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The Influence of Culture on Global Marketing Strategies: A Confirmatory Study

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Abstract:

The converging needs and wants of customers around the world have created the opportunity for globalization of markets and have stimulated global competition for global resources and customers. Firms round the world are expanding their production and marketing activities beyond national and continental boundaries. Firms require global marketing strategies to expand to other geographical boundaries but their strategies meet cultural barriers. This research therefore reviewed various research works on google and google scholar using key words: culture and international marketing strategies, culture and global marketing strategies and culture and marketing strategies from 2001 - 2017. Literature reviewed affirmed that culture has great influence on global marketing strategies such as promotional strategies, product design, branding, pricing and distribution processes as well as organizational performance. It is therefore prudent for international marketing managers to take keen interest in the local cultural characteristics of consumers in their marketing strategies.

Keywords: Culture, globalization, marketing strategies, global marketing

1. Background to the Study

The revolution of technology has bridged the gaps between and among nations and continents. Thus, countries are now closer and interconnected than ever before. This phenomenon of interconnectedness is called globalization. Globalization is now a dominant force driving business and marketing strategies in the world today. That is, globalization of the world's economy and markets are leading companies and nations to become global players and investing across nations and continents (Ocansey & Enahoro, 2014). Several firms (including medium-scale to large scale) around the world (developed and emerging markets) are expanding their production and marketing activities beyond national and continental boundaries. Chatterjee (2016) posits that, due to the movement of people around the world and the widespread use of the internet, there has been an extensive interaction which is making the world a single society and has called for a global trade.

What is really propelling the globalization of the world markets? The converging needs and wants of customers around the world have created the opportunity for globalization of markets and have stimulated global competition for global resources and customers. Djordjevic (2014) succinctly explains that, "regional economic agreements, converging marketing needs and wants, technology advances, pressure to cut down cost, pressure to improve quality, improvement in communication and transportation technology, global economic growth, and opportunities for leverage" (p.1) are the forces driving globalization.

Many firms or organizations are established with the intention to expand and grow without any restriction to grow. The desire to grow stimulates the formulation of business strategies that help these firms or organizations to expand their marketing strategies beyond national and continental boundaries. In order for firms to be successful in global trade requires global marketing strategies. According to Djordjevic (2014), the use of various marketing efforts has created global markets from the common needs and wants of human nature around the world on cultural universality as differences. The continuous growth of this cultural universality has brought to bear "the emergence of international markets for consumers" (Naghi & Para, 2013, p. 2).

Notwithstanding the globalization of the world, there are still differences in the way people live in different nations and continents. Thus, different cultures exist in different countries and difference continents. Cultural elements such as language, food, clothing, beliefs and practices differ from country to country and continent to content. Because firms seek to expand to other geographical boundaries, their global marketing strategies meet the barrier of culture. The fundamental shaper of consumer behavior is culture (Cleveland, Naghavi & Shafia, 2017). As asserted by Hart (2014) cultural study embodies the knowledge of custom and social behavior.

The influence of culture on marketing strategies has highly been debated in academic literature in recent years. Articles published in ten renounced journals during 1996-2001 revealed that almost 10% of the articles used culture as the explanatory variable

(Lenartowicz & Roth, 2001; Soares, Farhangmehr, & Shoham, 2007). Firms are mostly aware that local marketing strategies may not work in global trade and this is because of the cultural differences (Gupta & Santhosh, 2017).

Do these differences influence the marketing strategies of various global firms or organizations? The above question set the tone for the confirmatory research into the influence of culture on the marketing strategies of firms and organizations. This research therefore reviewed various research works on the influence of culture on the marketing strategies of global firms. The research analyzed and discussed various research findings, drawn conclusion and profiled recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culture and Global Marketing

Different nations have different cultures. That is, there are different ways of life for different people in different countries inspired by different norms, traditions, values, beliefs and religion. Simply put, different cultures in different nations create a great challenge for global marketing. It is therefore important to understand these cultural differences.

In order for firms to have a competitive edge in international business they have to understand the differences in culture, particularly in Africa given the contrast between African and Western cultures. Culture influences advertising, free trade policies, brand effectiveness, localization and standardization strategy decisions, international negotiation, business relationships, international business management, consumer behavior and international marketing (Darley, Luethge & Blankson, 2013).

Culture is learnt and not genetically inherited trait of human beings (Daramola & Oyinade, 2015) and as result, globalization affects culture. Cultural globalization is the infiltration of foreign culture (Daramola & Oyinade, 2015). However, Swanger (2015) has disclosed that even though cultures borrow and adopt to global features, they often retain their exceptional features. The fact that some unique cultural features exist is why firms going global requires marketing strategies that may be acceptable by their intended customers.

Hofstede indicated that there are five cultural dimensions which are individualism versus collectivism, long-term versus short-term orientation, power distance, masculinity versus femininity and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). These dimensions of culture depict the culture various firms and are also influenced by societal culture. It is important that these dimensions should be considered in the formulation of global marketing strategies. Also, language, religion, values and attitudes, education, social organizations, law and practices are eight cultural attributes grouped under six areas which are important to marketing managers (Ahmed, Ullah & Alam, 2014). These cultural attributes are relevant to the successful formulation and implementation of global marketing strategies.

Due to cultural differences, there is no one best choice of standardization strategy for multinational companies (Jiang & Wei, 2012) but rather a combination of localize and standardize strategies are needed based on the convergence of cultural elements. For instance, MNCs are likely to use higher standardization advertising strategy in European Union based markets than in Asian based markets due to the regional based differences (Okazaki, Taylor & Doh, 2007; Taylor & Okazaki, 2006).

2.2. Globalization of Markets

The term globalization according to Naghi and Para (2013) became widely used after the fall of the USSR in the early '60s through a mass media mentioning by a Canadian specialist. It appeared in the dictionary in 1961. It is considered in all human phase of political, sociological, psychological, anthropological, communicational and geographical dimensions. The word international marketing and global marketing are used interchangeably and both focus on the application, coordination and integration of marketing principles in more than one country (Johansson, 2000).

The word globalization is interpreted to mean internationalization and liberalization or integration of the world into a single market (Garai, 2015). Makasi and Govender (2013) also explain globalization as integration of markets, goods, service and capital. In general terms "globalization is the acceleration and intensification of interaction and integration among the people, companies and governments of different nations" (Rothenberg, 2003, p.1).

The converging needs and wants of customers around the world have created the opportunity for globalization of markets. Globalization of markets stimulates the global competition for global resources and customers. Thus, the opportunity to create and serve global markets is necessitated by common human elements (Djordjevic, 2014). Djordjevic (2014) further added that, products and services of technologies such as "satellite dishes, globe-spanning TV networks..., widespread of broadband internet, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and other social media p. 5" have fueled the convergence of global markets. These technological products and other sophisticated inventions have reduced the distance and enhanced the process of global markets.

2.3. Marketing Strategies

The desire to generate more revenue and increase profit margin in order to improve design and quality of goods and services calls for global marketing strategies. Iyamabo and Otubanjo (2013) have asserted that marketing strategies encompass environmental analysis, competitive advantage and positioning of the firm. They took marketing to mean value system creation and forming of relationship with stakeholders while strategy is centered on relationship between long term objectives and analysis of internal and external environment of the firm.

The key global marketing strategy dimensions as stated by Porter (1985) centered on standardizations, concentration and coordination of value-chain activities and integration. These strategies applied through the google of cultural differences have some benefits. The

issue of standardization affects the product, promotion, price and distribution channel structure. It is observed that global standardization benefits firms in terms of economics of scale and consistent brand image (Rao-Nicholson & Khan, 2016).

2.4. Influence of Culture on Global Marketing Strategies

In a study by Ekerete (2001) in Nigeria on the effects of culture on marketing strategies of multinational firms, concluded that culture had an effect on distribution, pricing, product offering and promotion with most cultural elements being language, religion belief, and ethnic values. It further stated that firms should be mindful of the socio-cultural dimensions in international marketing while government promote education to help in cultural assimilation process.

A research of culture on how multinational corporations (MNC) apply their strategy for international advertising standardization, showed that cultural values are used in American & Chinese adverts (Jiang & Wei, 2012). It further confirmed an increase phenomenon in international advertising for global consumer culture. Their research again showed that EU-based multinational corporations (MNC) favored global marketing strategies whereas North American-based firms preferred local strategies and Asia-based firms tend to practice local strategy as well.

In automobile industry, Jawal (2014) has stated that firms going global should consider cultural influence on their products. This is because of the people's fashion, taste and demand. Cultural influence on car consumption is not economic choice anymore but rather emotional and sensational based on aesthetic.

Al Karim (2015) has also researched into the effect of culture negotiating on international marketing. The findings revealed that the elements of culture were language, religion and social organization, law and politics, technology and materials, values and attitude are of more importance for Bangladesh citizens. This is a confirmation of Terpstra and Sarathy (2000) cultural framework.

In determining marketing strategies for global penetration of a product, Kaur and Chawla (2016) have asserted that firms must study the culture of specific group in that there are differences to income, traditions and customs. This paper particularly looked at how culture affects promotion of product in different countries and resolved that customs, traditions and cultural values affect specific cultural group.

The culture of language becomes a barrier to communication; religion impact on consumer behavior, purchasing pattern, lifestyle and belief; values and attitudes affects the promotional approach and branding message due to their internalization; aesthetics affects the taste, music and packaging; education shows the literacy level in terms of product usage and appreciation; law and politics shows the customs and rules applicable and acceptable to the people; technology and materials shows how sophistication of the people and readiness for innovation and finally the social organization affects the command and control system of the people (Terpstra & Sarathy, 2000). Rao-Nicholson and Khan (2016) have asserted that cultural difference must be addressed before firms go global.

Again, it has been mentioned by ECB Economics (2017) that global value chain improves competitiveness. This advantage is noticed in economics of scale and cross-country synergies. El Namaki (2016) has stated that cross country synergy is derived from resources and technological efficiency. Economics of scale related to the saving cost due to the increase in production (Celli, 2013). The concentration and coordination of value chain activities draws on countries unique prepositions for their comparative advantage.

The global marketing of integration is found in the cross-subsidization and cross-pollination. Cross-subsidization draws on resources to compete in another country order than the same country with the use of price (Chen & Rey, 2016). Products prices may differ per country in order to push a product to a particular market to gain market share. The cross pollination is based on copying good concepts from one country and applying same in another country.

3. Methodology

This paper adopted exploratory research design and discussed various research articles on cultural influence on global marketing strategies. These journals were randomly selected from the internet with publication date from 2000 to 2017. The search key words used in Google and Google Scholar for the selection of articles were culture and international marketing strategies, culture and global marketing strategies and culture and marketing strategies. The discussions brought out the similarities and differences of various research findings and the influence of culture on various marketing strategies.

4. Summary and Discussion of Various Research Findings

There is consensus in the literature that culture has a fundamental influence on marketing strategies, and marketers are expected to be more receptive to cultural differences especially in the international marketplace (Johnson, Elliot & Grier, 2010; Kalliny, Saran, Ghanem, & Fisher, 2011; Kaynak, Kara & April, 2011).

From the study of Ghani (2014), which focused on cultural movements and its impact on global marketing strategy, culture has huge influence on the choice of global marketing strategies. Cultural movement is seen as search for community, affiliation, and inspiration, as well as the desire to lead a better life at the level of social change and integration. To Ghani, it is not cultural lag that matters in global marketing but cultural diffusion; the ability of the firm to merge its host nation's culture with the culture of the destination market. According to the study, culture diffusion is a key to the success in this competitive world. Apple and Starbucks are two examples cited in this regard.

In a study conducted by Durmaz (2014) on factors that influence consumer buying behavior, it was revealed that culture is the most important factor. Literature reviewed indicates that culture does impact buying patterns, and the way marketing messages are received. For example, French-speaking Canadians pay attention to message source or the presenter of the advertisement, while English speaking Canadians focus on the message of the advertisement (Smith, 2003). Ghauri and Cateora (2010) added that, people in some African countries will likely reject products that involve the advert of a female exposing her sensitive parts since that is considered as

immoral or inappropriate. This suggests that in choosing market communication strategy, a firm should study closely the culture of the local country.

Kaur and Chawla (2016) believe that promotion of a product is highly affected by the cultural patterns of different countries. The choice of people and demand trends of different products depend upon customs, traditions and cultural values of specific region. They recommended that global market strategies should be framed by studying the culture of a specific group because each group has different needs according to their income, customs and traditions.

Ekerete (2001) supports the view that culture exerts varied influence on marketing strategies. He found language, religious beliefs and ethnic values to be the most influential cultural elements. Culture, he believes can determine a particular marketing strategy to be used. Culture is not same world over. In view of this, some cultures may require different forms of strategies such as quality products, frequent advertisement in local media, ideal pricing structure, reward sales promotion and new product innovations, for a business to succeed.

Interestingly, O’Cass and Liem (2007) found a parallel relationship between organization’s performance and culture. The reason given was that needs and wants relate with culture. They concluded that for an organization to succeed in a market, its business strategies should be tailored with the culture of that particular market.

Ahmed, et al. (2014) admitted that culture plays crucial role in the strategy a business employs in marketing its products. They asserted that without understanding the culture of a country in which the organization wants to do its business, that organization cannot achieve success. They define culture on the premises of the norms, values, beliefs and attitude of the customers to perform business activities within a foreign market.

Antunes, Barandas-Karl and Martins (2013) in using the theoretical construct of Hofstede (1980, 1991) in the dimensions of Power Distance (PD), Uncertainty Avoidance (UA), Individualism (IND), Masculinity (MASC) and Long-Term Orientation (LTO) to assess the impact of cultures on international marketing strategy admitted that cultures influence the marketing mix strategy of a company. They asserted that, marketing strategy of a business in terms of product design and branding as well as pricing, promotion and distribution process are dictated by the culture or the market environment.

Contrary to Antunes et al. (2013) and many studies based on Hofstede data, Jenner, MacNab, Birley, Brislim and Wortley (2008) in their study of cultural change and marketing, found no significant differences in Power Distance between the U.S., Mexico and Canada, no significant differences in Uncertainty Avoidance between Mexico and U.S., but between Canada and U.S., and no significant difference between U.S. and Canada on Individualism/Collectivism. Perhaps, the result is influenced by the geographical factors. However, they admitted that culture influence the marketing strategies of a firm.

Remarkably, Naghi and Para (2013), in their study of the effects of globalization on marketing, averred that consumers would no longer be willing to accept products and marketing strategies that will erase their national identity. This, accordingly, would make the development and implementation of a single marketing strategy difficult. They added that for a business to be successful on all markets, marketing strategies should be managed in line with local culture.

Obviously, the choice of marketing strategies never occurs in cultural vacuums. Instead, strategies develop within social contexts that encode values, beliefs, and acceptable patterns of behavior (Kaynak et al., 2011; Cayla & Arnold, 2008). In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, age is respected and communalism and belongingness is the bedrock of the culture. Therefore, designing marketing strategies in such region, age should not be downplayed. Messages should focus on an individual’s need for belongingness rather than on the individual striving for achievement. Advertising appeals should focus on the society and on the individual as a member of the society and not on individual self-enhancement (Darley, Luethge & Blankson, 2013).

The adaptation of marketing strategy implies the change of any attribute of product, price, distribution and promotional policy to fit the particularities of each country about culture, income, consumer tastes and preferences. Related to this controversy, international companies face the challenge of finding the optimal balance between standardizing and adapting their marketing strategies across national borders in order to be successful (Schmid & Kotulla, 2011; Griffith, 2010)

The study by Krueger and Nandan (2008) affirms that indeed culture impart on global marketing strategies. They stated that for businesses to maintain global competitive advantage the marketing mixes across borders needs to change to adapt to the different customs, different buying habits, and different demographic segments within a country. According to them, a firm going global should look at a strategy that depends on developing a successful marketing mix that aligns with the country’s culture.

While admittedly doing business in Africa is not easy (Babarinde, 2009), particularly for Western firms, creative thinking about how to surmount challenges in the African cultural environment, will make an organization successful in Africa because the region has potential business and investment opportunities.

The changing global marketplace and how cultural differences affect international marketing strategies are undoubtedly crucial issues marketers should not downplay (Kaynak et al., 2011; Huff & Smith, 2008; Cleveland & Laroche, 2007).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research concludes that, there are different cultures in different countries which serve as barriers of global marketing. That is, the dimensions and elements of culture impact the marketing strategies that are employed by international and multinational companies but these barriers can be minimize by using effective and efficient global marketing strategies. In other words, different marketing strategies are needed for different cultures especially in intercontinental cultures.

Literature reviewed affirmed that culture has great influence on global marketing strategies (Ahmed et al., 2014; Durmaz, 2014; Ghani, 2014; Kaynak et al., 2011; Cayla & Arnold, 2008; Krueger & Nandan, 2008). It is therefore prudent for international marketing managers to take keen interest in the influence local cultures exert on marketing strategies in that without diligent appreciation of host

culture, as in the case of Home Depot's failure in China (Gao, 2013), success in international markets will elude an organization's foreign marketing deliberations. This is because, culture has fundamental influence on marketing strategies (Kalliny et al., 2011; Kaynat et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2010) such as promotional strategies (Kaur & Chawla, 2016), product design, branding, pricing and distribution processes (Antines et al., 2013) and there is correlation between organizational performance and culture (Ahmed et al., 2014).

Looking at the great influence of culture on global marketing strategies as intimated in literature reviewed, this research recommends that multinational corporation should embrace the local cultural characteristics of consumers in their marketing strategies. That is, cultural differences (in terms of language, traditions, values, religion and beliefs) should be dovetailed into the operation, promotion, pricing and products development of international and multinational firms. That is, marketing strategies should be aligned to local cultures.

Also, in order to successfully integrate local culture into global marketing strategies, international and multinational firms should learn the local cultures and or involve local people in developing marketing strategies for a particular local culture. Local culture is very critical to the success of every business which is operating or deciding to expand its marketing activities beyond national boundaries. More so, Hofstede's five dimensions of culture should be incorporated in the formulation of global marketing strategies. Incorporating these dimensions into global marketing strategies can greatly propel the success of national and multinational firms.

In addition, global marketing strategists should continually and consistently learn local cultures of potential and current markets since culture is dynamic. If cultural change is ignored by international and multinational firms, they are likely going to face huge challenges since societal culture influence not only the products of firms but also the organizational culture.

Finally, the development and implementation of marketing strategies that will erode national identity should be avoided since that could lead to failure of international and multinational firms.

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