Journal of Marketing and Consumer Research
ISSN 2422-8451 An International Peer-reviewed Journal
Vol.23, 2016 www.iiste.org

Standardisation versus Adaptation as an International Marketing Strategy: The Role of Cultural Pattern in a Society and its Effect on Consumption

McLeish Ukomatimi Otuedon
DBA Scholar, SMC University, Vorstadt 26a, 6302 Zug, Switzerland

Abstract

This paper examined the concepts of standardisation and localisation, and the advantages and disadvantages of both, as well as the role of cultural patterns in a society and how market research must be conducted before a company enters a new international market. Since the popularisation of the term "global marketing" in the early 1980s, there have been various debate about globalisation and localisation. The idea of globalisation encouraged international companies to sell uniform products and services the same way in every market worldwide. The concept of localisation was also robustly examined. The paper documented that cultural patterns, when deeply embedded in a society, tend to have a strong influence on consumer behaviour and, indeed, consumption. The paper advised that market research must precede a company's entry into a new international market to provide a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist in the new market.

Keywords: Globalisation, Standardisation, Adaptation, Localisation, Culture, Cultural pattern, International market research, Consumption

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of the term "global marketing" in the early 1980s, there have been various debates about globalisation versus localisation, standardisation versus adaptation and centralisation versus decentralisation. Marketing strategists and researchers in the field of marketing have documented the philosophy of "globalisation" of markets or "global" marketing or "global" marketing strategy to have been started by Theodore Levitt, a Harvard Business School Professor, through his landmark article, "The globalisation of markets," published in the May/June 1983 edition of the Harvard Business Review (Douglas and Craig, 1986; Holt et al., 2004; Jain, 1989; Jeannet and Hennessey, 1998; Light, 2013; Yip, 1997). The idea of globalisation encouraged global companies and brands to sell uniform products and services the same way in every market worldwide (Levitt, 1983, 1984). Levitt argued that companies that embrace the standardised approach would achieve for themselves, profits and vastly expanded markets. Levitt further argued that the key to success, through the exploitation of the "economics of simplicity," is in the marketing of standardised products, services and brands worldwide. The rationale for this global approach to international marketing was to take advantage of economies of scale to increase cost efficiency through the assistance of the powerful force of technology.

However, several critiques with opposing view on the standardised global approach were quick to point to the numerous barriers associated with the standardised global approach. In fact, the critiques provided strong reactions, including a handful of articles arguing against the standardised global marketing approach (Boddewyn et al., 1986; Douglas and Wind, 1987; Kashani, 1989; Wind, 1986). They advocated for the localised approach that would assist to adapt products and strategies to the specific characteristics of individual markets in different countries (Boddewyn et al., 1986; Fisher, 1984; Kotler, 1986). Quelch and Hoff (1986) posited that standardised global marketing as proposed by Theodore Levitt is too extreme and impracticable due to the fact that competitive and customers' conditions significantly differ across jurisdictions. They concluded that globally standardised marketing approach as proposed by Theodore Levitt just won't work. Kotler (1986) argued that even products with similar features and look worldwide tend to have subtle jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction variations that can make the difference in their success. In a nutshell, the critics of the standardised approach questioned its practicality and benefits; rather, they advocated for an adaptation approach. The adaptation approach supports market tailoring to fit the peculiarities and unique features of different markets worldwide. The next few sections would be used to examine the differences between a standardised and localised strategy and the advantages and disadvantages of each, the role of the cultural patterns in a society and how these cultural patterns affect consumption, as well as how market research must precede entrance into a new international market.

2. Standardised Marketing Strategy

Standardisation has become a prominent buzzword in international marketing. Proponents of the philosophy of "global" standardisation asserted that the powerful forces of globalisation catalysed by technology were homogenising markets and demands worldwide and that global corporations or brands needed to take advantage of the wind of globalisation's fortune that was blowing by following a standardised marketing strategy (Levitt, 1983; Viswanathan and Dickson, 2007; Yip, 1996). Levitt (1983) boldly declared "The globalization of markets is at hand" (p. 92). There have been multiple definitions of standardisation in the context of global marketing. Szymanski et al. (1993) defined standardisation as a uniform and standard pattern of resource allocation amongst the variables in the marketing mix across national markets, while Viswanathan and Dickson (2007) defined standardisation as a common marketing programme applied simultaneously to all markets. Jeannet and Hennessey (1998) defined standardisation strategy as the creation of a uniform strategy for a product, service or company for the entire global market, encompassing many markets across jurisdictions or countries, while Jain (1989) asserted that standardisation refers to using a common product, price, distribution and promotion (marketing mix) programme all over the world, by identical strategies, with resultant lower costs and higher margins. The author viewed standardisation as a conscious practice by global organisations to deliver uniform products and services, as well as a common strategy for advertising, distribution, price and promotion worldwide.

The philosophy of standardisation of markets is based on the premise that there is homogenisation across national markets. Proponents of the standardised global marketing approach see the world as increasingly similar and, therefore, consumers across world markets have the same taste, preference and demand (Levitt, 1983, 1984; Ohmae, 1985 cited by Viswanathan and Dickson, 2007). In other words, the standardised approach is characterised by global homogeneity where global entities produce and sell identical products in the same way everywhere. Levitt (1983) concluded in the thought-provoking article that entities that do not adapt or fail to join the train of standardisation would be left behind at the least, or worst still, become victims of those that did. In the world of the proponents of standardisation, customisation, adaptation, variations, fragmentation, differentiation and decentralisation have no place. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of the standardised marketing strategy are discussed below.

2.1 Advantages of the Standardised Marketing Strategy

Standardisation as a global marketing philosophy bears quite a number of benefits which make it an attractive strategy for global companies and businesses. Proponents of the standardised marketing strategy have listed some of these advantages to include economies of scale in production, distribution, advertising, marketing, sales promotion and management, as well as transfer of expertise and know-how; reduction of costs and prices, uniform image, enhanced customer preference, high quality, easier control and co-ordination, amongst others (Douglas and Craig, 1986; Levitt, 1983; Quelch and Hoff, 1986; Yip, 1996, 1997). These advantages are further discussed below.

2.1.1 Economies of scale in development, production, distribution, advertising, marketing, brand name, sales promotion and management

One of the major arguments put forward in support of the philosophy of global standardisation is that global companies and businesses benefit from enormous economies of scale in development, production, distribution, advertising, marketing, brand name, sales promotion and management. Yip (1997) posited that global companies enjoy economies of scale, resulting in increased cost efficiency. Levitt (1983, 1984) argued that economies of scale enable global companies and businesses to compete favourably and lead to reduction of costs and prices. Douglas and Wind (1987) argued that adoption of a standardised marketing strategy across national markets enables a company to take advantage of the synergistic effect arising from multi-country operations, which enhances the global company's key competitive advantage. The author is of the opinion that economies of scale bring about 'economies of simplicity and standardisation' (no variations and no complexities), competitive similarities (across markets) and competitive advantage as a result of the speed to market.

2.1.2 Transfer of expertise and know-how

The importance of shared expertise and know-how cannot be over-emphasised. It has been argued that the standardisation of products across national markets facilitates transfer of experience and know-how from one jurisdiction or market to another (Douglas and Craig, 1986). For example, Oil and Gas companies such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Shell came into Nigeria in the 1970s with several expatriates; over the years, these expatriates have trained and transferred technical and managerial expertise to their Nigerian colleagues. Most of the top management positions in the Oil and Gas industry in Nigeria today are manned by Nigerians and some of the trained Nigerians have been sent abroad as expatriates in other countries.

2.1.3 Reduction of costs and prices

Global companies and businesses produce and sell products with great speed as a result of the lower cost of operations and reduced prices. Quelch and Hoff (1986) argued that standardised products can lower operating costs. A major argument in favour of standardisation is that if generic products are sold at reduced prices internationally, patronage would expand exponentially (Levitt, 1983). This strategy would assist global companies to gain global market share.

2.1.4 Uniform image

It has been argued that choosing a standardised strategy can help to project a consistent uniform global image with customers across all national markets. For example, global brands such as McDonald's, Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola have been able to standardise their products and brands worldwide. These brands are truly global because they have general acceptance worldwide. The mere sighting of the logos of these brands fascinates and generates great excitement amongst global consumers. Levitt (1984) asserted that the success of McDonald's, Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola in multiplicity of jurisdictions is a testament to the general drift towards globalisation. In Nigeria, especially, in the Hi-Tech and car markets, global brands such as Samsung, Sony, Honda Accord, Toyota, Apple, Mercedes Benz, Range Rover products (Sport, Vogue, etc) are holding sway. Even Nigerians would prefer the United States specifications of these products because they want to enjoy the same performance and standard that is the hallmark of electronics and cars built for use in the United States. In other words, Nigerians want to use the same products used in the United States without any modification or customisation.

2.1.5 Enhanced customer preference

Standardisation also leads to enhanced customer preference. Yip (1986) posited that when products are standardised across world markets, it enhances customers' preference from being uniform worldwide. For example, the introduction of Kentucky Fried Chicken ("KFC") in Nigeria few years ago drew a significant number of customers from domestic competitive brands such as Tastee Fried Chicken ("TFC"), Sweet Sensation and Tantalizers, amongst others. Most fast food and restaurant lovers in Nigeria who have experienced KFC in other countries long before its arrival in Nigeria were so excited and they never hid their feelings.

2.1.6 High Quality

One of the benefits (overt or covert) and the reason why standardisation is pursued is to produce high quality products that would be in great demand in both home and foreign markets. Levitt (1983) argued that if a global company pushes quality and reliability up, while keeping costs and prices down, customers in different countries would prefer its standardised products. In Nigeria, for example, customers want to wear the same kind of quality jean as the customers in India, and the customers in Bangladesh want to drive BMW sport utility vehicles ("SUVs") that are of the same standard and performance as the BMW SUV produce for the United States' market. Homogeneity of markets has enhanced customers' taste and preference for high quality products across national markets.

2.1.7 Easier control and co-ordination

Standardisation is generally believed to create easy control and co-ordination of products and operations across countries. Douglas and Craig (1986) posited that if a uniform product is sold across all markets, monitoring of performance in different jurisdictions would be more effective. It is much easier to control a standardised product than a product customised on a country-by-country basis because of the "economies of simplicity."

2.2 Disadvantages of the Standardised Marketing Strategy

On the other hand, standardisation as a global marketing strategy may not achieve its intended goals because of various constraints that limit its application, including government and trade restrictions, differences in customer interests and response patterns, the nature of the competitive structure and market characteristics (Douglas and Craig, 1986; Jeannet and Hennessey, 1998). The aforementioned constraints are further discussed below.

2.2.1 Government and trade restrictions

Government and trade restrictions require strong consideration when developing an international marketing strategy. Government and trade restrictions, including product, pricing and advertising regulations, tariff and other trade barriers, as well as the existence of cartels, frequently hamper the standardisation of the marketing mix elements worldwide (Douglas and Craig, 1986). In Nigeria, for example, higher tariffs are being levied on imported products, while local producers have been granted a lot of concessions, including waivers and exemptions. Although such waivers and exemptions were given and are still being given to make it more difficult for those that deal on imported products to compete with local producers on prices, but that objective has not been fully achieved.

2.2.2 Differences in customer interests and response patterns

Differences in customer interest and response patterns are key constraints to standardisation. Preferences, interests and response patterns of customers may differ significantly from one country to another or from one region to another (Douglas and Craig). These differences may be as a result of cultural, social or religious factors. In Nigeria, for example, the name "Queen of the Coast" has been associated with mermaid for a very long time and because of this, some consumers of sardine have found it difficult to accept a particular brand of sardine called Queen of the Coast, though this is more of perception than reality. Similarly, advertisements in Nigeria are more likely to be localised to reflect the multi-ethnic nature of the society. If the advertisement is in English, a very significant number of the population would be excluded, and if the advertisement is to be done in a local language, then it has to be in the three major languages, otherwise, there would be no general acceptability. Even in the United States, advertisements targeted at Hispanic consumers are done in Spanish or both in Spanish and English.

2.2.3 The nature of the competitive structure

The nature of the competitive landscape is a major factor when deciding whether to adopt a standardised strategy or adaptation strategy. According to Douglas and Craig (1986), competitive structure differs from one country to another and these differences may be the reason why international companies opt for adaptation strategy. For example, in developing countries where customers are very sensitive to prices, the existence of low-cost domestic competition may force global companies to lower prices to avoid being systematically forced out of the market.

2.2.4 Market characteristics

Differences in market characteristics from one country to another or one region to another such as the physical environment, cultural and social factors, language and macroeconomic factors may hinder the use of standardised strategy. Jeannet and Hennessey (1998) posited that the physical environment of any country, determined by population size, product use conditions and climate, often forces global marketing companies to adjust their products to fit local conditions. The unpredictable nature of the cultural and social factors has had tremendous influences on the marketing environment. Thus, customs and traditions have the most significant impact on product categories when consumers in a given country have had prior experience with a given product category (Jeannet and Hennessey, 1998). According to Jeannet and Hennessey (1998), language is another great hurdle that international marketing companies have to contend with. In Nigeria, for example, advertisements that run in only English would likely not be sufficient as most of the population do not understand English. Thus, most advertisements are aired in the three major local languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

3. Localised Marketing Strategy

Localised marketing strategy is about tailoring and adapting marketing strategies to fit the "unique elements" of individual markets worldwide. Some researchers have advocated for an "adaptation" strategy (Boddewyn et al., 1986; Kashani, 1989; Thrassou and Vrontis, 2006; Wind, 1986). Proponents of the adaptation strategy argued that there are insurmountable differences, including climate, topography, consumer tastes, law, culture, race, technology, disposable income, occupations, literacy and level of education, taxation, local labour costs, nationalism and society, amongst others, that exist in international markets and even between markets in the same country (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 1998; Papavassilou and Stathakopoulos, 1997 cited by Vrontis et al., 2009; Paliwoda and Thomas, 1999). Followers of the adaptation philosophy further argued that there are peculiarities associated with specific markets and that even products and markets that look similar worldwide tend to have subtle jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction variations that can make the difference in their success and that because of these variations international companies should make conscious effort to adjust their marketing strategy to fit specific market requirements worldwide (Kotler, 1986; Vrontis et al., 2009). The advantages and disadvantages inherent in adaptation are carefully discussed below.

3.1 Advantages of the Adaptation Marketing Strategy

Proponents of the adaptation marketing strategy have listed some of its advantages to include easy acceptability, responsiveness to local needs and market, expedited local business development (Douglas and Craig, 1986; Levitt, 1983; Quelch and Hoff, 1986; Yip, 1996, 1997), and strengthens local content, amongst others. These advantages are further discussed below.

3.1.1 Easy acceptability

One of the major arguments put forward in support of adaptation is that it is tailored to meet the specific needs and desires, laws, cultures and consumer taste and preference of individual markets worldwide (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 1998; Paliwoda and Thomas, 1999). This is more likely to bring about easy connection and acceptability by the people, which may generate much greater revenues and success.

3.1.2 Responsiveness to local needs and market

Adaptation as a philosophy is a kind of way a global company tells local markets that it understands that differences in customer needs and desires continue to persist and would ensure that these differences would be reflected in its products and other marketing mix strategies. Researchers on global marketing have advocated that because few markets are exactly alike, some adaptation of marketing strategy to local needs is necessary to win customers and maximise sales (Quelch and Hoff, 1986; Ramarapu et al., 1999; Szymanski et al., 1993; Wills et al., 1991). The local market would more likely respond positively to a product if it is tailored to their need.

3.1.3 Expedites local business development

Adaptation of marketing strategy to individual market needs and desires would give an international company a competitive edge as it would be able to swiftly match local competition. Adaptation would allow an international company to quickly and aggressively compete favourably with local competition while the global brand is still to gain recognition in the local market. This would facilitate domestic services and expedite local business development for the local operations of the company.

3.1.4 Strengthens local content

Adaptation enjoys the support of the local market because it helps to develop local contents. In Nigeria, local content as a philosophy involves empowering and giving Nigerians first considerations for project execution, award of oil blocks, oil field licences, oil lifting licences, jobs and goods and services. Localisation helps to strengthen the Nigerian content agenda through the empowerment of the manpower in the Oil and Gas industry. Most of the jobs that were hitherto done at the corporate headquarters of the Multinational Oil and Gas companies are now executed in Nigeria. In addition, many Nigerians have gained experienced from their expatriate colleagues and they are now able to carry out specialist functions in-country.

3.2 Disadvantages of the Adaptation Marketing Strategy

Some of the disadvantages of adaptation include increased operating cost, limited control and co-ordination, lack of uniform global image and lack of transfer of experience or know-how. These disadvantages are further discussed below.

3.2.1 Increased operating costs

Adapting the marketing mix elements (products, prices, distribution and advertising) to specific needs and desires of different markets can increase operating costs. Such operating costs would arise from the duplication of functions in different countries or regions.

3.2.2 Limited control and co-ordination

One of the challenges to adaptation as a strategy is that localisation of the marketing mix elements makes the control and co-ordination of an international company's operations more difficult. If products are customised to each market and different promotional campaigns are used, then it would be more difficult to implement the same production control methods, product quality standards, as well as the same brand awareness.

3.2.3 Lack of uniform global image

Localisation of the marketing mix elements to a great degree limits the extent to which a uniform global image can be achieved by an international company. In many consumer packaged product markets, the effect of the lack of a uniform global image might not be that pronounced. However, in some markets, especially industrial goods markets where customers are favourably disposed to foreign elements of the marketing mix and may even prefer them (Yip, 1997), the effect of the lack of a uniform global image might be more severe due to customers' preference for brands from countries that are perceived to be industry leaders in innovation, quality and the like. For example, some Nigerians prefer to buy cars directly from the United States simply because there is a general perception that cars built for the U.S. (U.S. specification cars) are different and have more features (quality, innovation, safety and otherwise) from those built for Europe, Middle East and Africa ("EMEA")

3.2.4 Lack of transfer of experience or know-how

Lack of integration and co-ordination of marketing activities across countries or regional areas act as a barrier to the transfer of experience and know-how built and developed in one country or national market to another. This would hinder the development of local contents in some countries, especially in developing countries.

4. Contingency Approach to Global Marketing

There is a school of thought that does not believe in viewing global marketing as either / or proposition, in terms of whether to go with standardisation (globalisation) or adaptation (localisation). Rather, this school of thought favours a contingency approach that integrates the best elements of standardisation and adaptation (Cavusgil et al., 1993; Jain, 1989; Light, 2013; Quelch and Hoff, 1986). According to the proponents of the contingency approach, globalisation of marketing lies on a continuum with standardisation of all elements of the marketing mix at one end of the continuum and adaptation of all elements of the marketing mix at the other end of the continuum (Quelch and Hoff, 1986; Viswanathan and Dickson, 2007; Walters, 1986). Globalisation can fall anywhere on the continuum from tight worldwide control and coordination of the elements of the marketing mix to a loose agreement on the elements of the marketing mix. In other words, the contingency approach suggests degrees of standardisation. Thus, the extent of standardising the elements of the marketing mix would be a function of the level of homogeneity of customers' response to the marketing mix, the homogeneity of economic freedom and the transferability of competitive advantage across markets (Viswanathan and Dickson, 2007).

The contingency approach to global marketing is contingent upon certain factors. Researchers have listed a number of these factors to include economic factors (economies of scale), competitive factors (competitive position and competitive similarity), environmental factors (legal, political and economic environment) and organisational factors (corporate orientation and headquarters subsidiary relationship), amongst others (Jain, 1989; Shoham, 1999; Solberg, 2000, 2002; Viswanathan and Dickson, 2007; Wind, 1986). Paul (2000) asserted that it is now generally accepted that an international company must consider both local and global aspects. According to Quelch and Hoff (1986), the issue of whether to go global is no longer in contention, but how to tailor the global marketing strategy to fit each national market and how to make it work, in terms of the degree of standardisation that is appropriate. In applying the contingency approach and making it work, flexibility is essential. In other words, international companies need to tailor the globalised approach.

Some researchers on international marketing used the term 'hybrid strategy' to describe the integration of the best elements of standardisation and adaptation instead of the term contingency approach used by the author. However, the principles behind both terminologies are the same. According to Holt, Quelch and Taylor (2004), international companies that adopt the hybrid strategy tend to use standardisation for technology, production and organisation, but favour adaptation for product features, distribution, selling techniques and communications. The inherent advantage of this strategy is that it is able to combine the best of both approaches (standardisation and adaptation). Global brands such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola that are famous for standardisation are becoming increasingly localised (Light, 2013). For example, McDonald's serves vegetarian burgers in India, McSpaghetti in the Philippines, hot dogs in Japan, McLobster rolls in Maine and chicken pita sandwich in Greece. Similarly, Coca-Cola now allows consumers to personalise their own special recipe through the assistance of its freestyle machine.

5. The Role of the Cultural Pattern in a Society

There are various meanings and definitions of culture. Jeannet and Hennessey (1998) defined culture as the heritage of a society, including beliefs, morals, habits, traditions, religion, art and language transmitted by words, literature or any other form. Bates and Plog (1976) defined culture as a system of shared customs, values, behaviours, beliefs and artefacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning. Hofstede and Bond (1988) defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from those of another" (p. 6). Culture is "a system of values and norms that are shared among a group of people that when taken together constitute a design for living" (van Heerden and Barter, 2008, p. 38). According to McCracken (1988), culture encompasses ideas and activities with which individuals within a society construe and construct their world. The author defined culture as the way things are done in any given society, group or organisation. In other words, it is a way of life or the way people live in their world. From the foregoing definitions, it is apparent that culture plays a significant role in modern day society.

Fulda (2010) defined a 'cultural pattern' as "the connection of concepts and practices which have gained relative perpetuity through cultural habitualization" (p. 138). He further stated that cultural patterns comprised a combination of interpretative schemes through which the world can be structured, explained, categorised and interpreted with practices (either individual or social practices) which either develop out of, or follow these schemes. Such cultural patterns create long-term exemplary status that helps a society or group adapt to its environment or surroundings. According to Amuah (2012), cultural patterns do not only have the strong potential to influence and shape the character of the society within which they exist, but they also act as the key determinant of the identity and worldview of the society. These cultural patterns, when deeply entrenched and embedded in a society, tend to have a very strong influence on consumer behaviour and, indeed, consumption.

Culture and consumption have an extraordinarily significant relationship (McCracken, 1988). This relationship is of intense mutuality. Zukin and Maguire (2004) defined consumption as an economic and socio-cultural process of choosing consumer goods. McCracken (1988) defined consumption as the process by which consumer goods and services are produced, bought and used. He further stated that consumption is a cultural phenomenon that is driven, shaped and constrained at every point by cultural considerations. The author therefore inferred that culture influences every aspect of consumption. Thus, consumption is cultural in nature. To understand the influence of culture on consumption, the author has decided to use the McDonald's example. McDonald's is a global brand that is famous for standardisation, however, it is becoming increasingly localised in order to accommodate the culture of its international markets. McDonald's now serves hot dogs in Japan, vegetarian burgers and Maharaja Mac in India, chicken pita sandwich in Greece and McSpaghetti in the Philippines. Culture is a powerful phenomenon and has a very strong influence on consumption.

6. How Market Research must proceed when an Enterprise Enters a New International Market?

The significance of market research for both domestic marketing and international marketing cannot be over-emphasised. Effective and timely market research is a prerequisite for entering a new market, domestic or foreign (Craig and Douglas, 2005). When a company enters a new international market, it becomes much more directly involved in the domestic marketing environment of the foreign country it has chosen to do business. Jeannet and Hennesey (1998) posited that a company entering an international market would have to find out how it must adjust its marketing strategy to fit the new market demand. An important challenge that the company would be confronted with would be how to understand the new environment, including the constraints embedded in that environment. According to Brady (2011), although the need to conduct research internationally is the same as the need domestically, the need internationally tends to be greater because of the lack of familiarity with the foreign market. It has also been documented that more problems are encountered when conducting research to enter a foreign market than in conducting research to enter a market in the home country (Brady, 2011). The company must conduct a market research to enable it have a good understanding of the political, social, cultural, economic, technological, legal and environmental factors that may impact its business in the new country.

6.1 The Importance of International Market Research

When the decision to expand into foreign markets is made, research is needed to assist with the market selection and entry decisions. Young and Javalgi (2007) posited that "market research is the vital link between the organisation and its customers" (p. 114). They further stated that the critical objective of a sound market research is to interpret consumer behaviour and translate the customers' viewpoints into concrete actionable marketing strategies. When effectively and timely conducted, international market research would be able to address a wide variety of challenges associated with international market, including avoidance of product formulation error, identification of appropriate promotion messages, correctly positioning new products and entering at the right price.

6.2 The International Market Research Framework

Clearly, there is a difference between the research conducted for domestic market and those conducted across international boundaries. There are challenges peculiar to specific countries, and international market research must be designed to address those challenges. Young and Javalgi (2007) asserted that "It is much easier to design a questionnaire focused on a single local market, as opposed to a study that represents a global unit of analysis" (p. 116). With this in mind, the researcher must painstakingly and carefully plan the international market research in such a manner as to create a competitive advantage for the company.

The international market research process is structured within the context of an overall research framework. According to Young and Javalgi (2007), this process follows four sequential steps, including setting objectives, designing research methodology, collecting data, and analysing and reporting findings to management. Although the aforementioned steps are not peculiar to international market research, they, however, provide the backdrop that highlights the potential challenges posed by international marketing designs. The author has provided a brief overview of each of the four steps below.

6.2.1 Setting research objectives

This is the first key step in the international market research process. The international market research process begins with the setting of clear objectives (Young and Javalgi, 2007). International market researchers, like their domestic counterparts, must be clear in their minds as to what they want to achieve in specific terms. The nature of the international environment and the potential challenges associated with it, make clear understanding of the specific objectives of international market research even more important. For example, a research with the objective of understanding customers' perception of the introduction of a foreign product will not elicit information on why manufacturers source raw materials from multiple suppliers.

6.2.2 Designing research methodology

This is the second key step in the international market research process. In this step, the researcher conducts the design of the research methodology (Young and Javalgi, 2007). The research methodology must be designed in such a manner that the requisite data can be collected, measured and analysed to arrive at a solution to the research problem (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). When it comes to research methodology, there are critical choices to be made, such as, whether to use quantitative or qualitative research, primary or secondary data, experimental or non-experimental/quasi-experimental research, probabilistic or non-probabilistic sampling, just to mention a few. The quality of an international market research depends on how carefully the researcher chooses the appropriate design alternatives, taking into consideration the specific research objectives. A more rigorous and sophisticated research methodology would more likely produce a high quality research.

6.2.3 Data collection

The third key step in the international market research process involves data gathering. In international market research, like its domestic counterpart, once the appropriate data collection methodology has been chosen, the researcher must proceed to the field to collect data. The researcher must plan and execute the actual collection of data carefully (Jeannet and Hennessey, 1998). This is even more so since the researcher might not be familiar with the new country the company is about to enter.

6.2.4 Analysing findings and providing report

This is the fourth and final key step in the international market research. The final step involves analysing the research findings and reporting the findings to management, along with a summary of the recommendation (Young and Javalgi, 2007). In the analysis, proper attention must be given to the cultural traits of the new country. It is important for the researcher to deliver a report that is factual, complete and objective. The limitations of the facts presented should be clearly stated to help management take informed decision.

6.3 Challenges of Conducting International Market Research

There are various challenges associated with conducting international market research. This is due mainly to the complexities of conducting and managing market research projects across boundaries (Young and Javalgi, 2007). Some of these challenges include: cultural challenges, language barriers, translation problem, religious fanaticism, low level of education, bad country image, sampling issues/sampling frame, measurement issues, lack of market research infrastructures, data collection challenges, legal and regulatory issues (Jeannet and Hennessey, 1998; Young and Javalgi, 2007). These challenges, if not adequately address, can have tremendous adverse impact on project management and, consequently, project deliverables.

7. Conclusion

The debate as to whether international companies should pursue standardised or adaptation strategy continues to be a focus of research in academic literature. The paper analysed the advantages and disadvantages of both strategies, as well as the benefits of the contingency approach to international marketing that integrates the best elements of standardisation and adaptation.

Culture has as many meanings as there are researchers on the interesting subject of culture, but the author chose to defined culture simply as the way things are done in any given society, group or organisation. Cultural pattern was defined as the connection of concepts and practices which have gained relative perpetuity through cultural habitualisation. Whilst culture and consumption have an extraordinary significant relationship, cultural patterns have a strong potential to influence and shape the character of the society within which they exist, as well as the major determinant of the identity and worldview of the society. Culture influences every aspect of consumption. Thus, consumption is cultural in nature.

The paper also discussed the significance of international market research. A company that wants to enter into a new international market, must first, conduct a timely market research. The author suggested that international companies must conduct market research to enable them have a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist in the new market. The author recommended a marketing research framework which outlined the stages of the international research process to include objective setting, methodology design, data collection, and analysis and reporting of research findings to management.

Finally, this study was theoretically oriented, thus, empirical studies to explore the under listed topics, which this paper was centred on, is recommended:

- standardisation versus adaptation of international marketing strategy;
- the role of cultural pattern in a society;
- the impact of market research on market entry: an international perspective; and
- the impact of culture on consumption: an empirical study.

Acknowledgements: My sincere thank you goes to Professor Babu P. George, Ph.D., my International Marketing Management tutor at SMC University, who meticulously reviewed and provided helpful feedback on this paper. My profound gratitude also goes to my tutors in Strategic Leadership and Research Methodology at SMC University, Professor William L. Quisenberry, DBA, and Professor Ted Q. Sun, Ph.D., respectively. They both helped in sharpening my research skills.

References

Amuah, H.B. (2012) *Market standardisation versus localisation as an international market strategy and the role of the cultural patterns in a society and its impact on consumption*. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2201571 (Accessed 8th August 2014).

Bates, D.G. and Plog, F. (1976) *Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed., McGraw-Hill, New York.

Boddewyn, J.J., Soehl, R. and Picard, J. (1986) 'Standardisation in international marketing: is Ted Levitt in fact right?', *Business Horizons,* Vol. 29, No. 6, pp.61-79.

Brady, D.L. (2011) *Essentials of international marketing*, M. E. Sharpe, Inc, Armonk, NY.

Cavusgil, S.T., Zou, S. and Naidu, G.M. (1993) 'Product and promotion adaptation in export ventures: an empirical investigation', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp.479-506.

Craig, C.S. and Douglas, S.P. (2005) *International marketing research*, 3rd ed., John Wiley & Sons Ltd, West Sussex, England.

Czinkota, M.R. and Ronkainen, I.A. (1998) *International Marketing*, 5th ed., London, The Dryden Press, London.

Douglas, S.P. and Craig, S.C. (1986) 'Global marketing myopia. *Journal of Marketing Management',* Vol. 2, No. 2, pp.155-169.

Douglas, S.P. and Wind, Y. (1987) 'The myth of globalisation', *Columbia Journal of World Business,* Vol. 22, No. 4, pp.19-29.

Fisher, A.B. (1984) 'The ad biz gloms onto global', *Fortune*, 12 November, pp.77-80.

Fulda, D. (2010) 'Historicism as a cultural pattern: practising a mode of thought [Abstract]', *Journal of the Philosophy of History,* Vol. 4, No.2, pp.138-153. http://philpapers.org/rec/FULHAA (Accessed 2nd August 2014).

Hofstede, G. and Bond, M.H. (1988) 'The Confucius connection: from cultural roots to economic Growth', *Organisational Dynamics,* Vol. 16, No. 4, pp.5-21.

Holt, D.B. Quelch, J.A., and Taylor, E.L. (2004) 'How global brands compete', *Harvard Business Review,* Vol. 82, No. 9, pp.68-75.

Jain, S.C. (1989) 'Standardisation of international marketing strategy: some research hypothesis', *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 53, No. 1, pp.70-79.

Jeannet, J. and Hennessey, H.D. (1998) *Global marketing strategies*, 4th ed., Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

Kashani, K. (1989) 'Beware the pitfalls of global marketing', *Harvard Business Review,* Vol.67, No. 5, pp.91-98.

Kotler, P. (1986) 'Global standardisation: courting danger', *Journal of Consumer Marketing,* Vol. 3, No. 2, pp.13-15.

Levitt, T. (1983) 'The globalisation of markets', *Harvard Business Review, Vol. 61, No.*3, pp.92-102.

Levitt, T. (1984) 'The globalisation of markets', *The McKinsey Quarterly,* Vol. 3, pp.2-20.

Light, L. (2013) 'How organisations manage global brands in an increasing local world', *Journal of Brand Strategy,* Vol.2, No. 3, pp.228-235.

McCracken, G.D. (1988) *Culture and Consumption: new approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.

Paliwoda, S.J. and Thomas, M.J. (1999) *International Marketing*, 3rd ed., Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, England.

Paul, H. (2000) 'Creating a global mindset', *Thunderbird International Business Review,* Vol. 42, No. 2, pp.187-200.

Quelch, J.A. and Hoff, E.J. (1986) 'Customising global marketing', *Harvard Business Review,* Vol. 64, 3, pp.59-68.

Ramarapu, S., Timmerman, J.E. and Ramarapu, N. (1999) 'Choosing between globalisation and localisation as a strategic thrust for your international marketing effort', *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice,* Vol. 7, No. 2, pp.97-105.

Sekaran, U. and Bougie, R. (2013) *Research methods for business: a skill-building approach*, 6th ed., John Wiley & Sons Ltd, West Sussex, England.

Shoham, A. (1999) 'Bounded rationality, planning, standardisation of international strategy and export performance: a structural model examination', *Journal of International Marketing,* Vol. 7, No. 2, pp.24-50.

Solberg, C.A. (2000) 'Standardisation or adaptation of the international marketing mix: the role of the local subsidiary/representative' *Journal of International Marketing,* Vol. 8, 1, pp.78-98.

Solberg, C.A. (2002) 'The perennial issue of adaptation or standardisation of international marketing communication: organisational contingencies and performance', *Journal of International Marketing,* Vol. 10, No. 3, pp.1-22.

Szymanski, D.M., Bharadwaj, S.G. and Varadarajan, P.R. (1993) 'Standardisation versus adaptation of international marketing strategy: an empirical investigation', *Journal of Marketing,* Vol. 57, No. 4, pp.1-17.

Thrassou, A. and Vrontis, D. (2006) 'A small services firm marketing communications model for SME-dominated environments', *Journal of Marketing Communications,* Vol. 12, No.3, pp.183-202.

van Heerden, C.H. and Barter, C. (2008) 'The role of culture in the determination of a standardised or localised marketing strategy', *South African Business Management,* Vol. 39, No. 2, pp.37-44.

Viswanathan, N.K. and Dickson, P.R. (2007) 'The fundamentals of standardising global marketing Strategy', *International Marketing Review,* Vol. 24, No. 1, pp.46-63.

Vrontis, D., Thrassou, A. and Lamprianou, I. (2009) 'International marketing adaptation versus standardisation of multinational companies', *International Marketing Review,* Vol. 26, No. 4/5, pp.477-500.

Walters, P.G.P. (1986) 'International marketing policy: a discussion of the standardisation construct and its relevance for corporate policy', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp.55- 69.

Wills, J.A., Samli, A.C. and Jacobs, L. (1991) 'Developing global products and marketing strategies: a construct and research agenda. *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 19, pp.1-10.

Wind, Y. (1986) 'The myth of globalisation', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 3, No.2, pp.23-26.

Yip, G.S. (1996) 'Toward a new global strategy.' *Chief Executive Journal*, 1st January, Vol. 110, pp.66-67 [online] http://chiefexecutive.net/towards-a-new-global-strategy (Accessed 23rd July 2014).

Yip, G.S. (1997) 'Patterns and determinants of global marketing', *Journal of Marketing Management,* Vol. 13, No. 1-3, pp.153-164.

Young, R.B. and Javalgi, R.G. (2007) 'International marketing research: a global project management Perspective', *Business Horizons*, Vol. 50, pp.113-122.

Zukin, S. and Maguire, J.S. (2004) 'Consumers and Consumption', *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 30, pp.173-197.

Biographical note: McLeish Otuedon is a doctorate of business administration (DBA) student at SMC University, Zug, Switzerland. He commenced the programme in 2011. He holds a M.Sc. in investment & finance from Middlesex University Business School, London, UK (2008). In addition, he has a background in accounting, B.Sc. (Hons.) accountancy from the prestigious University of Nigeria, Nsukka, (2003) and an Associate member of both the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ACA, 2007) and the Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria (ACTI, 2010), as well as a Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialist (CAMS, 2015) USA and a Certificant Member (CIRM, 2011) of the Institute of Risk Management (IRM), UK. He has research interests focused on leadership, corporate governance, compliance, risk management, corporate social responsibility, corporate strategies, international business and marketing, human capital development and emotional intelligence. McLeish Otuedon has over 15 years work experience across several sectors both in Nigeria and London, including Banking, Telecommunications, Oil & Gas and Consulting (Audit and Tax).