in many ways. So, the same product can be both quick and advanced. Of course, there can still make some confusion when it comes to the strategy about positioning and promotion, but the exporters do not have to produce two different products – it is enough with one. I will discuss the problem this can make for the promotion in the next chapter.

Like the different promoting strategies, it is hard to say what type of product is most suitable when targeting the Italian market without doing a market strategy among the consumers.

7.5.2 Promotion

Promotion is all about the communication between the business and the consumers and is, therefore, a very complex element in the marketing mix – but an essential part. For example, the respondents from the data collection think the Norwegian exporters of fresh cod can target the Italian market for fresh cod. But they say that it is a long-term job.

Promotions have many elements, so it is crucial to select where to start. The first thing is to decide where they want to communicate with their target market and then what they want to communicate. Since I have not collected primary data from the consumers, these are some

things that I cannot write much about, so this is not something that I am going to include in the strategy.

The SWOT analysis from the rapport (Ch, 4.4) shows that Norway is the only country that conducts any seafood-focused marketing in Italy, and this is a Norwegian strength exporter can use in the educational work to build good knowledge about Norwegian fresh cod. When I analyzed the data based on the theory of promotion (Ch. 6.2.2), did I write about how respondent A talked about NSC and the role they can have in promoting fresh Norwegian cod. This is something that can be very useful when promoting fresh Norwegian cod.

The most crucial part of promotion is educating the consumers since the awareness and knowledge about fresh Norwegian cod could be higher. There are many ways to do this. One strategy can be to focus on the differences between fresh cod and baccalá, so the consumers know when to buy what product. Another approach is to educate the consumers about Norway and Norway as a seafood exporter, so they know what they are buying.

8.0 Conclusion

The research question for this thesis is:

How can Norwegian seafood exporters target the Italian niche market for high quality cod filets.

I have decided to answer the RQ by making a simple marketing strategy to target the Italian niche market. I have chosen to do it like this because when targeting a market, you need to use different elements that together makes a strategy. Therefore, I have decided to present the essential elements of the strategy in a model:

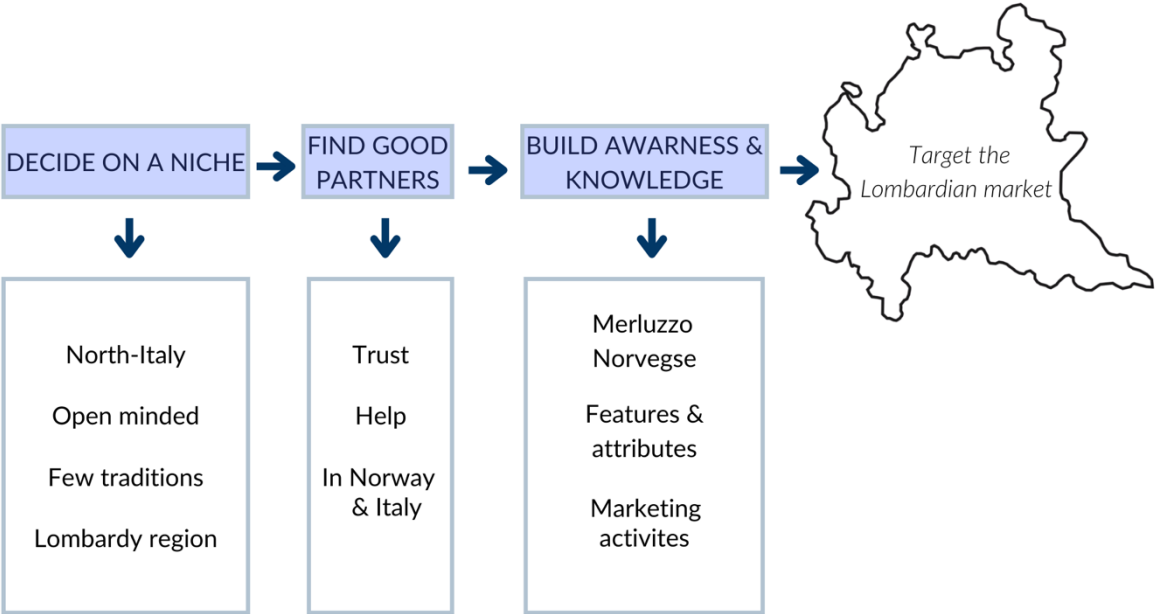


Figure 3: Marketing strategy

For the rest of this chapter, I will explain these different elements in more detail, in addition to why this is the best choice of strategy.

Based on the findings in this thesis, a niche marketing strategy is the best approach when targeting the Italian market for fresh cod. The implicit reasoning is that export of cod products like fresh cod from Norway may benefit from starting with a smaller group of key consumers – a nice. Exporters may consider expanding to a larger market when this niche is successfully established. Some qualities for the niche include high purchasing power, few traditions with eating seafood, and a relationship to and familiarity with Norway as the country of origin.

The geographical specialization – or the niche for this targeting is the Lombardy region. The reason for that is that there are no strong traditions with eating other types of cod – so this is a

brand-new market for Norwegian exporters to target. Since they do not have the traditions, it is more likely that they will try different types of cod instead of going with a safe choice. As one of the respondents told me: if one recipe contains stockfish, will they not swap it out with an alternative product. In addition, many people move to Lombardy (mainly Milan), so they are more open to trying new things.

Targeting the Lombardian niche market for fresh cod will take time and money. The reason is that it needs to be done a big educational job to teach the consumers why they should buy Norwegian fresh cod instead of the competitors. One of the most critical reasons it can be hard to target the Italian niche market in Italy is the need for more awareness and knowledge about fresh Norwegian cod in Italy. People buy merluzzo and think it is cod – when it could be something else. So, the first thing that needs to be done is to create a brand name – for example, “Merluzzo Norvegese” that only approved exporters can use. Something like what we in Norway call “NYT NORGE.” In this way can, Norwegian exporters prevent other countries of origin from using the advertising Norwegians are doing.

Even though relationship marketing won't significantly impact the strategy, is it never wrong to have a good relationship with the partners you are working with. Norway is a small country, so the best thing to do is to work together. The exporters of fresh Norwegian cod should use their network and relationships that is built on trust. For example, they may know some exporters of stockfish that could introduce them to someone in Italy, that can help them when targeting the Italian market. This can make it easier for the exporters to control the market; they can get a lot of first-hand and helpful information. It could also save them both time and money in the promoting strategy since they do not have to use many recourses to gather information, and they will not need to test all the different strategies – since the partners in Italy have a good idea of what the market wants and needs.

The next thing to do is to start the job by educating the target group. One of the respondents in the data collection said that targeting the Italian market “*requires very careful and strategic marketing planning because of the fear that one product may cannibalize.*” This was said because Norway has a long history and traditions of exporting stockfish to Italy. Since the niche is small, it is much easier to be careful and strategic with a niche strategy. Hence, the suppliers know the customers better and therefore know how to communicate carefully without taking a market share from other Norwegian cod exporters. So, it is important to remember that the things I present next must be done carefully.

Fresh cod is a very versatile product in the market; therefore, this should be one of the key elements in the strategy. This is because the studies in this thesis have shown that consumers want something easy to cook on weekdays, but that also can be something extra for the weekends. And as someone that has eaten cod for her whole life, I know that cod is the perfect product for this mix of consumer needs. You can cook it in the oven for 20 minutes and eat it with carrots & potatoes, have it in tacos, make fish sticks, or slow-cook it. Therefore, should the exporters focus on a product-line specialization in the form of one product. The product should be loins – or, as the Italians call it, *cuori*. This will not confuse the consumers since they only have one product.

The best positioning strategy when targeting the Lombardian market is to position the Norwegian fresh cod by features and attributes. In the discussion chapter, I write that this is a difficult option because fresh cod products are the same. But the consumers must know about the good qualities that the cod have – or else they will not buy any cod in the competition between other products. And if Norwegian exporters implement “Merluzzo Norvegese,” cannot other countries flow on the marketing done for Norwegian fresh cod.

The attributes should be country of origin, versatile, healthy, easy to cook, and sustainable. During the thesis, it has been established that the country of origin matters little to the consumers. But if Norwegian exporters of cod go together with NSC to implement “Merluzzo Norvegese” and teach consumers why this is a good, high-quality product, will the country-of-origin matter more. I did also learn from one of the respondents that the Norwegian world attracts Italians, and they pay attention to what is being said. The Norwegian fresh cod should be the product Italians buy when they want a quick, easy, and healthy dinner after a long day at work, but it should also be the product they buy when they have friends over for dinner on the weekends.

The last element in the strategy is maybe the hardest one and the most crucial one – the promotion. In this part of the strategy that the educational job has to be done. One of the most important things is identifying the target audience and determining which channels they use. As I have mentioned before, a weakness in this thesis is that no data is collected from the consumers. Therefore, it is hard to identify the target audience and channels. But from the data collection, I know that one of the most important things for the Norwegian exporters of fresh cod is to educate the target audience. So, in this chapter, I will write more about **what** should be promoted and not **where** it should be promoted.

There needs to be different campaigns over a longer period. The different campaigns should be about one specific attribute the exporters want to market and teach the consumers. The most important thing to communicate in this education process is:

- How easy it is to cook and prepare.
- How versatile the product is.
- Information about Norway
 - General information about Norway
 - Norway is a country of origin with a long history of exporting seafood to the world, particularly Italy.
- Sustainability
- About the cod
 - Healthy
 - How easy it is to cook.
 - How versatile the product is.
- Why it is yellow, and that it means that the product is natural.

The most important thing with the promotion is to gain awareness and knowledge about the product and make the consumers want to buy the product. There are many ways to do that. For starters, the best activities to do regular marketing campaigns in the channels that the target audience uses, where they communicate the different things I listed above in a fun, creative and informal way. Taste tasting can also be a good activity so that the consumers can see how versatile the product is and taste the high-quality filet. A bigger activity they can do is hosting different events. Here they can have cooking classes to show how easy it is to make good meals with fresh cod; they can invite influencers and other celebrities that fit into the niche and have short, fun, and informal lessons about Norwegian fresh cod.

So, there are many opportunities how to promote the Norwegian fresh cod. But it will take some time, and for it to succeed, they need a big budget – for market activities can be expensive.

8.1 Limitations of this thesis

The biggest limitation of this thesis is that the information about the consumers is all secondary, and I have made some assumptions based on this. The best thing would be to get information from them. Then would I have gotten useful information about the target audience, for example, more details about who they are and which channels they use. This would make the strategy much better. But if I wanted to gain enough information to give a valid conclusion, did I have

to talk to a big group of Italians to get a good representation of the population. And to do this, did I need to do a quantitative approach in addition to the qualitative approach I have had with the respondents. It is possible to make a mixed approach. However, that would be too complex for a task like this.

Another weakness of this thesis is that I have only talked to two respondents. I should have had more respondents to be sure that the information I had gotten was accurate, especially when it came to respondent B which I used to confirm the things I have already learned working with the thesis. The reason for the few respondents is that I, for a long time, hoped and thought I could travel to Italy. But when I decided that was impossible, did I have little time to find more respondents who wanted to talk to me. The lack of respondents who wanted to talk to me about this topic is one of the main reasons I could not travel to Italy, in addition to it taking some time to get funding to travel.

8.2 Further research

This thesis can help producers of fresh Norwegian cod learn more about the market for it in Italy and be give useful information on how to expand their market to Italy.

I also hope that this thesis is interesting and valuable for exporters from other businesses, academia, and others interested in the Italian market or niche marketing.

For future research, it will be interesting to hear about the opinion and look more closely at the attitude of the final consumers of the cod in Italy. These people can tell us whether it is a market for fresh Norwegian cod in Italy and what they want to buy.

References

- Andahl, P. & Brækkan, E. (2023, 4th of January). Norge eksporterte sjømat for 151,4 milliarder kroner i 2022. Norges Sjømatråd. Retrieved from: <https://seafood.no/aktuelt/nyheter/norge-eksporterte-sjomat-for-1514-milliarder-kroner-i-2022/>
- Andreassen, K. (2022, 1st of September). Markedsmulighetene for fersk, norsk, torsk i nord-Italia. [Master Thesis, Nord University].
- Berkman, W.H & Gilson, C. (1987). Consumer Behaviour: Concepts and Strategies.
- Business research methodology (n.d.). Read on 7th of May. Retrieved from: <https://research-methodology.net/research-methods/qualitative-research/case-studies/>
- Bye, H-G (2022, 5th of May). Eksportverdien av laks og torsk har aldri vært høyere enn i årets første kvartal. Retrieved from High North News. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/nb/eksportverdien-av-laks-og-torsk-har-aldri-vaert-hoyere-enn-i-arets-forste-kvartal>
- Coursera (2022, 10th of august). The 4 Ps of Marketing: What They Are and How to Use Them. Retrieved from: <https://www.coursera.org/articles/4-ps-of-marketing>
- Dalgic, T. and Leeuw, M. (1994), "Niche Marketing Revisited: Concept, Applications and Some European Cases", European Journal of Marketing, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 39-55. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090569410061178>
- Egga Utvikling (n.d). Cod Cluster. Retrieved on 2023, 22nd of May. Egga Utvikling. <https://www.egga.no/portefoelje/cod-cluster>
- Fiskerinæringens Felles Kompetansestyre (n.d.). Tørrfisk. Retrieved from Norges Råfisklag. <https://www.rafisklaget.no/media/cfvjk4oj/torrfiskbrosjyre.pdf>
- FN-sambandet (2020). Korrupsjon. Retrieved from FN-sambandet. <https://www.fn.no/Statistikk/korrupsjon>
- Hallenstvedt & Dørum (2021, 25th of February). Norsk Fiskerihistorie. Retrieved from Store norske leksikon. https://snl.no/Norsk_fiskerihistorie

- Høberg, N. E. (2022, 2nd of June). Tørrfisk. Retrieved from Store Norske leksikon. <https://snl.no/t%C3%B8rrfisk>
- Johannessen, A., Christoffersen, L. & Tufte, A.P. (2011). Forskningsmetode for økonomisk-administrative fag. (3rd edt). Abstrakt forlag.
- Johannessen, A., Christoffersen, L. & Tufte, A.P. (2016). Introduksjon til samfunnsvitenskapelig metode. (5.edt). Abstrakt forlag.
- Kotler, P. (1989), "From mass marketing to mass customization", Planning Review, Vol. 17 No. 5, pp. 10-47. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb054267>
- Lima, G. (2022, 21st of March). Lombardia. Retrieved from Store Norske leksikon. <https://snl.no/Lombardia>
- Lima, G. (2022b, 21st of March). Økonomi og næringsliv i Italia. Retrieved from Store Norske leksikon. https://snl.no/%C3%98konomi_og_n%C3%A6ringsliv_i_Italia
- Lima, G. (2023, 16th of March). Italia. Retrieved from Norske Leksikon. <https://snl.no/Italia>
- Lokalhistoriewiki (2022, 1st of decemeber). Tørrfisk. Retrieved from lokalhistoriewiki. <https://lokalhistoriewiki.no/index.php/T%C3%B8rrfisk>
- Lysvold, S.S. (2019, 23rd of January). Norsk torsk sendes til Kina og fylles med vann og kjemikalier. Retrieved from NRK. <https://www.nrk.no/nordland/norsk-torsk-sendes-til-kina-og-fylles-med-vann-og-kjemikalier-1.14393315>
- Marketing Efforts: Definition, Examples & Types. (2021, 29th of April). Retrieved from study.com. <https://study.com/academy/lesson/marketing-efforts-definition-examples-types.html>
- Martinussen, M.T (2022, 5th of October). - Eksportverdien av fryst torsk har aldri vært høyere i et tredje kvartal. Retrieved from Fiskeribladet. <https://www.fiskeribladet.no/marked/-eksportverdien-av-fryst-torsk-har-aldri-vart-hoyere-i-et-tredje-kvartal/2-1-1327128>
- Norwegian Seafood Council (n.d). Read 25th of September. Nøkkeltall fra 2021. Retrieved from Norsk Sjømatråd. [https://nokkeltall.seafood.no/.](https://nokkeltall.seafood.no/)

- Norwegian Seafood Council (n.d). Read 26th of March. Consumer Tracking. 2002-01, Italy [PowerPoint Presentation]. https://sfd-seafood-prod-cdn.azureedge.net/49e249/globalassets/markedsinnsikt/rapporter/seafood_italy_2022-06-07.pdf
- Norwegian Seafood Council (2022, 13th of October). Tørrfisk I Italia: Gamle tradisjoner på vei mot moderne vaner. Retrieved from Norsk Sjømatråd. <https://seafood.no/aktuelt/nyheter/torrfisk-i-italia-gamle-tradisjoner-pa-vei-mot-moderne-vaner/>
- Nuremberg (2022, 25th of October). The average purchasing power of Europeans in 2022 is €16,344. Retrieved from Growth from Knowledge. <https://www.gfk.com/press/average-purchasing-power-of-europeans-in-2022-is-16344>
- Nygård, R., E. & Ingebrigtsen, S.K. (2019, 14th of May). Tørrfiskmarkedet i Italia – et tradisjonelt marked i endring. [Master Thesis, Nord University]. Nord Open Research. <https://nordopen.nord.no/nord-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2620586/nyg%C3%A5rdIngebrigtsen.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Oghojafor, A.B & Ladipo, A.K.P (2012). Approaches for Generating and Evaluating Product Positioning Strategy. International Journal of Business Administration. Vol.4, No.1, pp.46-52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/ijba.v4n1p46>
- Panwar, Diksha & Patra, Sidheswar. (2017). Study on product positioning efforts of multinational fast-food chain in India-An exploration. Asian Journal of Research in Business Economics and Management. Vol.7, No.7, pp.120-134
- Sander, K. (2021, 23rd of October). Markedsføringsmix og konkurransevirkemidler. Retrieved from Estudie. <https://estudie.no/markedsforingsmiks/>.
- Sander, K. (2022a, 25th of March). Deskriptiv design. Retrieved from Estudie. <https://estudie.no/deskriptivt-design/>
- Sander, K. (2022b, 25th of March). Kausalt design. Retrieved from Estudie.: <https://estudie.no/kausalt-design/>

- Sander, K. (2022c, 25th of March). Eksplorerende design. Retrieved from Estudie.
<https://estudie.no/eksplorerende-design/>
- SendPulse, (2023, 22nd of march). Promotion mix. Retrieved from SendPulse.
<https://sendpulse.com/support/glossary/promotion-mix>
- Shani, D. and Chalasani, S. (1992), "Exploiting Niches Using Relationship Marketing",
Journal of Consumer Marketing, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 33-42.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/07363769210035215>
- SurveyMonkey (n.d.). Forskjellen mellom kvantitative og kvalitative undersøkelser. Read 27th
of April. <https://no.surveymonkey.com/mp/quantitative-vs-qualitative-research/>
- Squared (n.d.). Read 14th of November. Positioning in Marketing Guide.
<https://squareup.com/au/en/townsquare/brand-positioning>
- Sørli, D. (2021, 20th of April). Skreien tar Europa med storm. Retrieved from Norsk
Sjømatråd. <https://seafood.no/aktuelt/nyheter/skreien-tar-europa-med-storm/>
- Tamagnini, V. and Tregear, A. (1998), "An assessment of niche marketing opportunities in
the delicatessen meat sector", British Food Journal, Vol. 100 No. 5, pp. 228-235.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/00070709810221445>
- Teece, J. D. (2010). Handbook of the Economics of Innovation Chapter 16 - Technological
Innovation and the Theory of the Firm: The Role of Enterprise-Level Knowledge,
Complementarities, and (Dynamic) Capabilities. North-Holland. Vol.1, pp. 679-730.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-7218\(10\)01016-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-7218(10)01016-6)
- Tikkanen, A. (2023, 2nd of March). Lombardy. Retrieved from Encyclopedia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Lake-Lugano>
- Toften, K. and Hammervoll, T. (2010), "Niche marketing and strategic capabilities: an
exploratory study of specialized firms", Marketing Intelligence & Planning, Vol. 28
No. 6, pp. 736-753.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/02634501011078138>

Toften, K. and Hammervoll, T. (2013), "Niche marketing research: status and challenges", Marketing Intelligence & Planning, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 272-285.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/02634501311324618>

Twin, A. (2023, 28th of March). The 4 Ps of Marketing and How To Use Them in Your Strategy. Retrieved from Investopedia. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/four-ps.asp>

Vøllestad, A.L. (2021, 21st of December). Torsk. Retrieved from Store Norske Leksikon.

https://snl.no/torsk?gclid=Cj0KCQjwi46iBhDyARIsAE3nVrYH3uRmhW0P3hy0sBRdBCj8qLGPq8qZ2MZb_SIkz0-DPrPxQJQ4fU4aAjNxEALw_wcB

Ward, S. (2022, 14th of October). What is Target Marketing? Retrieved from In The Balance.

<https://www.thebalancemoney.com/target-marketing-2948355>

Yasar, K. (2022, May). 4 Ps of marketing mix. What is. Retrieved from Techtarget.

<https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/Four-Ps>

Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Before the interview

- Say a little about the consequences of taking part in the interview: for example, feedback on the result and that the informant can read the finished product.
- Go through how I'm going to record the interview if that find with the informant, and that the data will be deleted when the study is finished.
- Guarantee anonymity for the informant.
- Inform that the informant has the right to cancel the interview at any time.
- Indicate how long the interview will last.

Introduction

- Introduce myself, the background for my thesis, and what I will be asking questions about.
- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, and your role in making of the rapport for the Norwegian Sea Council?
- Can you tell me a little bit more about the study done for NSC?
- Do you have a background connected to cod in the Italian market? If yes, what?
- Ask if its okay if I can send some follow up questions if needed, because of the constitutional day.

The main part

- What separates Norwegian cod from the competitors – what impression does the Italian have on Norwegian cod?
- It's a very versatile product. Build an image of "easy to cook, premium fish for creative home chefs" - is this the right approach?
- Are the Italians very "locked" to what they are used to? Is it easy to change the buying behavior?
- How to succeed? Higher prices? Better quality? What does the Italian preferer?
- Do you think Italians know what the difference between stockfish, skrei and fresh cod is?

- Based on the rapport and what you know – do you think its possible for Norwegian producers of fresh cod to target the Italian market?
- How can Norwegian exporters of seafood position themselves to stand out in the Italian market?
- What are some challenges the Norwegian Seafood exporters can face when entering the Italian market? And how can they overcome it?

Appendix 2: Information letter to Respondent A

Some information:

- The information gathered is only going to be used for my master thesis, and all data and information will be deleted when the study is finished.
- There will be full anonymity.
- You can withdraw any time. All your personal data will then be deleted immediately.

About the study

- This is a master thesis, and it's the last work to finish my masters in science of business, with a main profile in international marketing and business at Nord University in Bodø.

Italians have long traditions with eating Norwegian Seafood, especially stockfish and salted fish. There is a change in the typical family in Italy, leading the Italians asking for different types of products. The Norwegian seafood has a strong position; however, studies shows that Norway has a small market share in Italy – only 0,3%. Because of this is my research question:

How can Norwegian seafood exporters target the Italian niche market for high quality cod filets.

Niche marketing: the process of carving out, protecting and offering a valued product to a narrow part of the market that displays different needs.

I have chosen to use a niche strategy because when targeting a new market do I think it easier to start with a smaller group. When this niche is successfully established, can they start to consider expanding to a larger market.

The questions

I know that some of these questions are quite big, and I don't expect you to have all the answers to them. But I think it will be interesting and useful to hear what you have to say and your reflections around it – and maybe that they may be a conversation starter for something that I haven't thought about.

- Can you tell me a little bit about the study you have done for NSC?

- Do you think it's best to specialize (focus on) the distribution channel, product-line, quality-price ratio – or something else?
- Do you think Italians know what the difference between stockfish, skrei and fresh cod is?
- Based on the rapport and what you know - What differential advantage, that Norwegian producers can use in their positioning (that Norwegian cod have) is important for Italians?
- Based on the rapport and what you know – do you think it's possible for Norwegian producers of fresh cod to target the Italian market?
- And do you have any thoughts about what the “perfect” niche (segment) for Norwegian cod is?

Appendix 3: Information letter to Respondent B

Some information:

- The information gathered is only going to be used for my master thesis, and all data and information will be deleted when the study is finished.
- There will be full anonymity.
- If you want to read the finished thesis, can I send it when it's done.

About the study

- This is a master thesis, and it's the last work to finish my masters in science of business, with a main profile in international marketing and business at Nord University in Bodø.

Italians have long traditions with eating Norwegian Seafood, especially stockfish and salted fish. There is a change in the typical family in Italy, leading the Italians asking for different types of products. The Norwegian seafood has a strong position; however, studies shows that Norway has a small market share in Italy – only 0,3%. Because of this is my research question:

How can Norwegian seafood exporters target the Italian niche market for high quality cod filets.

Niche marketing: the process of carving out, protecting and offering a valued product to a narrow part of the market that displays different needs.

I have chosen to use a niche strategy because when targeting a new market do I think it easier to start with a smaller group. When this niche is successfully established, can they start to consider expanding to a larger market.

The questions

- What is the “perfect niche” (segment) in the Italian market for Norwegian producers of cod?
- Do you think it's best to specialize (focus on) the distribution channel, product-line, quality-price ratio – or something else?

- What differential advantage, that Norwegian producers can use in their positioning strategy that is important for Italians?
- It's a very versatile product. Can a strategy be to build an image of "easy to cook, premium fish for creative home chefs"?
- Are Italians very "locked" to what they are used to? Is it easy to change their buying behaviour?
- How can Norwegian exporters of seafood position themselves to stand out in the Italian market?
- Based on your knowledge, do you think it's possible for Norwegian producers of fresh/frozen cod to target the Italian market?
 - How to succeed? Higher prices? Better quality? What does the Italian preferer?
- What are some challenges that the Norwegian Seafood exporters can face when entering the Italian market? And how can they overcome it?