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How to Support Expanding Sales Channels of Agri-Food Products in New Markets: Healthiness and New Experiences of Tunisian Olive Oil

Hiroko Oe ^{1,*}  and Yasuyuki Yamaoka ² ¹ Josai International University, 3-26 Kioi-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0094, Japan² Comparison Region Research Center, The Open University of Japan, Chiba 261-8586, Japan

* Correspondence: hiroko-o@jiu.ac.jp

Abstract: This study addresses the empirical problem of improving sales channels in countries like Tunisia, with a specific focus on the sales channels of Tunisian olive oil. The authors aim to explore this problem within the theoretical framework of sales channels and emphasize the contribution of their research to enhancing sales channels and accessing new markets for Tunisian olive oil. To achieve these goals, the authors conducted a study with a specific research objective: to examine the factors influencing consumer behavior and perceptions towards olive oil. By doing so, this research contributes to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities of expanding sales channels and supports the development of sustainable agribusiness. Additionally, the authors highlight the importance of advertising healthy food with good quality based on an ethical production process that emphasizes accountability and transparency. They argue that these ethical practices can serve as competitive strengths for agri-food producers in emerging markets as they explore new market opportunities. Overall, this research not only addresses the need for improving sales channels in Tunisia but also provides insights into consumer behavior, highlights the significance of ethical production processes, and supports the competitiveness of agri-food producers in emerging markets.

Keywords: Tunisian olive oil; communication; innovative milieu; collaboration; learning organization; triangulation



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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Tunisia, historically known as Carthage, has been a significant hub of Mediterranean civilization for almost 3000 years. One of Tunisia's prominent products is olive oil, which has evolved as a fusion of various food cultures, including Arab, European, and Turkish traditions [1]. Tunisian olive oil is renowned for its high quality within the region [2]. However, the awareness of Tunisian olive oil is limited compared to the dominance of “olive oil giants” like Italy, Spain, and Greece in the international market. As an emerging olive-producing country, Tunisia needs to explore new markets and attract customers in the face of global competition [3].

On the other hand, Japan ranks 14th among olive oil-importing countries as of 2019 [4]. The Japanese market shows significant potential for olive oil [5]. In Japan, there is a growing popularity of Mediterranean cuisine due to its perceived health benefits and the emphasis on organic food quality. Consumers have become more conscious of the impact of good food on well-being and longevity [6,7].

In a more detailed analysis, for example, the authors [8] examined the factors influencing olive oil consumption in Japan. Similarly, [9] explored Japanese consumers' behavior and the factors they consider when making purchasing decisions. However, there is still a

lack of comprehensive research on Japanese consumers' perceptions of olive oil, particularly in the context of increased consciousness regarding good food and well-being in the past decade.

1.2. Research Rationale and Aim

The research and development of agricultural products and food industries in emerging Asian countries have received considerable attention. However, there has been limited academic consideration of food products from emerging African countries, leading to a lack of sustainable marketing strategies for agribusinesses in the region. Examining strategic pathways for sustaining Tunisian olive oil in the Japanese market could serve as a valuable case study to support agri-food businesses in the region [3].

As discussed by the author [10], innovation processes should align with the learning attitudes of relevant stakeholders, which opens up new opportunities for the food sector. This theme deserves further exploration in the era of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Organizational learning enables businesses to experiment with new products in new markets with different values and cultures, benefiting both businesses and consumers through the consumption and sale of high-quality, healthy food. The relationship between suppliers and consumers should be the first stage for successful business outcomes based on win-win relationships [3]. Innovative strategies within organizations can enhance the development of product lines that cater to consumer needs, emphasizing the process of co-value creation. Cooperation with consumers and regional stakeholders contributes to innovation within the food sector as a whole.

It is crucial to clarify the main reasons for investigating sales channels for agricultural products in new markets to understand the meaning and purpose of this paper. The starting point of this study is to consider the economic value for producers of agricultural products and the countries where they are produced of expanding sales channels into new markets. It is essential to remain aware of the challenges associated with expanding into international markets in support of sustainable agriculture.

In comprehensive discussions, for example, author [11] focused on sustainable patterns, and author [12] provided examples demonstrating the necessity of strategic actions for promoting sustainable internationalization. From a broader perspective, the author [13] explained the significance of power relationships among the actors involved in the agricultural product business. Thus, the research objective of this paper, as emphasized by the author [14], is to adopt a multifaceted and comprehensive perspective essential for transitional measures aimed at maintaining the sustainability of agricultural and food systems.

Continuous testing cycles conducted in interaction with consumers should serve as sources of organizational innovation, inspiring real behavior rooted in business philosophy and ethos. A more in-depth investigation of collaboration and co-learning perspectives is needed. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to hypothetically discuss and demonstrate a smooth and effective pathway for internationalization that ensures the sustainability of agribusiness.

1.3. Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore how to effectively develop business strategies to support agribusinesses in the North African region that seek new markets and cater to consumers and distributors in those markets.

The research questions will then be set as follows:

RQ1: What are the appeal points on the producer side?

RQ2: What are the sources of competitive advantage for Tunisian olive oil for business stakeholders in Japan, a new market?

RQ3: What are the key advantages of Tunisian olive oil for Japanese consumers?

To answer these research questions and achieve the objectives of the study, data were collected from three agribusiness stakeholders: Tunisian olive oil suppliers, distributors in the Japanese market, and Japanese consumers, the new target of the Tunisian olive oil

business. The triangulation approach was applied. The results obtained will be used to develop a conceptual framework that will suggest ways for olive oil businesses to sustain their innovative businesses by strengthening new sales channels in the global market.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Olive Oil Production

Even though the quality of Tunisian olive oils is well-known among the food business [15], consumers think of Spain, Italy, Greece, and other Mediterranean countries when they hear of the term “olive oil” [3]. Although its level or quality is high, because the current market share is rather small, consumers’ recognition is low [16]. It is required to develop business strategies for the Tunisian olive oil industry to support their business sustainability and their acquisition of new customers in the global market [17].

2.2. Healthy Food Experiences and Well-Being

2.2.1. Contribution to Well-Being from Healthy Dining Table

“Healthy, fancy and tasty” is the motto of one of the top olive oil producers in Tunisia; this implies that a unique selling point regarding the well-being of purchasers is critical for suppliers. Developing healthy and innovative food experiences should be one of the top themes for both humanities and scientific fields of study. For instance, consumer behavior discipline suggested new concepts, such as “servicescape”, which implies that food consumption and eating habits should be analyzed and investigated from a holistic perspective, including meals, space, services, and other elements as well.

2.2.2. How to Design Effective Marketing Strategies as a New Entrant into a New Market

As a new entrant, it is inevitable for Tunisian businesses to develop business strategies to respond to the needs of new customers in the market. In the food-agribusiness sector, academic discussions have been concentrating on the impact of food consumption on consumer well-being [18–21], as well as recent topics on how to sustain food consumption and production by reducing food waste and securing sustainable producers by securing traceability and transparency [22,23]. They have discussed sustainable business models based on a systematic review; they have presented the food sector as needing some more detailed exploration in line with the key topics such as strategic management and marketing and innovative business behavior. As summarized by [20], it is important to find a way to implement systematic organizational innovation in helping researchers and relevant food services increase the food well-being of those consumers who aim to purchase good-quality materials.

2.3. Investigation of the New Market and Consumers’ Perceptions: Japanese Market as a Target

Considering the main aim of this study is to develop key factors in enhancing agri-food businesses’ sustainability by enhancing their global sales channels based on a collaborative and innovative approach with consumers, a deepening understanding of the new markets and consumers’ behavior could be the first kick-off action of the study.

2.3.1. Market Entry Modes: Sales Channels

The author [24] discussed how the role the country of origin (COO) can play in global market entry depends on the current and existing sales channels. The entry mode must be carefully selected with great care following the market investigation, referring to the international consumers’ needs and demands. In other words, without the pre-test and detailed investigation based on the collaborative examination, the products cannot maintain their brand value in the new markets.

The author [25] also discussed how the interplay between market intelligence activities and sales strategy should be the key elements for those who seek to go into new markets; the interaction of market research and communications with potential customers should

be drivers of better performance in foreign markets. Similarly, the analytical pathway is emphasized when aiming for a new market in the food business context [26].

2.3.2. Japanese Food Culture and Perceptions of Products from Emerging Markets

Japanese food culture has been added to the cuisine added to the UNESCO ‘intangible heritage’ list in 2013 [27]. As an intangible cultural heritage, washoku (Japanese cuisine) is well-known for its good quality, health, and contribution to well-being. Japanese food is their culture as a national identity [28].

The theme of healthy Japanese food culture with a potential contribution to well-being has been one of the academic arenas of discussion. The author [29] discussed the characters of Japanese cuisine and its contribution to the citizens via the dining table from a globalization perspective. It is analyzed in Japanese cuisine from the dimensions of self and well-being [30]. In the globalized era, the author [31] investigated the food culture from the perspective of consumers’ personal values while choosing ethnic food. It is emphasized that the impacts of global marketplaces on consumers’ well-being are important. Based on the discussions as above, how to combine foreign food ingredients in a mature cuisine culture such as Japanese cuisine is an academic discussion to explore further [32].

2.3.3. Ethical and Social Values of Producers’ Impact on Food Consumption

As the author [33] argued, food environments and consumer behaviors are closely correlated, whereas food consumption patterns and tendencies are influenced by the production process and the firms’ ethical behavior [34]. The author [35] also suggested it is inevitable to support ethical behavior such as fair-trade attitudes.

The Japanese government has launched a standardization of organic and fair-traded agricultural products supplied in Japan, which has enhanced consumers’ awareness and preference for good-quality food [36]. The formation of consumers’ trust towards food supply has been a theme in developing a sustainable food supply chain [37,38]. Furthermore, it is inevitable for businesses that are entering new markets to attain new consumers by increasing awareness of their products and brands [39].

2.3.4. Consumer Trust in Food: Olive Oil Production and Quality

The emergence of the paradigm of advanced technologies, such as AI and blockchain concepts, has underpinned the development of data-driven business network systems that collect and process data to enhance transparency and accountability [40]). Blockchain and information-oriented data processing are critical factors in securing the quality of supplied products and services, which leads to business sustainability by enhancing traceability and the trust of consumers [41].

Similarly, the author [42] discussed the positive impact of transparency in the food sector on gaining consumers’ support for relational business activities in a competitive market. Some empirical studies have confirmed that recent consumers pay more attention to the quality of food, and it is recommended to implement technological systems to support transparency and traceability, which should be the key themes for agri-food businesses [43–45].

However, the critical theme should be explored further to develop actionable insights and recommendations for the industry from which agri-food businesses can design strategic plans to sustain their performance.

2.4. Key Take-Outs and Interview Guide for Data Collection

From the discussions as above, five key take-outs have been developed for further examination with primary data in the next step of this research (Table 1).

Table 1. Outline of main key take-outs.

Key Themes	Relevant Stakeholders (Interviewees)
1. Overall perspectives and evaluation for Tunisian olive oil	- Tunisian suppliers - Japanese distributors - Japanese consumers
2. Healthy food provision	- Tunisian suppliers - Japanese distributors
3. Consumer experiences and expectations	- Japanese consumers
4. Effective marketing strategies in the new market (e.g., sales channels, impact of different cultural values).	- Tunisian suppliers - Japanese distributors
5. Ethical business behavior and consumer trust	- Tunisian suppliers - Japanese distributors - Japanese consumers
6. Consumers' awareness of Tunisian products and new values of healthy agri-food	- Japanese consumers

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Methods and Data Collection

The research used an inductive method, which supports the exploratory data analysis required for the theme of this study [46]. This approach enables the authors to discuss and develop theories from the attained data without considering predetermined theories or models [47,48]. This study utilized an interpretive paradigm with the goal of understanding the perspectives and behaviors of stakeholders involved in the marketing and supply of olive oil in Tunisia [49,50]. The inductive approach is best suited for qualitative research [51], as it allows the researcher to investigate the “feel” of the situation, and the authors employed this method to better understand the nature of the research topic [52].

The authors focused on obtaining a holistic perspective using relevant qualitative data that took into account human interpretation. To this end, it was essential to obtain qualitative data that took into account human interpretation [53]. Therefore, interviews based on a semi-structured interview questionnaire were conducted with the targeted participants. The number of interviewees was determined based on saturation criteria to ensure reasonable data sources and size [54]. This process allowed the researchers to identify new market actors involved in olive oil production and sales channel expansion in Tunisia and consumers' thoughts and behaviors [55].

By using semi-structured interviews, the deep insights and perspectives of these participants were reasonably expected to contribute to the development of deep implications for conceptual model design, the central theme of this study [56].

The interviews were conducted with 28 participants based on the semi-structured interview questionnaire. This process allowed the authors to gather hidden thoughts, emotions, and opinions from the interviewees. This method was sufficient to achieve the research aim and objectives, which were reflected in the semi-structured interview outline, which contained key take-outs from the research and encouraged participants to express their thoughts and feelings, providing rich primary data to analyze [57].

To achieve the research objectives, it is necessary to select participants who are close to the topic and have experience with and knowledge of it. In this study, a purposive approach was used for sample collection [58]. Thus, this study employed in-depth interview techniques for primary data collection and text mining of participants' thoughts and feelings to capture their dense feelings and attitudes. This qualitative research approach seeks to examine and explain the fundamental significance that individuals ascribe to social phenomena [59]. When analyzing human judgments and behaviors, as this study aims to do [60], i.e., human opinions, attitudes, views, beliefs, and preferences, qualitative approaches are often preferred.

This method enabled the authors to apprehension the interviewees' thoughts and opinions, pivotal to meeting the research aim and objective to uncover the perceptions' ideas and suggestions towards the Tunisian olive oil businesses.

3.2. Sampling

As the research aims to reveal and grasp the participants' perceptions of Tunisian olive oil and its business strategies entering the new market, it was critical to create a participant group from the relevant stakeholders. To select suitable participants, the researchers employed convenience and snowball sampling techniques [61]. This was applied to the initial participants, asking relevant business partners and suitable acquaintances whether they were available and happy to contribute. Following this step, the researchers implemented snowball sampling, mainly based on two institutions, which were the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) and the Olive Oil Sommelier Association Japan, whereby participants introduced someone they would be willing to participate in this research [62]. Thus, eight participants from Tunisian suppliers and 20 participants from Japan in total (12 suppliers/distributors and 8 consumers) are collected in Table 2. The data collection was conducted in May–June 2022.

Table 2. A list of participants.

Subject Area	Control	Occupation
Tunisian Interviewees (Suppliers)	T1	Business consultant
	T2	Supply chain quality assessor
	T3	Olive oil industry association
	T4	Adviser
	T5	Food planner
	T6	Producer A
	T7	Producer B
	T8	Producer C
Japanese Interviewees	J1	Business consultant
	J2	SME adviser/management quality assessor
	J3	Cabinet office, advisor
	J4	Advisor/University Professor
	J5	Chairman, Japan Association of Performance Excellence
	J6	Nutritionist/University Professor
	J7	ICT standardization expert/consultant to smart agribusiness
	J8	Imported food wholesale and retail A
	J9	Imported food wholesale and retail B
	J10	Sales adviser of Food wholesaler
	J11	Tokyo Chamber of Commerce, Japan
	J12	Food coordinator: French and Food coordinator: French and Pacific Lim
	J13	Consumer A
	J14	Consumer B
	J15	Consumer C
	J16	Consumer D
	J17	Consumer E
	J18	Consumer F
	J19	Consumer G
	J20	Consumer H

3.3. Data Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed and then coded. The coding process enabled the authors to identify patterns and themes in the interviewees' perceptions [63]. To support the manual content analysis method, text mining software, KH Coder Ver3. Beta. 01g, was used for the text data. It calculated the frequency of the words, created co-occurrence network charts, and developed clusters for three stakeholders: Tunisian suppliers, Japanese distributors, and Japanese consumers [64]. The empirical analysis conducted relied on the method of thematic analysis: mining and visualizing the co-occurrence of words and word trees obtained from the mining. Categorizing the dataset contributed to identifying key themes and revealing links among the codes, which were discussed to triangulate the findings. From the analysis, the developed findings with key themes and elements were summarized as a conceptual framework with recommendations for the relevant stakeholders.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. Text Mining Outcome

4.1.1. Tunisian Supplies' Perspectives

The results of text mining are shown in Figures 1 and 2. From the top 351 words, we analyzed and developed a co-occurrence term map (Figure 1) and a cluster map (Figure 2). To reveal the core terms stated by Tunisian suppliers, the minimum frequencies were set to four times for both analyses of co-occurrence and cluster mapping. To summarize the text mining results obtained here, for example, olive oil producers are aware that entering new markets contributes to the sustainability of their business, and they understand that it is an effective strategy, but they are anxious about exploring the market situation and developing a plan of action, as well as about the time and investment involved. There is also a glimpse of expectations for third-party support and intervention to implement the strategy [65].

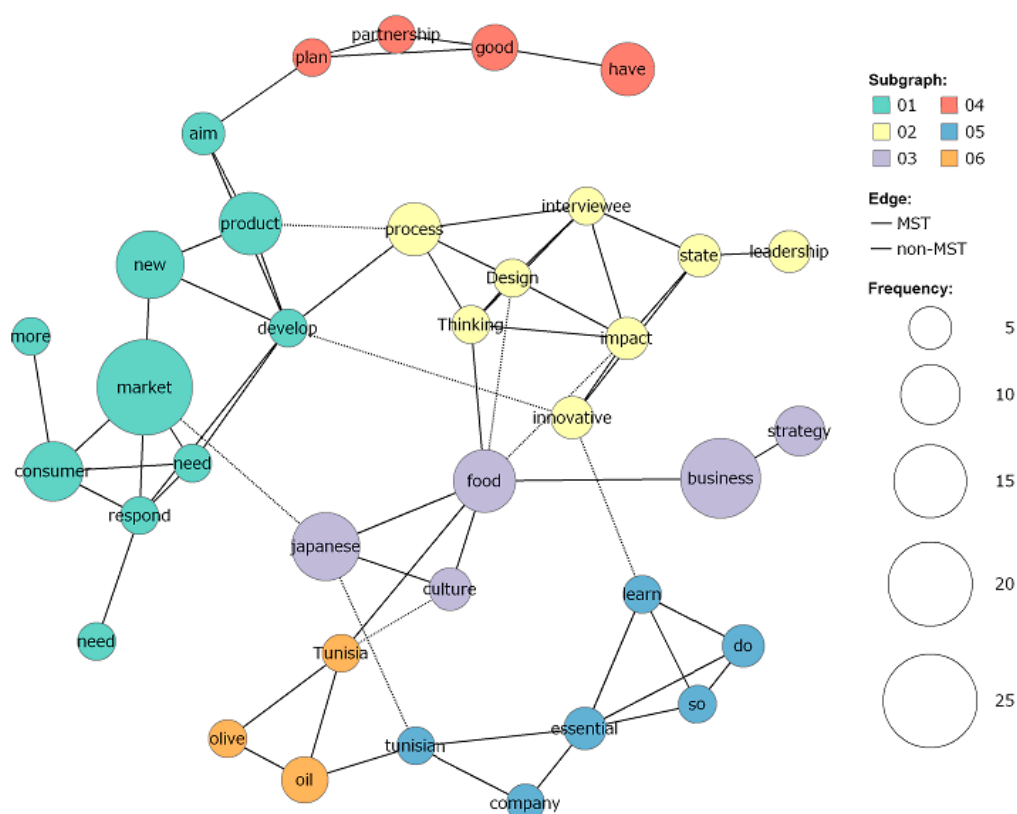


Figure 1. Co-occurrence term map (Tunisian supplies).

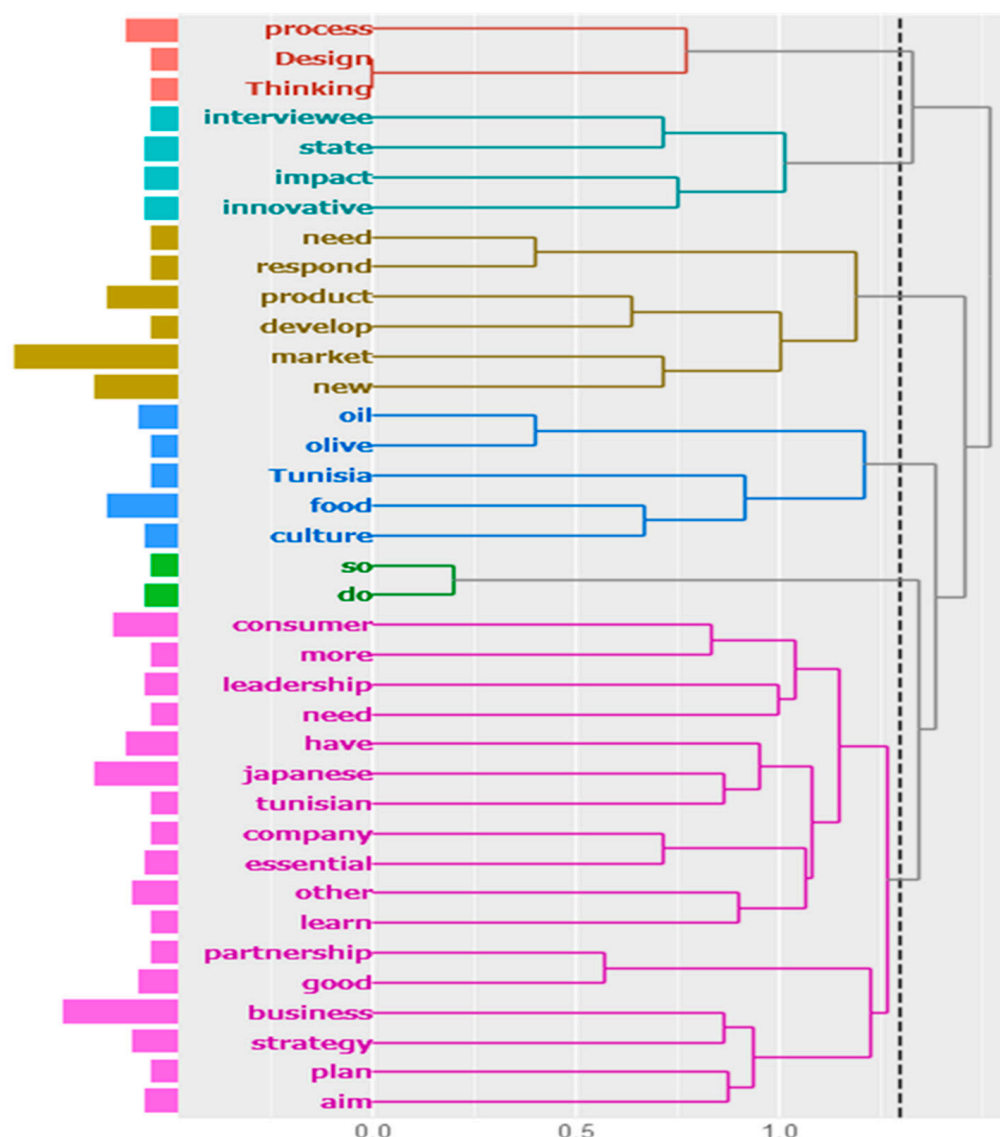


Figure 2. Tunisian suppliers' term cluster map.

4.1.2. Japanese Distributors' Perspectives

To develop Japanese distributors' perspectives for Tunisian olive oil, the top 411 words were analyzed; a co-occurrence term map (Figure 3) and a term cluster map (Figure 4) were created using KH Coder software.

Next, we mined the perceptions of Japanese marketers, and as Figures 3 and 4 show, they are mainly aware of the importance of considering and deciding on appeal factors related to the ethical characteristics, aromas, and nutrients of new products, as well as promoting North African cultural aspects that are unfamiliar to Japanese consumers—exotic and seductive. These factors suggest the importance of a mid- to long-term customer acquisition strategy that targets not only economic value but also consumer thinking and values [66].

4.1.3. Japanese Consumers' Perspectives

To develop Japanese consumers' perspectives for Tunisian olive oil, the top 155 words were analyzed; a co-occurrence term map (Figure 5) and a term cluster map (Figure 6) were created using KH Coder software.

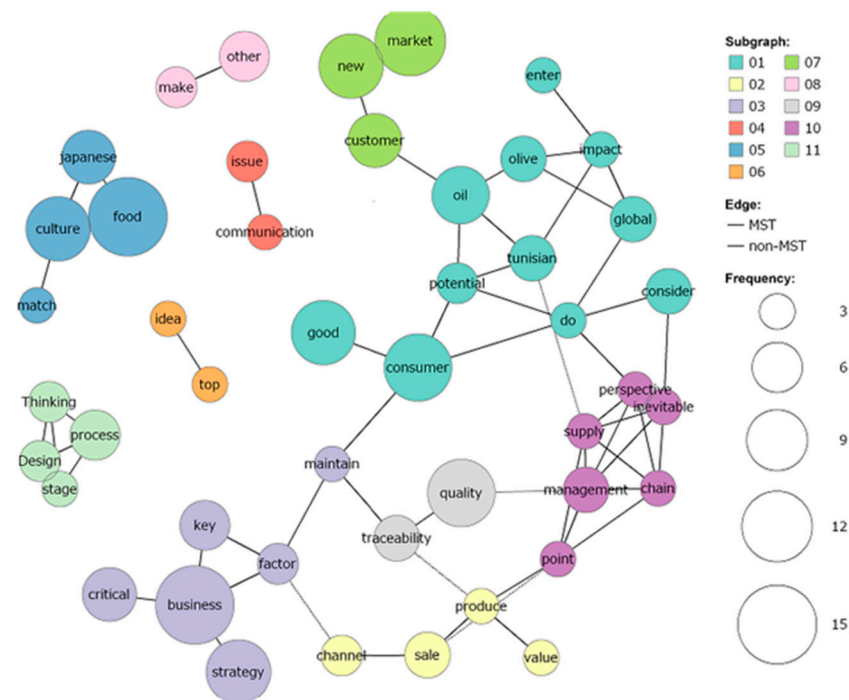


Figure 3. Co-occurrence term map (Japanese distributors).

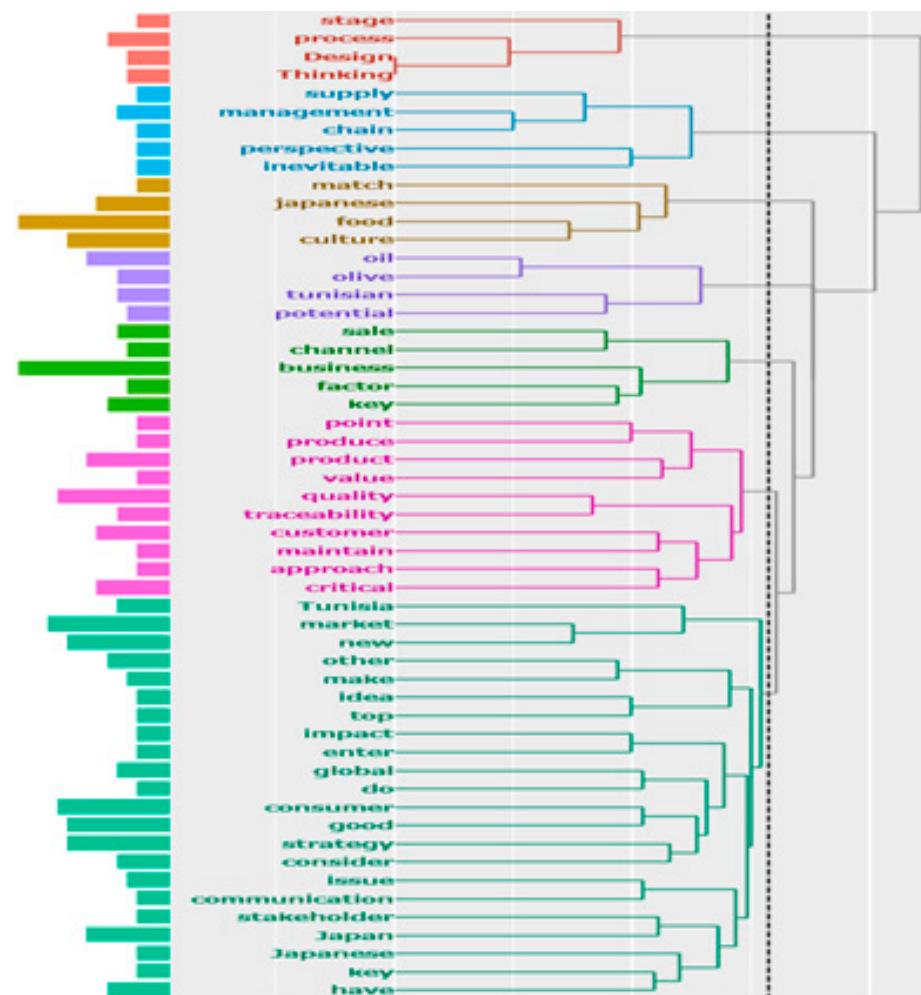


Figure 4. Japanese distributors' term cluster map.

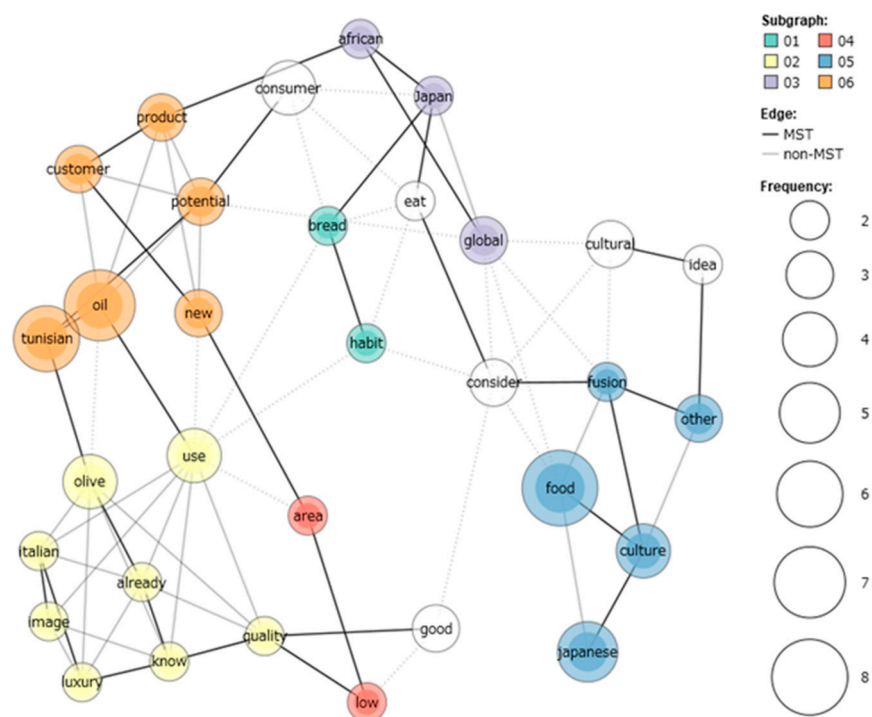


Figure 5. Co-occurrence term map (Japanese consumers).

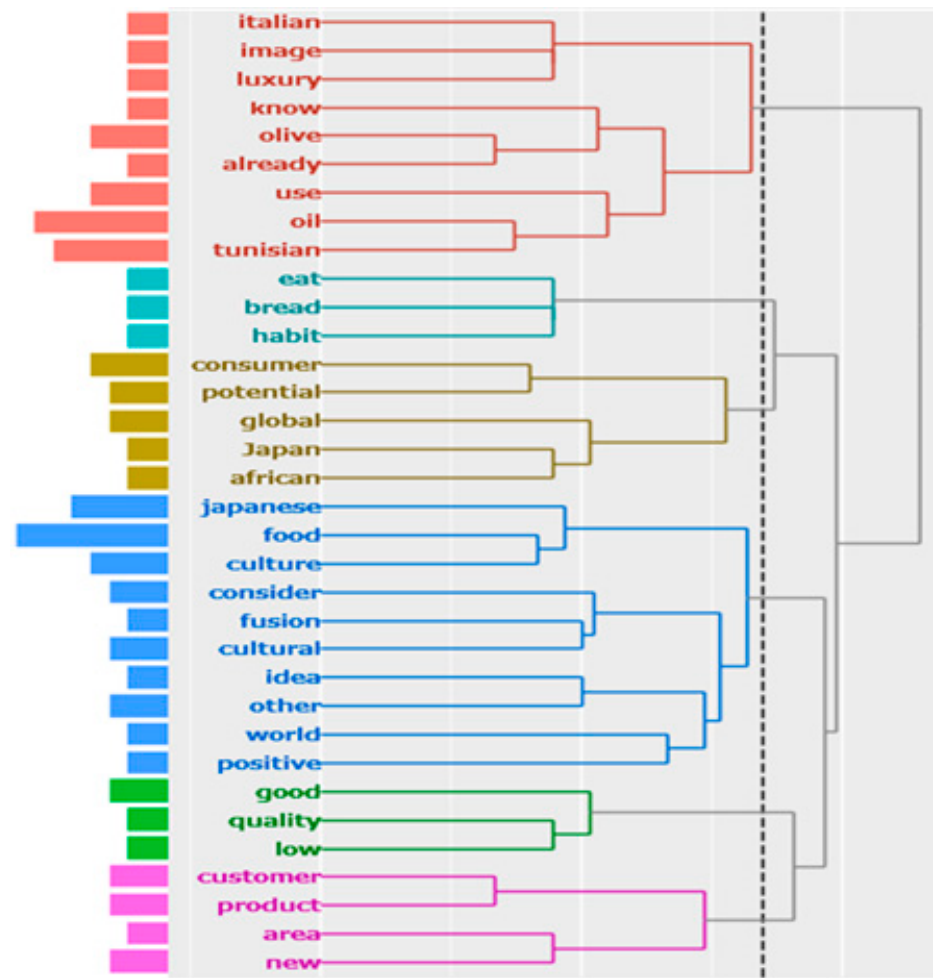


Figure 6. Japanese consumers' term cluster map.

5 and 6 suggest that, while Japanese consumers do not have a strong affinity for Tunisian olive oil, a product of North Africa, they are more than aware of its cultural value and have an interest in its place of origin. It is also apparent that they are eager to apply olive oil, a health food from an exotic region, to the Japanese table, which similarly requires a rich food culture, and to enjoy the marriage of different cultures. The study also provides an insight into the importance of marketing appeals that match the characteristics of Tunisian olive oil (polyphenols, antioxidant function, etc.) with its cultural values for today's health-conscious consumers [67]. Furthermore, the ethical aspects of cultivation methods in the production area and the appreciation of environmentally friendly cultivation methods can be seen to be effective in attracting customers to Tunisian products [68].

4.1.4. Key Themes Developed from Triangulation of Three Stakeholders' Perspectives

From Figures 1 and 2, Tunisian producers can get a glimpse of pride and confidence in Tunisian oil from words such as process, design, innovate, product, olive oil, etc. from the producer's perspective. However, consumer consideration seems to be buried.

As can be seen from Figures 3 and 4, in addition to the Tunisian producer's perspective, the Japanese distributors perceive the necessity of matching the new food with Japanese cultural values, including Japanese cuisine culture and lifestyle. Figures 5 and 6 indicate that Japanese consumers do not have any feelings or sympathy for "made in Tunisia", but they perceive olive oil as an ingredient for Italian cuisine and a fashionable and high-class lifestyle as one of the western cultural values. It is positioned. The word "high quality" that producers are proud of is buried as a condition of food. The words Tunisia and Africa do not appear on the surface.

Based on the text mining outcome as a preliminary analysis, the next section will discuss details of three stakeholders' views to develop some more actionable implications for the Tunisian olive oil businesses while they seek a new market in Japan.

4.2. Details of Interview Outcome (Tunisian Side)

4.2.1. Tunisian Suppliers' Perspectives on Entering the New Market

While interviewees stated the impact of food on consumers' well-being, Tunisian suppliers emphasized the role of leadership to guide business perspectives in the direction needed:

... when I visited Tunisia, the cooking school students tasted a 'mélange' with olive oil and Japanese food ... It goes well with maki sushi (Sushi roll), Japanese carpaccio, and somen (thin noodles). (T5: Food planner)

Interesting ideas and plans should be examined with a clear purpose by leadership. (T6 Producer A)

Regarding the contribution to well-being made by their good products, some producers and a food planner emphasized the following:

... the polyphenol is higher than other Mediterranean products, which is not known in the global market yet. (T7: Producer B)

A mélange of ingredients that match olive oil ... must be an attractive experiment for us! (T5: Food Planner)

To embed the aimed goal within the whole organization, it has been stated that the important roles of leadership and continuous effort to meet market needs are:

The business system should be evolving based on the review and redesign activities. (T8: Producer C)

4.2.2. Designing Effective Marketing Strategies

Statements were made that empathizing should be the first step in designing effective marketing strategies:

When products are launched in a new market, it is important to check and review the planned schedule strategically. In doing so, good partnerships or consortiums are helpful to evaluate the plan. (T8: Producer C)

Similarly, some interviewees mentioned the process of 'Ideate and Define' of the aimed products as a key phase of the businesses:

When we were aiming for the British market, which went well, we planned and designed our strategy with our schedule, which supported our strategic activities. In order to differentiate ourselves from other good brands, mainly from Italy and Spain, we targeted specific consumer groups who are more interested in the ethical attributes of our production process. (T8: Producer C)

It is more important to communicate with Japanese consumers to understand the market's conditions and requirements, and in doing so, our innovative process to develop suitable product lineups for the new market can be successful. (T3: Olive oil association)

In the context of the process of building effective marketing strategies, one interviewee emphasized that the business owners should lead the whole company in an aimed direction based on trial-and-error behavior:

Developing marketing strategies and implementing new products in new markets requires an incessant passion to check, review, and rearrange what we have done. (T6: Producer A)

In line with the statement as above, another interviewee stated that the process of entering the new market is an experimental trial, and establishing a partnership in the new market should be a good attempt:

It was quite a good opportunity for us to have an experimental sale at a department store with other North African food producers (e.g., the North African Food Fair). (T3: Olive oil industry association)

In the process of developing products aimed at the Japanese market, however, more details about consumers views and opinions are essential for our improvement. (T3: Olive oil industry association)

Tests and strategies are part of the implementation of the new products in the new market:

As the production volume and the current sales channel are limited in the global market. Therefore, we should have an experimental partnership to investigate the potential of the Japanese market in the first place. (T6: Producer A)

It should be useful to collaborate with other firms in the region. In cooperation with other members of the business cluster in the regional group, innovative ideas can be nurtured for all. (T7 Producer B)

4.2.3. Business Sustainability and Innovative Attitudes

Relating to innovative business behavior, some key topics were stated by several interviewees:

One thing I can say is that the trigger for our success was 1) specialization and 2) marketing strategies based on a thorough market investigation. Without our motivation to be more innovative to be successful, we cannot achieve our aim. (T8: Producer C)

Perhaps it would be an idea to pay attention to the Muslim religious culture and the values within the organizations. (J1: Business consultant)

Still, not all of the business people in Tunisia know the Japanese markets, but overall, we respect Japanese culture, including their food culture, and we are happy to be considered one of the suppliers in the Japanese market. Mutual communication would be the first step for our businesses in Japan. (T2: Supply chain quality assessor)

How to develop a new product responding to new markets' needs and demand.....Establishing partnerships or consortiums should be a good kick-off action, and to do so, the whole

industry should be aware of the impact of our new challenge in seeking out the new market. (T1: Business consultant)

In the context of 'learning organizations', some statements were made discussing the positive impact of 'innovative milieu' as a business cluster:

It is essential for Tunisian companies to understand the Japanese market and consumers. The first stage of putting the companies into learning mode is essential, and in doing so, collaboration with other "neighbor" firms in the regional area should be helpful. (T4: Adviser)

When designing business strategy, an internal spiral aiming for a better plan is essential. Human resource management, focusing on individual skill development and increasing individual eligibility to respond to the market's needs, is the primary factor in sustaining business continuity in a competitive situation. (T4: Adviser)

She also stated as follows:

To be able to empathize with customers, training to enhance employees' abilities and sense of catching markets' needs and trends should be at the top of the organizational agenda. (T4: Adviser)

This notion is shared by one of the producers as follows:

Internal communication is essential. A clear vision of the company's strategy should prevail and be communicated with the employees at an organizational level. (T7: Producer B)

He also stated regarding the impact of regional clusters as an innovative milieu from which businesses can enhance organizational innovation in responding to consumers' needs:

Sharing information about our business strategies in the geographical cluster has contributed to our learning to go forward with innovative actions. (T7: Producer B)

In line with these statements, another Tunisian specialist in quality management stated as follows:

Still, not all of the business people in Tunisia know the Japanese markets, but overall, we respect Japanese culture, including their food culture, and we are happy to be considered one of the suppliers in the Japanese market. Mutual communication would be the first step for our businesses in Japan. (T2: Supply Chain Quality Assessor)

Most of the potential Japanese business partners and specialists also made comments to support Tunisian intentions and perceptions:

When building business strategy, organizational learning attitudes under the top manager's leadership are key to success. Especially when seeking out new markets, it is critical to act proactively and communicate with the potential customers in the new market. (J2: SME adviser/management quality assessor)

Organizational behavior in building an entry-mode strategy is critical. Internal strategic actions should be reviewed, tested, and adjusted to respond to the market situation and consumers' needs. The information should be analyzed and reflected in the business plan. Moreover, an organization itself should learn and process critical market data to build a business strategy. (T1: Business consultant)

To conclude the discussion, the following statement from a specialist is inspiring:

How to judge and select relevant issues following the five stages should be an endless business cycle to realize a tailored business strategy responding to the market's needs based on the learning organization. (J4: Advisor/University Professor)

4.3. Interview with Japanese Stakeholders: Distributors and Consumers

4.3.1. Recommendations Regarding the Sales Channels

As discussed in the literature review, designing market entry strategies should take a holistic approach from an innovative organizational perspective. Informative statements were made by the potential partner-business stakeholders in Japan:

The process of entering a new market is critical for all businesses. Aiming to expand sales channels through the human network is a basic strategy for new entrants and an established tactic. (J5: Chairman, Japan Association of Performance Excellence)

The quality of the product as a luxury product and the scarcity of small-lot sales successfully penetrated the UK market. ‘Differentiate strategy’ should be a good plan when entering the Japanese market. (J2: SME adviser/management quality assessor)

For example, there are several examples of holding ‘small-scale matching events’ with restaurants and cooking schools in Tokyo. They are good opportunities for checking each other’s needs and opening new sales channels. (J9: Imported food wholesale and retail B)

North Africa is a potential market that Japan’s JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization, a Japanese government agency) is also paying attention to. It is a priority area where Japan should establish sustainable partnerships in the food industry sector. (J5: Chairman, Japan Association of Performance Excellence)

Marketing strategies and influencers’ impact were also mentioned:

Since the Italian cuisine boom in Japan in the 1980s, many celebrities have advertised olive oil on TV cooking shows and other programs. It is remarkable in our sales trend, but in order to promote products from emerging markets such as Tunisia, it is indispensable to select age-specific appeal media. (J10: Sales adviser of Food wholesaler)

Women in their 60s and above respond more to shopping sites on the internet such as Rakuten, TV shopping channels, and newspaper inserts than to SNS. (J13: Consumer A)

It is a good idea to focus on top fine restaurants and luxury food stores such as Kinokuniya and Seijo Ishii (Japanese superstores specializing in good-quality food and imported materials). (J8: Imported food wholesale and retail A)

4.3.2. Food Culture and Impact on Purchase Intention of Global Products

Japanese food culture, washoku, and traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese were added to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2013 [69,70]. Since then, movement for matching and fusion with other food cultures on the global edges has been boosting [71–73]. Then, what do potential consumers consider the food’s cultural fusion and global impact in the context of Tunisian olive oil?

Since luxury stores are already occupied by Italian and Spanish olive oil, and Japanese customers prefer the products from southern Europe. It is necessary to consider the age group and eating habits of the targeted customer. (J10: Sales adviser of Food wholesaler)

The flavor is unique and herby, and the slight spiciness that tingles at the back of the tongue stimulates the appetite! This could be a big selling point. How to cover the low awareness of the producing area would be the first challenge. (J2: SME adviser/management quality assessor)

Familiarity is overwhelmingly low. If the quality is good, it could be an idea to raise the profile on TV and other mass media, but recently there have also been SNS and other individual tools to make potential consumers aware of Tunisian olive oil. (J17: Consumer E)

I do not know where Tunisia is, and I do not have the image of luxury goods from there; perhaps I am more of an average majority as a consumer in Japan. It might be nice to eat it directly on bread. However, we don’t have the habit of using olive oil for bread, so what about Japanese dining tables? (J15: Consumer C)

Whereas some consumers mentioned the cultural value of the North African products:

I have been using Italian oil mostly, but the image of Carthage is exotic, and I am interested in using something new from a new area of the world. (J14: Consumer B)

Similarly, another interviewee was supportive and positive towards Tunisian food:

As a pianist, I have been on world tours when I could enjoy global foods that I seldom found in Japan. I like North African food, such as lemon pickles. I cook it at home. I am very positive about using Tunisian olive oil, of which I already know the quality. (J13: Consumer A)

Considering an appeal for ‘good chemistry’ with Japanese food and sake as UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage could be an idea. (J9: Imported food wholesale and retail B)

How to embed Tunisian ingredients in Japanese food culture needs a communication strategy. (J16: Consumer D)

4.3.3. Japanese Consumers’ Perceptions towards the Ethical and Good Quality of Food Products

Suggestions in line with the Japanese markets and consumers’ behavior are stated as follows:

The fragrance and deep green color when opened the bottle cannot be experienced with commodity-level olive oil, but the location of Tunisia itself, I don’t know... (J15: Consumer C)

Food safety is my top concern as a mother of young children. I would like to ask how to ensure the quality control of food traveling from North Africa. It is important to make consumers aware of the ethical production behavior and social values of the products. (J3: Cabinet office, advisor)

Recent consumers are clever. Supply chain quality management can be a good point from which consumers’ sympathy and supportive intentions toward good products arise. Consumers are also interested in environmental issues. (J12: Food coordinator: French and Food coordinator: French and Pacific Lim)

Some common key terms were attained mainly from business consultants and experts, namely, the implementation of technologies to support the quality of the products, including traceability.

Supply chain management perspectives are inevitable (blockchain). How to maintain quality is critical for gaining customers’ trust. (J1: Business consultant)

The challenge is quality control for olive oil. In terms of nutritional value, we should publicize the benefits of eating together. (J6: Nutritionist/University Professor)

Supply chain management is a critical point; further research and guidance on how to implement effective IT support are required.

Furthermore, the supply side should consider how to develop sales strategies in the new markets. Japan is extremely far away from Tunisia. Learning to understand different cultures and consumers should be a key to mutual win-win relations. (J4: Advisor/University Professor)

When we had seminar sessions on quality management of the products, the topic of how to maintain traceability to attain consumers’ trust was raised as the number one issue on the agenda, both from B2B and B2C perspectives. (J11: Tokyo Chamber of Commerce, Japan)

It is inevitable for agribusinesses to consider how to enhance their production and how to attract global consumers. In doing so, the ‘Agtech’ approach is critical to sustain the businesses; IoT, AI, and other technological tools would be essential to making the

products' quality and traceability seamless in the markets. (J7: ICT standardization expert/consultant to smart agribusiness)

In the global age, food culture can be more global with respect for different cultures. Not only are we importing food from overseas to sell it in Japan, but we have also launched collaborative research activities and consortia to support the agribusinesses in the supplier countries. One of the key themes for us currently is how to attract consumers with good quality and trustworthy production processes, including traceability. (J9: Imported food wholesale and retail B)

These statements are in line with those made by Tunisian business stakeholders, who emphasized the impact of innovative behavior based on the 'innovative milieu' as a catalytic business cluster.

4.4. Discussion

4.4.1. Overall Findings and Discussion

Tunisian olive oil has potential in the Japanese market, as stated by Consumer 6:

Lack of information is an issue. I believe there must be good potential customers for Tunisian oil. I am open-minded to new products. (J14: Consumer B)

Overall, it has been found that some specific key themes were strongly perceived by the participants: Leadership; innovative milieu (collaboration with regional stakeholders); assessment and review process to respond to consumers' needs.

4.4.2. Conceptual Model

Based on the outcome of the research, a framework with dimensions was proposed, as shown in Figures 7 and 8.

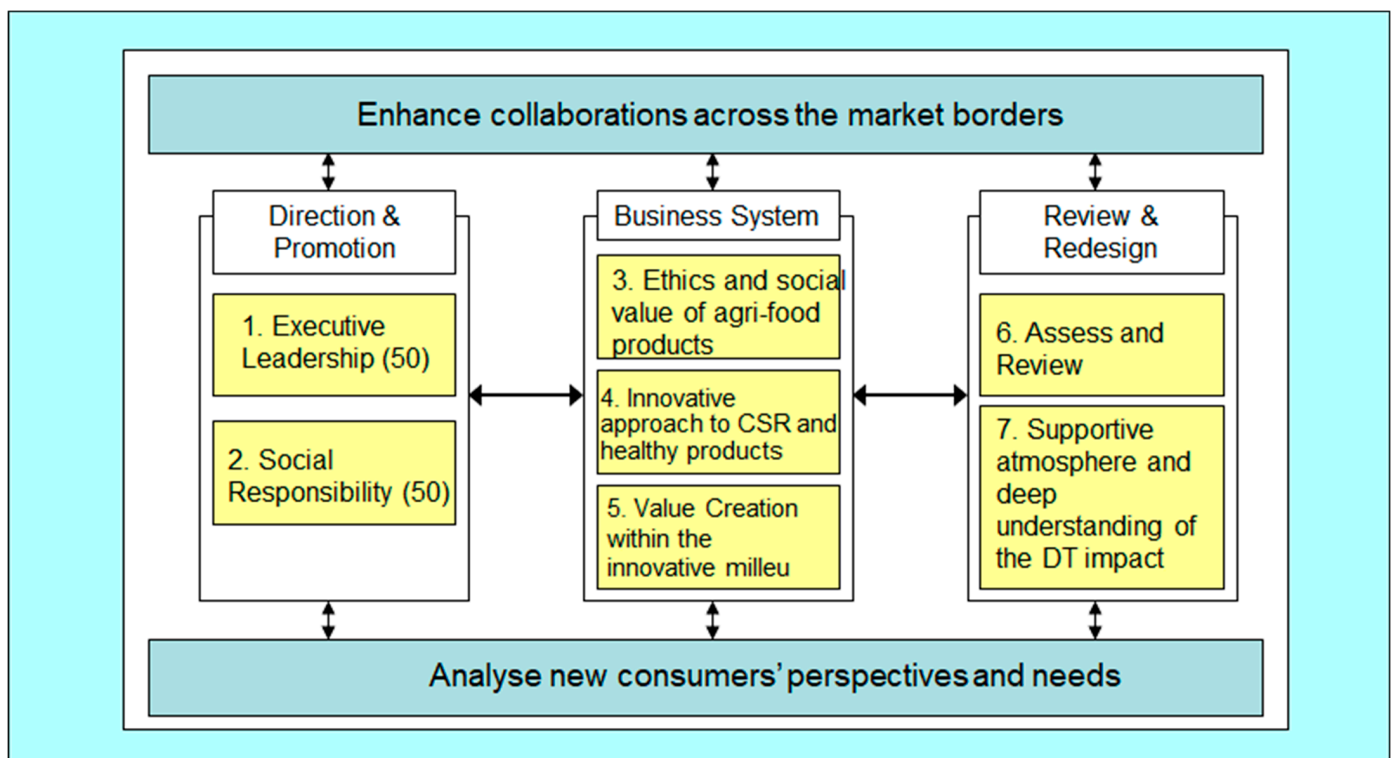


Figure 7. A proposed conceptual framework.

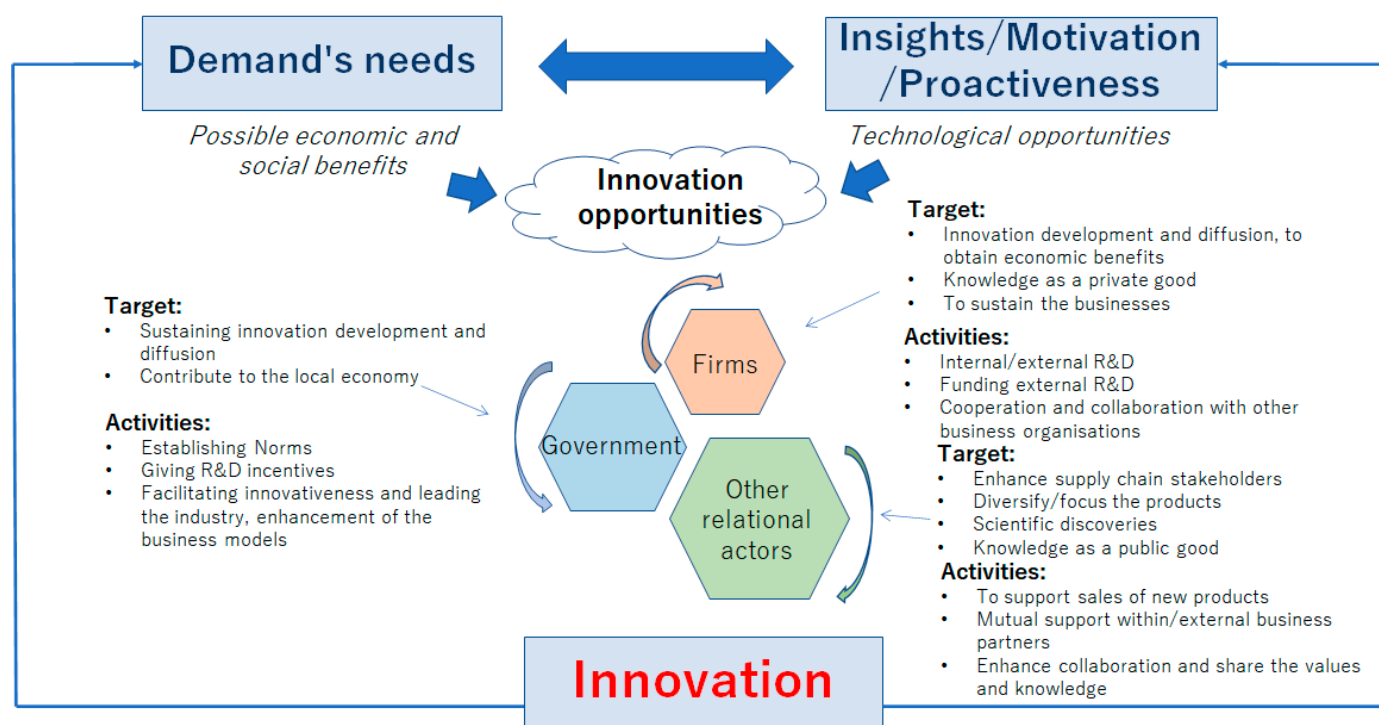


Figure 8. Innovative milieu in the food/agri-product scenario when entering a new market.

As a supportive mind map, the following Figure 8 was also developed from the primary data. The figure indicates the impact of business clusters as catalysts for enhancing innovative behavior in organizations.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Contribution to Theories and Practices

A conceptual framework was developed with new key dimensions to support innovative business behavior in expanding its capability by going into a new market with new consumers. A developed framework with recommendations and dimensions for new key elements can be a useful analytical map for the agri-food business sector.

This study revealed the perceptions of both consumers and food-agribusiness stakeholders. A developed conceptual framework with dimensions can be a practical analytical tool for practitioners in the relevant sector who are especially aiming to be competitive and innovative in the global market. Although the agri-food industry is labor-concentrated, there are innovative impacts to establish a new organizational culture as a learning organization to sustain the business through increasing awareness and attractiveness with healthy and quality attributes. The newly proposed conceptual model suggests key factors and dynamic activities for enhancing innovative behavior in responding to the new customers' needs and wants.

For the Tunisian olive oil sector, to penetrate into new markets globally, including Japan, could also contribute to the UN SDGs; for instance, Goal 1: No Poverty; Goal 3: Good health and well-being; Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production. This fruitful and good agri-business has not been paid attention to, which lacks meaningful support for the potential businesses in the North African region.

5.2. Limitations and Further Research Opportunities

A developed framework with recommendations can be a useful analytical map for the agri-food business sector. The proposed research outcome should be verified and confirmed with a quantitative dataset in the next stage to develop more robust implications that should contribute to the theories and practices in more depth in the food-agribusiness domain. And

moreover, we recognize that the challenge is to re-examine the empirical background and policy implications of the results obtained in this analysis and to provide further discussion and suggestions, including country-specific aspects of the paper's main findings.

A developed conceptual framework with dimensions should be applied to practices to develop some more concrete implications in both theories and practices of food businesses, especially for those who aim to go into the competitive and innovative global food market. Thinking about heterogeneous linkages between two contexts in trade, or supply chain management, provides an important perspective when considering the promotion of products with strong regional characteristics in a global culture and seamlessly nodal world market, as this study has made clear. And one methodology to do so would be to seek to upgrade suppliers in the global value chain, for example, through the valorization of external attributes of olive oil, in light of the theme of this study.

Consumer research in this context is fundamental and can be expected to present valid suggestions to the stakeholders involved, but in particular, it calls for a focus on the first actors in the chain who recognize and pay for the value created further upstream. In fact, there is little accumulated research from this perspective in the research field. Therefore, one of the directions of future research, starting with this study, is to take a macro perspective, quantify the value of external attributes of olive oil in the global value chain, replace them with measurable variables, and draw a quantitative behavioral principle and path diagram of purchase decision-making based on survey data from stakeholders. The idea is to draw a path diagram. Such a second step in the research is expected to enable the presentation of more compelling suggestions to business stakeholders.

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