

Cultural barriers in international marketing



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The research area of this proposal is focused on the broad area of international marketing. More specifically, the focal point of the research will be the sociocultural environment and how this has an impact on a multinational company whose ambition is to enter a new market (Hollensen, 2007). As indicated by Doole and Lowe (2008), the sociocultural factor affects the consumer and buyer behaviour, making the development of international marketing strategies inevitable.

In addition, this research's centre of attention will be the elements of culture which is a popular method of discovering cultures (Albaum & Duerr, 2008). Furthermore, the layers of culture will be presented from two different perspectives as well as the relation of culture with consumer behaviour. Finally, an attempt to examine the Japanese culture will be made by reviewing the high- and low-context concept (Hall, 1960 cited in Nguyen et al., 2007: 207), and some additional models introduced by key authors.

3. 3 Background

Primarily, understanding one's culture before entering his market has a dual aspect. On one hand, the effectiveness of the established marketing strategies and its implementation by locals could be verified (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2007), and on the other hand you familiarise with your own culture (Yamada, 1997: xvi).

Furthermore, Japan is ' one of the most culturally homogenous countries in the world' (Engel & Murakami, 2001: 21), citizens of which consider their heritage valuable and indispensable (Keillor & Hult, 1999). Consequently, this creates trade barriers for the multinational companies (Albaum & Duerr,

2008) whose intention is to enter the Japanese market. These barriers can be eliminated by ' understanding the Japanese values and expectations' (Engel & Murakami, 2001: 20).

Moreover, the ability of overcoming these barriers and cultivate relations with the target market is the fundamental stepping stone for an effective marketing strategy (Ford, 1984 cited in Lohtia et al., 2009). In order to achieve that, companies should be culturally sensitive, in other words they should acknowledge the dissimilarities between domestic and international markets and handle them effectively (Holzmuller & Stottinger, 2001; LaBahn & Harich, 1997; Rice& O'Donohue, 2002 cited in Lohtia et al., 2009: 241). However, ' it is difficult to achieve cultural sensitivity to Japan' (Hall, 1987 cited in Lohtia et al., 2009: 242), and companies that will achieve it will gain the appreciation of the Japanese consumers (Lohtia et al., 2009).

3. 4 Conclusion

Initially, Craig and Douglas (2006: 338) confirm that due to globalisation and the rapid change of cultures, a deeper understanding of culture is necessary. Moreover, Steenkamp (2001: 41) verifies that culture is a ' complex phenomenon' and that many dimensions are required to be developed, so that marketers can distinguish effectively one culture from another, and thus establish the appropriate marketing strategy.

In the dissertation, the researcher will try to uncover as many dimensions that capture culture as possible, focusing on the Japanese culture, hence identifying the cultural barriers. Japan was chosen as it is a high context country (Hall, 1987 cited in Lohtia et al., 2009), and subsequently the higher

the context of a culture, the more effort will be needed from a company to adjust its strategy to that culture (Hollensen, 2007: 221).

Literature Review

4. 1 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to present definitions of international marketing that are related with Japan's sociocultural environment.

Additionally, a synthesis of the existing literature was conducted in order to provide a thorough description of the elements and the layers of culture, the available models that examine cultures and their implications for consumer behaviour.

Moreover, the data collection was achieved by using the university's library and ebrary database. The keywords ' international marketing' resulted in 543 and 18. 719 hits of secondary data respectively, and lastly 9 books were used.

Finally, the e-library was used to obtain academic journals in order to inject scientific ideas in the research. The search engine showed 66798 results of which only 240 were available. Eventually, 10 articles were selected to be used, mainly coming from Emerald's and ScienceDirect's databases.

4. 2 Definitions and concepts

To start with, before attempting to define ' culture', international marketing should be introduced. There seems to be a consensus regarding the definition of international marketing. More specifically, Doole and Lowe (2008: 6) as well as Ghauri and Cateora (2005: 8) defined it as the procedure that a company's goods and services are targeted in customers of more than <https://assignbuster.com/cultural-barriers-in-international-marketing/>

one country, which seeks the maximisation of its' profit. Additionally, Ghauri and Cateora (2005: 8) raised the difference between international and domestic marketing, where the latter focuses only in one nation.

Furthermore, Doole and Lowe (2008: 7), and Hooley et al. (2008: 61) used the SLEPT model to identify the environmental impacts on international marketing. These are: Social/Cultural, Legal, Economic, Political and finally Technological. This proposal will focus only on the Sociocultural influences.

Moreover, 160 definitions for culture have been recorded (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2007), proving the significance of the role that culture plays in marketers' strategy (Ghauri & Cateora, 2005).

Firstly, the “etic” approach of culture, which focuses on the contrast between two cultures (Luna & Gupta, 2001: 46) was identified by Hofstede (1997) as ‘the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another’ (Hollensen, 2007: 216; Luna & Gupta, 2001: 46).

In contrast, the “emic” approach of culture was proposed by McCracken (1988: 73) cited in Luna and Gupta (2001: 46). He defined culture as “the ‘lens’ through which all phenomena are seen. It determines how these phenomena are apprehended and assimilated. Second, culture is the ‘blueprint’ of human activity. It determines the coordinates of social action and productive activity, specifying the behaviours and objects that issue from both”. The objective of the emic approach is to achieve a thorough comprehension of the study of culture (Luna & Gupta, 2001).

4.3 The elements of culture

Primarily, culture was divided into different elements to direct marketers to a deeper examination of the cultural differences between international markets (Ghauri & Cateora 2005: 82).

More detailed, Ghauri and Cateora (2005: 83) identified six elements of culture: Material culture, Social institutions, Aesthetics, Belief system, Education and Language. Furthermore, Albaum and Duerr (2008: 122), and Doole and Lowe (2008: 74) added Technology with Material culture, as well as Law and Politics, with the former omitting Aesthetics. Hollensen (2007: 225) included Technology to Material culture, added Manners and customs, and omitted Law and Politics. Finally, Czinkota and Ronkainen (2007: 57) added Manners and Customs, and omitted Law and Politics.

It is worth mentioning that all the elements will be examined thoroughly in the dissertation from the perspective of Japan.

4.4 The layers of culture

The layers of culture can be a great opportunity for multinational companies to familiarise themselves with the behaviour (Hollensen, 2007), attitudes and values (Doole and Lowe, 2008) of people with different cultural backgrounds they hire (Hollensen, 2007). On one hand, Hollensen (2007: 219) indicates four layers of culture: national culture, business/ industry culture, company culture and finally individual behaviour, with each layer affecting the next one.

On the other hand, a different approach was presented by Doole and Lowe (2008: 73). They portrayed the layers of culture in a national, a regional/
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ethnic/ religious/ linguistic, a gender, a generation and finally a social class level.

In a nutshell, companies should familiarise themselves with the characteristics of the Japanese employees, as they hardly ever quit their jobs and they are astoundingly bonded with them so as to receive a flourishing career (Engel & Murakami, 2001: 29).

4. 5 Culture and consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour regarding a product or a message is affected by different components of culture (Doole & Lowe, 2008). Jeannet and Hennessey (2004) cited in Doole and Lowe (2008: 80) presented the procedure that consumer behaviour is affected by culture.

In contrast, Hofstede (1997) cited in Luna and Gupta (2001, 47) argues that consumer behaviour is influenced by four manifestations which are: values, heroes, symbols, and rituals. Moreover, Craig and Douglas (2006) stated that customs and rituals play a significant role for Japan, in maintaining well-balanced relations among its citizens. However, Usunier (1996) cited in Holden (2004: 567), partly agrees with Hofstede's view, since he believes that consumer behaviour, which consists of consumer's values, attitudes and decision making, is affected by cultural dissimilarities.

Lastly, Doole and Lowe (2008: 80) identified four ideas that marketers should reflect on when using Western ideas to comprehend the foreign consumer behaviour.

4. 6 Cultural analysis

4. 6. 1 High- and low-context cultures

The model of high- and low-context cultures was defined by Edward T. Hall (1960a) ' as a way of understanding different cultural orientation' (Hollensen, 2007: 220). As indicated by Hall (1976) cited in Nguyen et al. (2007: 207), in low-context cultures the message itself is of great importance. On the other hand, in high-context cultures, people tend to elaborate on the message to gain a deeper understanding of it (Hollensen, 2007: 220; Doole & Lowe, 2008: 86). As argued by Hollensen (2007), the Japanese have the highest context culture, while the Swiss have the lowest.

4. 6. 2 Hofstede's model

To begin with, Hofstede's dimensions should be taken into consideration when marketers construct their marketing strategy (Hollensen, 2007: 228). Ghauri and Cateora (2005), as well as Hollensen (2007) mention four dimensions of culture; distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity, while Hofstede adds long-term orientation (Hofstede, 2009). The importance of these results is due to cultural dimensions illustrating the traits of a country (Rivera-Vazquez et al., 2009). Consequently, the results for Japan are intended to be used for the dissertation. Lastly, strengths and weaknesses of this model were introduced by Hollensen (2007: 229).

4. 6. 3 Schwartz's model

An alternative framework was created by Schwartz (1994) cited in Steenkamp (2001). He mentions three dimensions through which he will provide answers to his societal topics: ' conservatism versus autonomy,

hierarchy versus egalitarianism and labelled mastery or labelled harmony’ (Steenkamp, 2001: 32).

4. 6. 4 Alternative models

Primarily, Keegan (2004: 14) supports that the focus on marketing changes and that concepts need updating regularly. Based on this idea, Holden (2004: 570) disapproves the reliance on Hofstede’s model, while suggesting an approach to culture from a different perspective. Finally, an alternative model for approaching Asian cultures was introduced by Fang (1999), cited in Fletcher and Flang (2006: 438).

4. 7 Conclusion

Primarily, although there is a large amount of literature concerning international marketing and culture, there seems to be some disagreements between authors, as well as some omissions by others.

For instance, Hollensen (2007) supports that it is inevitable to examine cultures without referring to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. On the other hand, Holden (2004) criticises the validity of Hofstede’s model. As a result, the researcher will try to compare and contrast the models that have been developed for gaining knowledge of the differences amongst cultures.

Methodology

5. 1 Introduction

The approach that was developed in order to accomplish the objectives was based on desk research. More specifically, the researcher utilised existing written material such as books, e-books, and some scientific journals (Gummesson, 2000: 35). Finally, the World Wide Web (Internet) will be used <https://assignbuster.com/cultural-barriers-in-international-marketing/>

to obtain the empirical results regarding the cultural dimensions of Japan suggested by the key author Hofstede.

The qualitative research method is going to be used. Primarily, the researcher uses secondary analysis which is a qualitative method (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 326). Secondly the thesis of other writers will be introduced, instead of the researcher's own opinion (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 425). Additionally, of great importance should be the fact that the use of mixed methods -both qualitative and quantitative- was avoided because these methods are two 'different paradigms' (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 642).

Finally, concerning 'the relationship between theory and research' (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 11), the inductive theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007) was used. Although Fisher (2007: 322) argues that a combination of inductive and deductive method can be employed, only the inductive method was used for this proposal. This can be justified by the fact that the researcher moves from observations, which is the aim of the proposal, to the general which is the theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 14).

5. 2 Desk Research

To start with, the only method that was used in order to obtain data for this proposal was desk research. Although Gummesson (2000: 34) argues that knowledge coming from secondary sources is limited, Bryman and Bell (2007: 328) believe that secondary analysis provides the researcher with high quality data. Additionally, it is more cost-effective in a way that secondary data are easier to interpret than primary (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 333).

Moreover, part of the secondary data collected came from scientific journals. The researcher focused on journals that were related to 'culture' and 'cultural barriers'. The journals that were used came from:

- The International Marketing Review
- The Journal of Product & Brand Management
- The European Journal of Marketing
- The International Business Review
- The Journal of Knowledge Management

Finally, text books were used in an attempt to achieve a deeper understanding of the theory related to international marketing and culture. Some of those used are:

- 'International Marketing Strategy' by Isobel Doole and Robin Lowe
- 'International Marketing' by Ghauri and Cateora
- 'Global Marketing' by Svend Hollensen
- 'Passport to Japan' by Engel and Murakami

5.3 Alternative Methods

Ideally, the researcher could have used alternative methods to complement the validity of material found (Gummesson, 2000: 35). These methods could be: case studies, questionnaires and qualitative interviews (Gummesson, 2000: 35).

Primarily, the researcher could have used existing case studies in this proposal to support the data found from existing theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Unfortunately, word limit prevented him from including material found, as more theoretical findings were included to help readers gain basic

knowledge on international marketing and culture. However, it is unquestionably that in the dissertation the researcher will use existing case studies.

Finally, the researcher could conduct a case study by approaching a multinational company which maintains its operations in Japan. More specifically, the use of questionnaires or qualitative interviews would have helped the researcher ' gain an insider perspective' (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 443) of the marketing strategy that a company deploys in Japan.

Unfortunately, the difficulty of approaching a company and accessing its confidential data prevented the researcher from implementing it.

However, it is worth mentioning that the researcher has not had the chance to meet his supervisor. Consequently, the research methods could possibly change with the intention of writing a high-quality master's dissertation.

Ethical issues

There are no ethical issues concerning this proposal since only desk research was conducted. To be more specific, there was no distortion of data and every secondary source has been acknowledged by in-text references and a reference list, adhering to the rules of Aston Business School on plagiarism. Last but not least, copyrights of published books, articles and journals were respected.

Task List

Tasks

Problems

Solutions

Search and obtain existing literature on theory and concepts of culture in books and e-books

Limited searching skills, due to restricted previous experience

Received advice from professors as well as from library staff on effective research techniques

Search and obtain existing literature from scientific journals

Not all journal articles are available in full text in the Aston e-library and many of those available were not completely relevant to the topic of the proposal

Methodical and detailed research for alternative articles

Select the most relevant articles

Time consuming

Skim and scan the articles found

Obtain text books from the Aston library that are related to differences across different cultures

Not all books are available in the Aston library

Obtained e-books from ebrary of Aston University

Obtain results from empirical studies regarding the culture of Japan

Not all data is available in text books

Access World Wide Web (Internet) to obtain the information needed

Write the assignment

Limited previous experience

Guidance on the structure of the assignment via lecture notes and slides

Conduct an effective literature review

Limited previous experience

Guidance provided through lecture notes and slides

Combine information provided from different books, producing a uniform text

Large amount of information from secondary data sources available

Skim and scan all secondary data sources to combine all information provided and highlight any omissions observed in the literature

Use case studies of different multinational companies that examine similar problems

Word limit

Not covered by the proposal but will be covered in the dissertation

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Proof-read and edit the assignment before submission

Possible mistakes or omissions

Thorough reading and correction of mistakes