**DIPLOMA THESIS ASSIGNMENT**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name and surname: |  |
| Study program: | Master of Business Administration (MBA) |
| Study group: | MBA EN08D |
| Title of the thesis: | International Marketing Through Local Cultural Strategies |
| Content of the thesis: | 1. Introduction2. Theoretical Part2.1 Defining culture & international marketing2.2. Culture 2.3 Culture and international marketing 2.4 Methodology3. Practical Part 3.1 Market analysis3.2 Customer habits analysis3.3 Intercultural differences 3.4 Role of national culture in molding the corporate culture3.5 Suggested international marketing strategy 4. Conclusion |
| References:(at least 4 sources) | * Baack, D. et al. *International Marketing*, 2nd Edition. London: Sage, 2018. ISBN: 978-15-264-6312-8.
* Cavallone, M. *Marketing, and Customer Loyalty The Extra Step Approach*, 1st Edition. Pennsylvania: Springer, 2017. ISBN: 978-33-195-1991-3.
* De Mooij, M. *Global Marketing And Advertising Understanding Cultural Paradoxes,* 5th Edition. Navarre: Sage, 2018. ISBN: 978-15-443-1814-1.
* French, J., Gordon, R. *Strategic Social Marketing For Behavior and Social Change*, 2nd Edition. Queensland: Sage, 2019. ISBN: 978-15-264-7164-2.
 |
| Schedule | * Aim and methods until: 10.8.2020
* Theoretical part until: 1.10.2020
* Results until: 1.11.2020
* Final version until: 1.12.2020
 |
| Supervisor: |  |

In Prague 1st of July 2020

**DIPLOMA THESIS**

International Marketing Through Local Cultural Strategies

# Table of Contents

[Table of Contents 3](#_Toc60087819)

[1. INTRODUCTION 5](#_Toc60087820)

[1.1 Study Background 5](#_Toc60087821)

[1.2 Problem Statement 5](#_Toc60087822)

[1.3 Purpose of the Study 6](#_Toc60087823)

[1.4 Objectives of the Study 6](#_Toc60087824)

[1.5 Research Questions 6](#_Toc60087825)

[1.6 Importance of the Study 6](#_Toc60087826)

[1.7 Dissertation Structure 7](#_Toc60087827)

[2. THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL SECTION 8](#_Toc60087828)

[2.1 Defining Culture and International Market 8](#_Toc60087829)

[2.1.1 Culture defined 8](#_Toc60087830)

[2.1.2 International marketing defined 9](#_Toc60087831)

[2.2 Culture 9](#_Toc60087832)

[2.2.1 Facts about the Saudi culture 10](#_Toc60087833)

[2.2.2 Saudi Arabian customs and etiquette 11](#_Toc60087834)

[2.3 Culture and International Marketing 11](#_Toc60087835)

[2.3.1 The impacts of Saudi Arabian culture on international marketing 12](#_Toc60087836)

[2.4 Gaps in the literature 13](#_Toc60087837)

[2.5 Methodology 13](#_Toc60087838)

[2.5.1 Research design 14](#_Toc60087839)

[2.5.2 Research approach 14](#_Toc60087840)

[2.5.3 Research philosophy 15](#_Toc60087841)

[2.5.4 Research strategy 15](#_Toc60087842)

[2.5.5 Data collection 16](#_Toc60087843)

[2.5.6 Sample and sampling strategy 16](#_Toc60087844)

[2.5.7 Data analysis approach 16](#_Toc60087845)

[2.5.8 Reliability and validity 17](#_Toc60087846)

[2.5.9 Ethical considerations and professional issues 17](#_Toc60087847)

[2.6. Summary of the Methodology 17](#_Toc60087848)

[3. PRACTICAL PART 19](#_Toc60087849)

[3.1 Market Analysis 19](#_Toc60087850)

[3.2 Customer Habits Analysis 20](#_Toc60087851)

[3.3 Intercultural Differences 22](#_Toc60087852)

[3.4 Role of National Culture in Molding the Corporate Culture 24](#_Toc60087853)

[3.5 Suggested International Marketing Strategy 24](#_Toc60087854)

[4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION 26](#_Toc60087855)

[Research Questions 26](#_Toc60087856)

[5. ABSTRACT 28](#_Toc60087857)

[6. KEYWORDS 29](#_Toc60087858)

[7. REFERENCES 30](#_Toc60087859)

[8. APPENDIX 33](#_Toc60087860)

[Appendix 1: Semi-structured Interviews 33](#_Toc60087861)

[Appendix 2: Sample Interview Transcription 34](#_Toc60087862)

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Study Background

The past two centuries have recorded a significant growth of multinational firms worldwide, as thousands of companies are increasingly turning towards international marketing. Several reasons are tied to the increasing rate of internationalization of firms. Firstly, internationalization and global marketing give the company's operational advantages – it makes it possible to maintain the prices of products low and attractive for many consumers globally. The second reason is linked to the fact that companies always intend to create their image everywhere. According to Cateora et al. (2015, p.103), the key justifications for international marketing is “spending less expense and making more profit.” Together with the tide of globalization, firms are obligated to deals with customers within different cultural boundaries, among other factors impacting international marketing (Javalgi et al., 2014, p.120). At least five factors (culture, language, political and legal systems, technological differences, and economic systems) have been outlined from past studies to have great impacts on international marketing (Baack, Czarneck, and Baack, 2018, p. 15-17). Consequently, while companies strive to market their products internationally, they are compelled to adopt diverse, relevant local strategies to ensure that they remain pertinent to customers from all cultures and that they attend to all the needs of the customers in different geographical destinations without cultural or value limitations (Kaynak and Herbig, 2014, p.48).

According to Kaynak and Herbig (2014, p.48), international marketing should be a gradual process – the first step towards global marketing involves a complete concentration of companies on the domestic side with every activity centered on the companies’ home markets through the use of local strategies. In this case, local marketing strategy exploitation is recognized as a key component of international marketing. Due to the perceived relevance of local strategies in international marketing, world companies are maximizing their efforts to adopt “globalization,” which is an international marketing strategy that strives to gain international marketing approaches by implementing local cultural strategies on the basis of localization as well as the internalization of products and services (Surugiu and Surugiu, 2015, p.134). Through the approach, several international firms tend to follow the slogan of globalization slogan, “Think Global, Act Local.” The key reason as to why firms strive to adhere strictly to the slogan is not only to meet the diverse demands of different cultures and values but also to benefit from all possible advantages (Surugiu and Surugiu, 2015, p.137). Therefore, the completion of this dissertation seeks to explore and analyze how firms implement their marketing strategies with respect to local cultures and values.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Values and cultures are important facets of marketing that substantially influence the implementation of both local and international marketing strategies adopted by companies, as well as the possible success of the strategies. For instance, it is paramount that a company engaging in international marketing must study and gain adequate insights about the cultures and values of the market niche targeted by the company before offering a product or service to them (De Mooij, 2015, p. 653). Besides, understanding consumers’ values, which is a local marketing strategy, is argued to be fundamental in international marketing because every marketing promotion done internationally must be able to promote the products that satisfy the needs of different cultures within the international market (Cateora et al., 2015, p.105). In close connection to the claim, recent studies have explored and present elaborate information explaining the need for international marketing to be an integral element of all the social program design and delivery while focusing on achieving a social good in the process of marketing (French and Gordon, 2019, p. 266). In this regard, it is imperative that the process of product or service promotion in the international markets must communicate the specific features of the services and products to customers and specify how they influence or satisfy their cultural values.

Nevertheless, global companies face significant cultural and political differences, and this exposes them to a range of challenges when trying to implement marketing approaches in international markets (Cateora et al., 2015, p.105). The challenge is puzzling and intricate since every market within the global markets has its unique cultural, economic, and political features that differentiate them from others (De Mooij, 2015, p.648). In this regard, international business managers are often exposed to intense dilemma and pressure on how to employ the best marketing approach that adapts to the local characteristics of the market while still maintaining the international marketing standards. How international firms ensure that they remain vigilant to the diverse values and cultures of their different niches of customers globally while implementing their international marketing strategies remains to be a critical concern and a crucial area of study, and this makes the epicenter of the research.

## 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The key purpose of the study is to map the solutions for cultural and political challenges affecting international marketing. Achieving the purpose entails extensive exploration and examination of the different international companies carrying out successful international marketing through local strategies and. Exclusively, the research seeks to conduct case studies on ten key companies operating in Saudi Arabia to acquire details about the firms’ marketing strategies and how they implement the strategies with respect to culture and values. The purpose will be achieved with the guide of the following key objectives and questions.

## 1.4 Objectives of the Study

**Main objective:**

The main objective of the thesis is to examine the impacts of market culture on international marketing strategies and the effective international marketing approach in the cultural market.

**Minor objectives**

Minor objectives included the following:

* To find out the different international marketing strategies used in international marketing.
* To explore the varied customer cultures and values influencing international marketing.
* To determine how cultures and values of customers affect the success of dominant international marketing approaches.
* To establish a suitable marketing approach in an International cultural market

## 1.5 Research Questions

* What are the dominant international marketing approaches in international marketing?
* How do different cultures and values of customers influence the implementation and success of marketing approaches in the international market?
* Which are the common values and cultures that shape the adoption of international marketing approaches?
* Which are the most effective international marketing strategies that should be considered in the Saudi Arabia market?

## 1.6 Importance of the Study

International marketing is growing rapidly as every company is looking forward to increasing its profit by expanding its base of customers. This implies that it is imperative for companies to be equipped with adequate knowledge on how to implement effective marketing strategies through local strategies to increase their chances of attracting customers from different cultural and political backgrounds. For instance, firms in the Middle East enjoy a politically driven trade and most often uses this as a privilege to gain maximum dominance over other countries. Therefore, the outcome of the research will not only help companies in identifying the most relevant international marketing strategies but also how to implement them while taking into consideration the different cultures and values of consumers globally. Besides, the results from the study will enlighten international companies of the different cultures and values in international markets and how they affect marketing success – this creates a perfect platform for the organizations to deploy necessary measures to counteract the possible negatives impacts that may result from the cultures and values to affect the success of marketing approaches. Researchers can benefit from this study by using the outcome to develop new theories connecting international marketing with local strategies. Finally, the companies used in the case studies can use the results from the study to make better improvements in their marketing approaches for competitive advantages.

## 1.7 Dissertation Structure

The dissertation has four major chapters. The first chapter (introduction) gives a detailed background of the research topic, the problem for research, the purpose, as well as the significance of undertaking the study. The second chapter covers the theoretical part of the dissertation, which provides an in-depth analysis of the past studies relevant to the topic of study along with the methodology. Chapter three (practical chapter) presents results obtained from the study based on the research questions, while the last section provides a conclusion based on the data from the study and the findings from past studies.

# THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL SECTION

The chapter provides elaborate discussions on the varied basic concepts related to international marketing, local strategies, and culture. Besides, it provides an in-depth analysis of the past studies related to the problem of study. Finally, the extensive chapter analyzes the methodological approach that will be adopted in the study, including data collection approach, study sample and sampling technique, data analysis, research philosophy, as well as validity and reliability tests.

The completion of this study is guided by the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) of marketing. According to Askegaard (2014, p.507), CCT refers to the stream of study that focuses on the consumption patterns as a cultural and social practice, which implies that when planning and conducting the marketing program, the cultures and social values of the customers must be taken into consideration. Baack, Czarnecka, and Baack (2018, p. 147) conducted an in-depth analysis into the concept of CCT and presented tangible arguments on how consumption choices and behaviors from a social and cultural point of view, rather than economic or psychological views, affect international marketing. According to the definitional article by Arnould and Thompson (2015, p.229), consumer culture symbolizes the “*social arrangement where the relationships between social resources and lived cultures, and between meaningful approaches of life and the symbolic as well the material resources they depend on are mediated through markets*” (Arnould and Thompson, 2015, p.232). Therefore, with this theory, consumption phenomena are easily understandable only through their inscription in the sociocultural context where they exist. Furthermore, all the consumers globally must be viewed in connection to the full consumption cycle, including possession, acquisition, consumption, as well as disposition.

## 2.1 Defining Culture and International Market

Culture, religious culture, and marketing (local or international) are inseparable since the entire process of international marketing must take into account the prevailing cultures in the market in order to be successful.

### 2.1.1 Culture defined

According to Gunduz (2017, p.147), culture refers to a series of ethics, values, thoughts, habits, beliefs, standards, as well as rules that govern the daily activities and practices of individuals within a society or community. However, Rasmussen and Lavish (2014, p.17) theorized that culture is generally the collective programming of an individual's mind that is produced from a specific set of collective moral concepts. In this case, a discrepancy in the definition and meaning of culture is notable in the sense that as opposed to Gunduz (2017, p.149), the illustration provided by Rasmussen and Lavish (2014, p.20) depicts that culture does not exactly appear in similar ways in every individual within a society. It is an extremely flexible concept that varies from one individual to another due to its potential of being shaped differently in every individual. As a result of the flexibility of culture, Zittoun and Gillespie (2015, p.478) termed it as the “software of the mind” thinking, acting, and feeling patterns that are learned throughout every person’s lifetime Zittoun and Gillespie (2015, p.482). Today, the term ‘culture,’ has been accorded very active and broad descriptions. Culture is based described in the context of Zittoun and Gillespie (2015, p.480) as a mindset as an inseparable substance lying on the base of the mind of every human being. Closely linked to culture is religious culture. According to Coccia (2014, p.397), religious culture refers to a social-cultural system of designated practices, worldviews, behaviors, morals, sanctified places, texts, as well as ethics that connects humanity to spiritual, supernatural, or transcendental elements. Modood (2016, p.69) adopted a similar definition but considered religion as culture itself, with the argument that religion comprises a set of beliefs, cultural systems, as well as world views relating humanity to a specific order of existence.

### 2.1.2 International marketing defined

The term international marketing has been defined by a number of scholars. However, Baker (2014, p. 121) and Varadarajan (2015, p.78) theorized that the first step to an effective definition of international marketing is to get detailed insights about marketing, then proceed to international marketing, which is the epicenter of this study. In the context of the study, Baker (2014, p.127) defined marketing as the activities undertaken by a company to enhance the buying or selling of products or/and services. The entire concept of marketing entails advertising, make sales, and delivering products and services to consumers (Baker, 2014, p.127). However, Varadarajan (2015, p.81) defined marketing as the process of identifying the needs and wants of customers in the market and employing the required efforts to satisfy each of the needs and wants efficiently and effectively than competitors to gain competitive advantages. The definition coincides with Cavallone's view that every organization must first establish then understand all the marketing drivers linked to the specific values realized by a consumer to gain competitive advantages (2017, p. 18).

On the other hand, Malhotra and Dash (2016, p.118) argued that marketing exclusively involves conducting key business activities geared towards effective and efficient flow of goods and/or services from the point of production to the point of consumption, or the collection of the fundamental business activities undertaken by a business organization in order to relate profitably to its market. Noteworthy, while there are small differences in the definitions, all of them point towards getting consumers and satisfying their needs while keeping in mind the core objective of every business marketing program (profit maximization). According to Malhotra and Dash’s (2016, p.120) definition of marketing, companies should adopt McCarthy’s four Ps. With regards to the first P (product), the first activity of a firm in marketing is to conduct an extensive study of its prospective buyers, including who they are, where they are, the specific important aspects in their purchase of the firm’s product or service, including their culture, their values, and what they love most. The core activity here is developing the products or services with the ability to satisfy the varied needs and wants of the customers.

The second crucial activity takes the second P (price), which is to set terms and prices on the products and services that look reasonable to all categories of buyers while returning fair profits at the same time (Malhotra and Dash, 2016, p.121). Conversely, the third activity takes the third P (place) of McCarthy’s four Ps, which involves making products and services available, taking into perspective the most convenient time, and the place where prospective buyers can conveniently access the services and goods. The last activity represented by the last P (promotion) is a product and services promotion that entails informing and persuading the targeted market about the company's goods and services available. Both Malhotra and Dash (2016, p.121) and Armstrong et al. (2014, p. 37) agreed that all activities are more crucial for the success of marketing and that every marketing manager should be able to plan and coordinate the activities to produce successful and well-integrated marketing programs. Therefore, from the definitions of the term “marketing,” international marketing” can easily be defined. An explicit and understandable definition of international marketing lays a good foundation to study its correlation with local strategies, particularly the aspect of culture.

## 2.2 Culture

The Saudi culture has continued to capture the attention of several scholars and international entrepreneurs, including Schulze (2013, p. 428), Featherstone (2019, p.21), Wien (2017), and Rubin (2015, p.539). Historically, the culture of Saudi Arabia is exclusively defined by its Islamic heritage, integral historical role as the ancient trade center globally, and by its Bedouin traditions (Schulze, 2013, p. 430). Besides, both Schulze (2013, p. 430) and Featherstone (2019, p. 21) shared the common opinion that the Saudi Society has persistently evolved over the years in the sense that their traditions and values from their customs, hospitality to their dressing style, are currently trying to adapt with modernization. Wien (2017) affirmed the description of the Saudi Arabia culture provided by Schulze (2013, p. 437) – they described Saudi Arabia as “*a conclusion of a deep-rooted heritage as well as an inherent of a series of civilization that were crowned by Islam religion*” (Wien, 2017, p.56). Rubin (2015, p.542) also confirmed that Saudi Arabia is one of the international markets that has strictly preserved its cultures and enjoys great heritage and culture that affirm their depth of civilization along with its historic presence through the ages upon which the country currently stands. Rubin (2015, p.542), in support of Featherstone (2019, p.42), stated that there are a variety of cultural institutions established throughout Saudi Arabia to preserve the country’s cultural heritage. For instance, Rubin (2015, p.540) highlighted that Saudi’s Department of Culture at the Ministry of Culture and Information does not only sponsor cultural programs but also ensures that people strictly to the cultural values of the country. Doubtlessly, this implies that any residence of the country or a visitor to the country must abide by the cultural setting of the country, and this includes all the business and activities undertaken in the country.

### 2.2.1 Facts about the Saudi culture

Algumzi (2017, p.24) argued that modern-day Saudi Arabia is not only a traditional country but also a very conservative society that is centered on strong religious beliefs, values, beliefs as well as customs. The scholar further mentioned that the beliefs and values cut across every person within the country – both expected expatriates, as well as visitors, are expected to respect and adhere to them like any other citizen of the country. Alqahtani (2016, p.108) presented a contingent argument illustrating that all Saudis are culturally entitled to practice Islamic, which is their major source of guidance and rules deemed crucial for personal, political, economic, legal, as well as social lives. Facts tabled by Alqahtani (2016, p.108) and Bowen (2014, p.55) showed that the Saudi Arabia culture accords Islamic religion maximum respect and authority. As such, the Saudi government embeds religious obligations, including prayer times, into public and business life; in fact, religious obligations are considered inflexible, and one does not have any prerogative to disrespect the obligation. Therefore, in relation to the Islamic culture governing the country, every business institution in Saudi Arabia is expected to close on a Friday, which is the Muslim holy day.

Lewis (2015, p.123) supported the above hypothetical argument; however, they added that irrespective of the Saudi’s deeply conservative culture, they consider themselves as completely inclined to “live for the moment,” with relaxed opinions related to punctuality and time-keeping. As opposed to other scholars that have only studied the Saudi culture in general, Peterson (2020, p.230) and Lücking (2014, p.27) focused their attention on family culture. For instance, in the case studies Peterson (2020, p.231) conducted across five families within the country, the scholars established that culturally, the Saudis are highly family-oriented. Directly correlated to the argument, Lücking (2014, p.29) noted that family and loyalty serve as the principal basis of individual identity, social alliances, as well as status.

Lücking (2014, p.29) furthered his argument, stating that Saudis are also very conscious culturally of their clan ties, lineage, as well as their extended family – they tend to take obligations very seriously when offering a safety net in the situations of family need. In close relation, Cavallone (2017, p.63) conducted extensive studies on international marketing and emerged with a new model, *The Extra Step* (TES), where the theme of customer loyalty become dominant. The scholar argued that "it is possible to provide/create a service or a product and at the same time make customer loyalty by acting on the *delivered mix*” (Cavallone, 2017, p.63). With the evidence from the different scholars, it is theoretical that in any undertaking within the Saudi culture, the family is accorded the first priority irrespective of the prevailing conditions. Harbi, Thursfield, and Bright (2017, p.280), who studied the perceptions of performance appraisal in Islamic culture governing the Saudis and found that nepotism in business is never regarded as harmful, affirmed the above position. According to the scholars, nepotism is rather considered a way of portraying the relevance of employing the ones you are much knowledgeable about and the ones you fully trust in terms of job performance or loyalty (Harbi, Thursfield, and Bright, 2017, p.280).

### 2.2.2 Saudi Arabian customs and etiquette

Saudi Arabia customs and etiquette are deeply rooted in their Islamic teachings alongside Arab customs that the Saudis learn at an early age, both from family members and in school. With respect to their customs, Cooper (2019, p.83) posited that Arabs are always much tolerant of any social blunders in the sense that they never take offense in a case where a blunder arises from ignorance. In another observation, (14) established that being cognizant of the local customs and etiquette of the Saudis is always a way of showing good manners and ensuring that every visitor is accorded a warm welcome. In regards to this, it is hypothetical that Saudi Arabia customs and etiquette makes Saudi Arabia an attractive destination for visitors, expatriates, as well as international business owners and organizations. Cooper (2019, p.85) supported the position but clarified that foreigners coming into the country for the first time must adhere to the significant limits regulating public interaction as well as contact between opposite sexes even within the business environments.

Consistent with the above claim put forward by Cooper (2019, p.88) regarding limits to contact between women and men, Anishchenkova (2020, p.32) observed Saudi Arabia as the most gender-segregated nation worldwide in which public places, including restaurants, shopping malls, restaurants, as well as workplaces have specific areas exclusively set aside for females only. The etiquette of the Saudis is highly presented in their greetings and dressing code. According to Anishchenkova (2020, p.33), Saudis’ greetings are naturally warm and exclusively entail a strong handshake, which is strictly done with the use of the right hand. However, depending on the level of familiarity, one can embrace the other with kisses on his or her alternate cheeks. Nevertheless, the culture restricting physical contact between opposite sexes dominates during public greetings in all conditions. With regards to dressing, Cooper (2019, p.89) highlighted that the Saudi customs take appropriate dressing with utmost seriousness.

## 2.3 Culture and International Marketing

Having given an in-depth description of what “culture” means, it is now imperative to discover the relationship between cultural values and marketing, and particularly international marketing. Baack, Czarnecka, and Baack (2018, p. 15) emphasized culture as one of the predominant factors that largely influence international marketing. Therefore, the subsection provides an overview of the published pieces of literature regarding the existing correlation between cultural and international marketing, particularly how culture influences international marketing.

Several scholars, including Samaha, Beck, and Palmatier (2014, p.82), Papadopoulos, and Heslop (2014), Fregidou-Malama, and Hyder (2015, p.529), Baack, Czarnecka, and Baack (2018, p. 15) and Stahl and Tung (2015, p.393) have delved into the study of the existing relationship between culture and international marketing. In a study conducted by Samaha, Beck, and Palmatier (81), and supported by Papadopoulos and Heslop (2014, p. 75), the scholars reported that market cultures play integral roles in determining the success or failure of international marketing – cultures have greater impacts on international marketing strategies. Fregidou-Malama and Hyder (2015, p.529) similarly affirmed the case and narrated that before offering a product or service to a niche of customers, an international marketer must first study the prevailing local cultures and values in the international market in-depth to ensure that the products and services match the cultural way of life of the targeted market. De Mooij (2015, p.651) added that cultures play integral roles in explaining consumer behaviors that consequently influence marketing along with the marketing approaches applicable within a market. The scholar explained that studying the cultures ensures that every marketing promotion carried perfectly promotes the product or service to the intended market through proper communication of the features of the products to the consumers and influencing them to buy the product.

In line with this, Stahl and Tung (2015, p.397) laid more emphasis, highlighting that in order to have effective and meaningful communication during the international marketing process, an international marketing firm or individual must be in a position to convey the marketing message according to culture, customs, as well as the learning process of the receiver. However, Stahl and Tung (2015, p.400) noted that there is a vast range of key barriers through which effective communication can be halted. This aligns with the argument provided by De Mooij (2018), who highlighted a relevant example affirming the case. According to De Mooij (2018, p.318), every human has distinct characteristics, but the majority of human beings always want to judge everything according to their cultural measurement and self-learning process. Doubtlessly, this implies that for an international marketing campaign to be successful, an international marketing firm must identify with the cultural measurements among the targeted market.

Nonetheless, De Mooij (2018, p.318) advises marketers to be careful about the cultures in the sense that in an international market with different cultures, a single thing shared between two or three cultures may have different meanings depending on the cultural context upon which it is used. For instance, showing a thumb in the western part of the world is a cultural symbol of "all right." However, the use of the same symbol among the Bengali rural people carries a very serious negative meaning. The difference, therefore, implies that an international marketer must have in-depth knowledge of the cultural background of the people targeted by a promotion to ensure the communication activity is effective and deliver the expected meaning. For this to be successful, Cateora et al. (2020, p.131) recommend that while carrying out international marketing, the marketer in the international market must first convert all his or her thinking and cultural perspectives into the thinking and culture of the local people target in by the promotion. The idea behind the recommendation is associated with the fact that on some occasions, international marketer fails to make effective marketing conversion successfully because of the conflicting cultural thoughts between the marketer's cultures and the customers' cultures. Consequently, such marketers may not get the total attention of the locals in the international markets at the end of their marketing activities, which in turn subjects them to losses due to the costs incurred to conduct the campaigns. Unlike other scholars who have studied the relationship between culture and international marketing, Biagetti and Lugli (2016, p.15) outlined various elements of culture and explained how each element influences international marketing. The essential elements of culture include education, social organization, religion, values and attitudes, technology, and materials, as well as law and politics. Each of these facets of culture significantly influences international marketing strategies.

### 2.3.1 The impacts of Saudi Arabian culture on international marketing

Most studies completed on this subject cited religion as a key cultural element that is significantly influencing international marketing. For instance, Cader (2015, p.105) argued that religious beliefs, particularly the Islamic religious values linked to different symbolism of different colors, are likely to create either a rejection or preferences of a given product as well as the marketing materials used in the international market. Sheikh et al. (2017, p.1693) added that the existing association between religious practice and gender roles is more likely to define which family member influences which kind of buying decisions, and this may, as a result, affect the marketing process significantly. Consistent with the argument, Cateora et al. (2020, p.128) highlighted the beliefs of the Islamic religion dictates what they consume, when they should be shopping, as well as they carry out business, and this eventually influence what should be marketed in the international depending religious beliefs prevailing in the targeted market.

With respect to the arguments centered on the impacts associated with religion, Cateora et al. (2020, p.129) argued that it is crucial for international marketers to seek an in-depth understanding of the varied impacts of the Islamic religion on consumer culture within the targeted markets or the markets in which they operate. It is, therefore, hypothetical that adhering to the Islamic religious values, which forms the culture of the Saudis, is the essential approach to making the international marketing activities to be appropriately sensitive in the Saudi market. De Mooij (2015, p.647), who highlighted that the failure to conform to religious beliefs or the cultures of the Middle East might severely undermine the reputation of a brand or company, affirmed the case. Besides, Cateora et al. (2020, p.137) confirmed the position from the studies where they tabled that the international marketers that are highly attuned to the influence of Islamic religion on local culture are likely to achieve significant advantage in aligning both their promotional opportunities and marketing messages to religious practice, which gives them higher chances of getting more clients.

## 2.4 Gaps in the literature

The available pieces of literature have provided in-depth insights on the varied definitions of culture and international marketing, the link between culture and international marketing, and the Saudi Arabia culture. However, how there are very limited studies on how Saudi Arabia culture influence business within the country. Hence, there is a need to conduct more studies to validate the existing information and to acquire more insights on the subject. Besides, there are no studies outlining the effective strategies a firm can employ to enter a market that is dominated by vast religious traditions and values successfully. Therefore, further studies are important to outline the most effective strategies that firms can adopt within a market dominated by religious traditions and values deemed as “red lines” by providing examples of companies that have failed and those that have succeeded.

## 2.5 Methodology

The methodology section gives an elaborate outline of the specific research methods that were used in the completion of the dissertation in order to ensure that the objectives and the aim of the research are successfully achieved. Firstly, the methodology section provides the users of the research with adequate information regarding the companies that were sampled to take part in the study as well as the sampling strategy used to come up with a sample. Furthermore, the methodology section provides a vivid description of the method of data collection employed and research design used in the study, as well as the reasons for the selection of the data collection approach and research design adopted for the study. Research instruments deemed fit for collecting data relevant to the study, data analysis approach, and research philosophy that guided the study are also explained elaborately in this section. Lastly, the methodology section outlines some of the ethical standards that were observed to ensure the study was ethical and the various limitations of the methodology that would affect the quality or quantity of the data collected.

### 2.5.1 Research design

The study is qualitative in nature. While a range of research designs are available, including exploratory, descriptive, explanatory (*see figure 1*), an exploratory research design was considered the most appropriate research design for the purpose of the study. According to Berman (2017, p.133), exploratory research is primary research that delves into the exploration of the theoretical or hypothetical idea that has not been studied earlier. The research design is applicable in situations where a researcher has observed something or has an idea about a phenomenon and seeks to get more understanding about it. Fundamentally, the exploratory research design lays a foundation for future studies and the development of new theories (Berman, 2017, p.136).

*Figure 1: Basic Research Designs*



Source: Berman (2017, p.137)

The deployment of the exploratory design in this study is justified by the following three crucial factors. Firstly, the exploratory design is appropriate for this study because it is discovery and productivity-oriented in nature – it provides reasonable diversified ideas about a fundamental topic study. The primary purpose of the study is to explore and analyze how different international companies carry out successful international marketing through local strategies, particularly the strategies they use in marketing while still upholding the prevailing cultural values. However, there are limited past studies on the marketing strategies used in the international markets where religious traditions and values dominate the market; hence, the application of the design help in creating new ideas and theoretical concepts related to the subject. Secondly, the application of exploratory designs creates a better platform for a researcher to get a better understanding of the prevailing problem for research (Sarstedt and Mooi, 2014, p. 245). Thirdly, the adoption of the exploratory design is motivated by the fact that it is much flexible since it has no standard process. The findings obtained from the exploratory research design are crucial because they create a framework for future studies.

### 2.5.2 Research approach

Three options of research approach that research can employ in a study depending on the design of the research include abductive, inductive, and deductive approaches. From the three options, an inductive research approach has been recommended for the current study. Inductive research is an approach in which a researcher begins a study by observations, then theories are proposed as the research approaches the end, majorly from the results of the study (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018, p.154). Therefore, it is from a researcher’s observation that ideas for research are developed. The approach is more applicable to qualitative research (*see figure 2*).

*Figure 2: Illustration of Inductive Approach*



Source: (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018, p.154)

It is imperative to note that when adopting the inductive research approach, a researcher always creates empirical generalizations then defines preliminary relationships as progress. Noteworthy, there are no hypotheses completely at the early stages of the research – the researcher is never sure of the nature and type of the study results until the end of the study (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018, p.168). The inductive approach is proposed based on various reasons. First, since there are no previous hypotheses related to the study, the application of the inductive approach is beneficial to the current study because it enables a researcher to merge research data from significant, recurring themes inherent in raw data. Besides, the approach is more flexible in the sense that a researcher is not limited to follow predetermined information (Gilgun, 2001, p.340). Although there some critics that inductive research might lead to an incorrect conclusion if observations are incorrect (Gilgun, 2001, p.347), the advantages of the approach dominate over the critic because the chances that observation may turn to be incorrect are limited, thus making the approach applicable in the completion of the study.

### 2.5.3 Research philosophy

Multiple research philosophy options that researchers can use to guide their studies are available. The commonly used philosophies include positivism, pragmatism, positivism, interpretivism, as well as realism. Nevertheless, although all these philosophies are useful for guiding a study, the applicability of each of them solely relies on other essential elements of study methodology, including study approach, research design, as well as the strategy employed in a study (Shusterman, 2016, p.210). In connection with the illustration, Pragmatism research philosophy has been deemed relevant in the completion of this study. With the research philosophy, the researcher only variables and concepts as relevant if they are confirmed to be support action. Besides, the variables and concepts must show a relationship between cause and effect for a researcher to consider them important (Shusterman, 2016, p.217; Simpson, 2017, p.54). For instance, in the current study, the researcher must establish the existence of the Islamic dressing code with marketing to validate the variable, dressing code, as important. Ideally, the philosophy necessitates the researcher to incorporate data from different respondents to help in creating valid and reliable conclusions and theories from the study, and this makes the pragmatism research philosophy very crucial in the completion of the study.

### 2.5.4 Research strategy

The current study employs the qualitative research strategy to achieve the intended objectives. The research strategy is essential is effective in exploring processes and systems, such as marketing approaches, thus making it appropriate for the current study. Besides, the qualitative strategy offers a comprehensive understanding of how people act and manage their daily situations within particular settings (Kouamé and Langley, 2018, p.560). Therefore, the strategy is applicable in exploring insights on how international companies strive to ensure that their marketing strategies are successful in regions with strict religious cultures and values. Besides, the qualitative data obtained from the stud will provide non-numerical in-depth illustrations of the major themes reoccurring from the study.

### 2.5.5 Data collection

Primary sources were used to collect data useful for the study. Hence, the completion of the study uses primary data in order to arrive at a valid conclusion. The primary data were used because there is no adequate secondary information relevant to this study. Also, the primary data has been proposed for this study because of the varied advantages associated with them, including the authenticity of information and their ability to provide up-to-date information (McDaniel and Gates, 2013, p.17). In order to collect the primary data, semi-structured interviews were conducted across ten respondents representing ten companies already operating in Saudi Arabia (*See appendix 1*). The semi-structured interviews were recommended for the study based on multiple reasons. Firstly, semi-structured interviews are very flexible because they give the respondents the chance to fully express their opinions and explain their positions (Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey, 2015, p.28). Hence, the data collection was deemed effective in collecting in-depth data relevant to the objectives of the study. Similarly, the appropriateness of the semi-structured interviews stems from the fact that data from the approach tend to be reliable and easy to analyze. Besides, the data collection approach enables the respondents to open up and provide sensitive issues relevant to the aim of the study, hence helps in collecting reliable and valid information.

### 2.5.6 Sample and sampling strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to come up with ten companies that have operated in Saudi Arabia for a minimum of five years. The purposive approach is defined as a non-probability sampling approach in which a researcher depends solely on his or her personal judgments in the selection of a sample to take part in a study (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016, p.3). Out of the ten companies, 5 of them are those that have strong marketing strategies and have been successful in the Saudi Arabia market despite their strict religious cultures and values. Responses from the first five companies will help in determining the effective marketing strategies to deploy in a culturally-bound international market. The companies are intended to remain anonymous and hence will be named according to the first five letters of alphabets (A, B, C, D, E). The remaining five companies involve those weak marketing strategies – those that have failed despite their efforts to market their products in the Saudi Arabia market.

The feedback from the five companies is intended to help in defining why their strategies have not been fruitful. For anonymity, the companies are labeled according to the last letters of alphabets (V, W, X, Y, Z). The purposive sampling approach was recommended for the study because it enables a researcher to focus exclusively on a company perceived to be having the features required for inclusion as a sample. In this case, it enabled the researcher to sample companies that he observed to have strong and successful marketing strategies and those that had failed. By selecting the companies with the specific features under investigation to take part in the interview, the researcher can be in a better position to focus the interview on the study questions as well as to enhance the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data simultaneously.

### 2.5.7 Data analysis approach

The qualitative data gathered through the semi-structured interviews are analyzed through the thematic data analysis approach. Thematic analysis is an approach to analyzing qualitative data – it is always employed in analyzing a set of texts like interview transcripts (*Appendix 2*). With this approach, a researcher is charged with the task of examining the data collected from interviews to determine the common themes, ideas, topics, as well as patterns of meanings that pop up repeatedly (Smith and Sparkes, 2016, p.23). With respect to the approach, the researcher identified repeated themes and patterns and extracted datasets from the qualitative data and the meaning derived from them. In order to facilitate effective thematic analyses, the researcher ensured that the interviews were properly saved in audio format. The content of the audio interviews was transcribed to text verbatim (*See appendix 2*). The thematic analysis approach was used based on the following advantages. Firstly, the thematic data analysis approach is flexible in the sense that it allows a researcher to modify it (Gavin, 2008, p.221). This helps in ensuring that all the objectives and aims of the study are achieved. Furthermore, the thematic data analysis approach allows the researcher to effectively summarize the key features of the datasets from the themes developed, and consequently, adopt a structured approach to handle data.

### 2.5.8 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity concepts have been adopted to ensure that the data collected are valid and reliable. The trustworthiness and consistency of the research instruments were tested using different concepts. Firstly, the researcher made significant efforts to ensure validity and reliability by ensuring that the interview questions were clear and that the same question sheet was used across the entire interview process. Reliability if the data was ensured by comparing the data retrieved from the different companies. The use of audio recordings and transcription also ensured that the data used to derive conclusions were valid and reliable and that their originality could be traced.

### 2.5.9 Ethical considerations and professional issues

Varied ethical standards and professional issues relevant to research were put into consideration and accorded maximum consideration in the process of primary data collection. Firstly, the management of the ten companies sampled for the study was contacted 15 days in advance before the actual day of the study. Each of the companies involved in the study was given a vivid description of the content of the study, as well as the specific objectives and procedures relative to the interview process. Besides, the benefits the companies will enjoy from the completion of the research were unveiled to them. The right of the companies to pull off from the sample list was assured, but this was to be communicated five days before the actual day of research to help in reorganization. Lastly, the companies were guaranteed privacy and confidentiality, and, therefore, letters were used instead of the actual names of the companies to ensure anonymity.

## 2.6. Summary of the Methodology

The study involved a number of steps that ranged from problem definition to data analysis and discussion. An explicit definition of the study problem, research question, study background, and purpose of the study was provided before proceeding to the next chapter that offered detailed theoretical information pertaining to the aim and objectives of the study. Analysis of the research method and data collection was accomplished at this stage. The next step involved developing themes from the interviews results and critical discussion of the results. *Figure 3* provides a summary of all the steps involved in the study. The study has been successfully completed; the success is attributed to the methodology adopted, which enabled the collection of detailed primary information and detailed analysis of results. There was adequate corporation from all the firms included in the study; the enabled timely collection and analysis of data and allowed time for reviews to ensure a reliable and valid conclusion is reached. The availability of time was also a success driver for the successful completion of the study.



*Figure 3: Summary of the steps involved in the study*

Through the application of the qualitative research design, the completed dissertation has provided valid data that effectively respond to the questions that guided the entire study. Different themes relevant to the study objectives emerged, and they have been discussed extensively by comparing and contrasting the results of the present study to the findings from the past studies.

# PRACTICAL PART

The ten companies that reached out for the interviews respond positively by answering all the interview questions, although few companies took too long before providing responses. For anonymity purposes, the first five letters of alphabets (A-E) and the last five letters of alphabets (V-Z) represent the names of the companies that responded to the interviews. Multiple themes emerged from the results, they have been outlined and discussed extensively, and the information compared to the previous findings discussed in the literature review.

## 3.1 Market Analysis

The market analysis helped in answering the first research question, *what are the dominant international marketing approaches in international marketing?* The market analysis process focused exclusively on determining the common marketing strategies used by the international companies in the market, and whether the marketing strategies are aligned to the cultural and political values of the market. Two key findings emerged from the results, as discussed below.

The results presented sales promotion as the dominant marketing strategy for International firms in the Saudi Arabian market. While some companies had distinct strategies for marketing their product, the majority of the firms adopted different forms of sales promotion as their marketing strategy. Company A promoted its sales by offering free machines after the purchase of large quantities of capsules. The marketing manager, through a phone interview, highlighted, “Our best approach is the offer of the basic coffee machine for free if a large quantity of capsules is purchased.” Ideally, this is a strategy focused on motivating and retaining existing customers and increasing their loyalty to the firm. A contingent strategy to that of Company A was noted from the response of Company X, a multinational company that produces a vast array of home appliances useful in daily life. The marketing manager of the company stated that the firm’s marketing strategy focuses on benefits and after-sale service strategy. The aspect of sales promotion was also evident from the interview feedback from Company C, which produces chocolate waffles and other sweets targeting youngsters. The firm’s marketing manager stated, “…We also use the bounty marketing for the younger generation as well as social media by our distributors.”

The use of social media for sales promotion as a marketing strategy was also noted from Company D, an oil and gas company that sells lubricants for car engines. The marketing manager of the firm, through Microsoft Teams interview, highlighted, “We use social media and advertisement collaboration with car makers/agents to promote our lubricant to ensure the exposure of our product on car owners.” In this case, it is evident that the use of social media and distributors and offering free products after the purchase of large quantities are both sales promotion strategies geared toward increasing the sales volume of the firms. Nevertheless, the sales promotion adopted by Company A is much focused on retaining the existing customers, unlike the strategies used by Company C and D that are majorly geared toward acquiring new customers. Noteworthy, the marketing strategies adopted by the international firms justify Baker’s definition of international marketing as the activities an international firm undertakes to enhance the buying or selling of products or/and services (Baker, 2014, p.130). From the results, which are consistent with the viewpoint of Baker (2014, p.131), the whole marketing concept and marketing strategies entail advertising, increasing sales volume, and delivering products and services to consumers. Similarly, the results concur with the argument Cavallone (2017, p.64) highlighted that getting a new customer is five times costly compared to retaining the existing ones; hence, the organizations strive to implement favorable marketing policies purposed at increasing consumer loyalty as a way of retaining them.

Further market analysis with regards to the question depicted that the majorityof the international firms align their marketing with cultural and political viewpoints of the market**.** While international companies adopt sales promotion for their product marketing, their strategies are forced to comply with the prevailing cultural and political values dominating the market to increase consumer loyalty. Thus, the marketing strategies satisfy one of the major constituents of "The Extra Step" (TES) marketing model (customer loyalty, Cavallone (2017, p. 63) proposed. Reports from Company C provided an elaborate view of the case – the firm’s marketing manager stated that they carefully ensure that their marketing strategies conform to the cultural and cultural values “because young population requires more freedom, however, we do have strict rules when it comes to the content of our marketing.” A similar finding was noted from the response gotten from the marking manager of Company B, who explained that it was essential for the company to conform to the cultures and political viewpoints for it to sustain business in the Arabic world. The results create an impression that the company must conduct an evaluation of the prevailing cultures of the market before implementing their marketing strategies to ensure the strategies abide by the cultures of the market.

The findings, in this case, coincide with the previous hypothesis by Fregidou-Malama and Hyder (2015, p.530). The scholars noted that an international marketing firm must study the prevailing local cultures and values in the international market prior to offering a product or service to a niche of customers or implementing a given marketing strategy. This helps in ensuring that the products and services, along with the marketing strategies, match the cultural way of life of the targeted market. It is analytical, based on the similarity of the data with the previous finding, that cultural values prevailing in a market should be regarded as a key factor for determining the marketing strategies an international firm should employ or the products to offer in the market. However, Company X provided results contradicting the above position. The company’s marketing manager stated, “we have partnered up with local company for sale and services, we do not feel that there is a must to conform any cultural values in our strategy.”

The response, therefore, raises questions on whether partnering with the local companies is an alternative to being culturally sensitive in marketing. In this case, if the position of Company X is taken into account, then the claim by De Mooij (2018, p.321) that studying the cultures ensures that every marketing promotion carried perfectly promotes the product or service to the intended market is of no great value since partnering with local firms will have achieved the goal. However, this is just a single contradicting argument from one company without any much support from the results obtained from other companies and does not ratify the importance of ensuring marketing strategies as well as products offered by an international firm conform to the cultures in the market.

## 3.2 Customer Habits Analysis

The results captured under this subsection answered the researcher's question. "*How do different cultures and values of customers influence the implementation and success of marketing approaches in the international market?”* Customer habit analysis involved examining the dominant habits in the Saudi Arabia market, how the habit is culturally influenced, and how these, in turn, influence the international marketing strategies used in the market. Two major themes emerged from the interview results.

The findings highlighted that consumers’ habits are culturally influenced. Responses from most of the companies demonstrated that the habit of each of every consumer in the market was influenced by the prevailing culture of the market. For instance, Company V that produces veal meat in a wide range, explained that Saudis usually consume lamb meat; hence a significant percentage of the population (at least 72%) consume lamb meat. With regard to the case, it is indisputable that the habits of the consumers toward meat-eating are influenced by the culture of eating lamb meat. The response coincides with the finding from Company C, which demonstrated that over 70% of the Saudi population is younger than 35 years old, whose habits are sometimes are global trends. However, the respondent from the company narrated that such habits are strongly condemned and fought by the older generation.

The fact that the older generations condemn the younger generation’s attempt to embrace global-trending habits is an indication that the habits of the consumers are governed by the cultures prevailing in the market. However, these findings contradict the prior findings by Schulze (2013, p.4437) and Featherstone (2019, p.33), who shared the same thought that the Saudi Society has evolved over the past years in the sense that their cultural values are currently trying to adapt with the modernization. On the other hand, the response from Company C, which showed that elders condemn the adoption of the global trending habits, affirm the previous hypothesis by Rubin (2015, p.561) that Saudi Arabia is one of the international markets that has strictly preserved its cultures, and enjoys great heritage. Therefore, this means that consumers’ habits are still strongly tied to the preserved cultures of the market. There is a significant need for extensive research to affirm or disregard the aspect of cultural and habit modernization of Saudi consumers.

Similarly, the findings revealed that consumers’ cultural habits influence marketing strategies and products availed in the market. The findings from the interviews conducted showed that consumer cultural habits have a significant influence on the products availed in the market and the marketing strategies used by international companies. For instance, regarding marketing strategies, Company B mentioned, “Saudi customers seem to be aggressive when it comes to marketing mistakes, the habit of the Saudi customer is to boycott the company when if such thing occurs.” The response is an indication that firms whose marketing strategies portray cultural mistakes that do not conform to the habits of the consumers may not successfully operate in the Saudi Market. A similar finding was retrieved from Company D, which narrated that, “Saudi culture is quite conservative comparing to other cultures in the region…we do take into consideration those factors when we implement our marketing tactics.” The present findings coincide with the prior results, which showed that market cultures play integral roles in determining the success or failure of international marketing due to their numerous impacts on international marketing strategies (Samaha, Beck, and Palmatier, 2014, p.81; Heslop 75).

The findings also support the early arguments by De Mooij (2018, p.321) that cultures play a key function in explaining the behaviors of consumers that significantly influence marketing, as well as the marketing approaches applicable within a market. The present study has provided adequate details of how cultural habits influence marketing strategies. Based on the findings, if Company D or Company B failed to take into consideration the cultural habits and behaviors of their consumers, then their chance of success in the market would be quite limited. In a situation where they are more than one cultural habit, the firm has to make attempts to balance their attention between the cultures to ensure that they do not lose any of their customers; Company C is a perfect illustration. Although the Saudi market is dominated by youth whose habits sometimes are "global trends," which is fought and condemned by the older generation, the company strives to find a balance to satisfy both. Therefore, it is evident from the results that the first step to ensure successful marketing in the Saudi market is to align the marketing tactics with the prevailing cultural habits of the consumers.

Besides ensuring that marketing strategies are aligned to the consumers' cultural habits, the present study results have indicated that the products international firms provide in the market also confirm the cultural consumption habits of the consumers. Company W is a good illustration of the case. According to the company, the majority of the consumers in the market (72%) consume lamb; hence, their distributors have to do their best to market the company’s veal by linking it to specific cultural activities. Company W further stated, “during Hajj and Omrah, Saudis and Muslims visiting Saudi Arabia have the mandate to sacrifice sheep...these times, sales of beef and veal are at a minimum.” The response indicates that products that are not linked to the cultural activities of the consumers are less likely to sell in the market. The finding corresponds with the earlier position taken by Fregidou-Malama and Hyder (2015, p. 530) that before offering a product or service to the targeted customers, an international firm must first study the local cultures and values to ensure that the products and services match the cultural way of life. In addition to this, it is hypothetical that the products sold should match the cultural events at every given time to increase their purchase. The argument is consistent with Cateora et al. (2020, p.128), who highlighted that Islamic religious beliefs dictate what is consumed in the market when they should be making their purchases and when they should be carrying out business.

## 3.3 Intercultural Differences

The section discussed results from the research question, “*which are the common values and cultures that shape the adoption of international marketing approaches****?****”* Much attention was onArabia markets and how the cultural differences influence international marketing strategies adopted in the market. The intercultural analysis involved analyzing the predominant cultures in the Saudi Arabian market and the possible cross-cultural problems within the market that influence the marketing strategies adopted in the market, as well as the products available in the market. The following results emerged.

The study results showed that religious culture dominates the Saudi Arabia market. As per the results,all the firms involved in the study identified Saudi culture to be a religious culture (Islamic culture). Only a few companies highlighted the presence of limited traces of traditional cultures within the market. For instance, when asked about the predominant cultures in the market, the marketing manager from Company A stated, “mainly religious cultures, then partly traditions.” The aspect of Saudi culture being a religious culture was affirmed by Company Z, which mentioned, “the Saudi culture is an Islamic culture, it has been under the influence of religion for centuries.” The response from the company affirmed the previous position by Schulze (2013, p.450), who narrated that the culture of Saudi Arabia is exclusively defined by its Islamic heritage historically. A similar result was recorded from Company B. The company acknowledged religious culture to be the dominant culture in the market.

The overall findings from the intercultural analysis affirm the argument by Algumzi (2017, p.27) that the modern-day Saudi Arabia market is a very conservative society centered on strong religious beliefs, values, beliefs, and customs. The present results further supported Alqahtani (2016, p.110) argument that all Saudis are culturally entitled to practice Islamic culture, the major source of guidance and rules deemed crucial for personal, political, economic, legal, as well as social lives. However, the findings disregard the argument by Featherstone (2019, p.32) that the Saudi Society has evolved over the recent past by trying to adapt to modernization in their traditions and values from their customs, hospitality to their dressing styles. Ideally, the presence of modernization in the market would imply that the market is dominated by different cultures from other western countries, which is not the case since the only one culture (Islamic religious culture) dominates in the market. Based on the results, it is hypothetical that the market does not accommodate external cultures, and people paying a visit to the country or doing business in the country must be flexible enough to adapt to the existing religious culture.

Similarly, the results provided that religious cultures influence advertisement content and marketing plans. The interview results showed that the religious culture controlling the operations in the Saudi Arabian market is a major factor when creating marketing content and plan. International organizations must take into account the religious culture when preparing their marketing advertisement content. Company V indicated that they always take into consideration religious cultures in their marketing contents. Company Z mentioned, “the Saudi culture is an Islamic culture, it has been under the influence of religion for centuries... we take this into consideration when drafting our marketing plan of actions.” All the companies admitted that the religious cultures prevailing in the market influence their marketing plans and contents except Company X, which highlighted that the religious cultures do not influence their marketing plans and contents in any way, but they take them into consideration.

Most of the companies acknowledged that their marketing plans are influenced by religious cultures but never provided a detailed explanation of how religious cultures impact their marketing plans. However, a significant level of correlation is detectable between the present findings and the results from the previous studies. The present study findings support the prior results tabled by Cateora et al. (2020, p.129) that seeking an in-depth understanding of the Islamic religion and its impacts on the consumer is one of the crucial steps for international marketers when preparing an effective marketing plan that can effectively attract the attention of the target market. The current study results also affirm the results De Mooij (2015, p.646) presented, which highlighted that the failure to conform to religious beliefs or the cultures of the Middle East might severely undermine the reputation of a brand or company, affirmed the case.

Arguably, the companies’ efforts to adhere to the religious, cultural standards are an approach to ensuring that the companies uphold the good reputation of the brand and increase their sales. Therefore, Cateora et al. (2020, p.137) argued that international marketers who are highly attuned to the influence of Islamic religious culture in their marketing plans are more likely to achieve significant advantage in aligning both their promotional opportunities and marketing messages is irrefutable. The sense created by the results is that every international firm operating in the Saudi Arabian market must be sensitive to the religious cultures when planning their marketing strategies and contents.

The third finding from the question highlighted that nonadherence to local Saudi culture results in the failure of companies. The results from several companies that participated in the study pinpointed nonadherence to the consumer cultural beliefs as a major cause of international failure firms in the market. When asked about the causes of failure for international firms in the market, Company Z stated, “We believe that disrespect of values and traditions of the Saudi society can be a major reason for failure in the Saudi market.” Similar feedback was recorded from Company E. The company’s marketing manager highlighted, “Disrespect to culture, wrong use of advertisement abusing religious scripts or religious habits are major caused of failure.” Company Y also narrated, “some companies consider their marketing plan as a regional plan while it should be per country and per culture.

A company entering the market should perfectly understand the country and its local culture. The results strongly support the previous findings that market cultures play key functions in determining the success or failure of international marketing (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2014, p.47). The findings also affirm the recommendation that international marketing firms must convert their thinking and cultural perspectives into the thinking and culture of the local people target in order to be successful in the market (Cateora et al., 2020, p. 131). Based on the findings, it is doubtless that adhering to the local culture of the Saudi Arabian market is a prerequisite for the continued existence of international firms in the market. Non-compliance to the cultural values subject firms within the market to high risks of closing down; hence, every international company operating within the market has the responsibility of ensuring its sustainability by paying close attention to local cultures within their areas of operations.

## 3.4 Role of National Culture in Molding the Corporate Culture

The results under this section purposed to analyze the existing national culture of the Saudi people and how it shapes the corporate culture that governs the international firms within the market. Mixed responses emerged from the companies that participated in the study since some companies indicated that that the national culture had no role in molding their corporate cultures, while few companies acknowledged that the Saudi’s national culture influenced their corporate culture. Nevertheless, the dominant theme that emerged from the responses is that “*national culture had no role in molding corporate culture*.” Approximately 60 percent of the companies engaged in the study indicated that the Saudi’s national culture had no influence on their corporate culture. Company X, Company, W Company E, Company Z, and Company B presented similar results supporting the above theme. For instance, Company Z highlighted, “We are an international company based in the Netherlands with offices across the globe, including the Middle East. Local culture of any country does not have any influence on our corporate culture.” Similarly, the marketing manager from Company E stated that national culture does not apply in their case.

Contradicting responses to the theme that highlighted that Saudi’s national culture influenced their corporate culture seemed to the country’s national culture to religious culture. Company V stated, “We do have a local office in Saudi Arabia, where Saudis work too. I believe that they contribute to the culture of our local office.” Correlating feedback was recorded from Company C, “...we decided to establish a branch in Saudi Arabia, so it can be called a Saudi company. We have Saudis working there and they participate in molding the culture of Ulker in Saudi Arabia.” The three responses created a perception that the Saudi national culture influenced the corporate cultures of international companies operating in the Saudi market. However, compared to the results supporting that “*national culture had no role in molding corporate culture*,” the influence of the national culture on the corporate culture cannot be ascertained. Besides, there are no past studies that can be used to test the validity of the findings. Hence, whether or not national culture has a role in molding the corporate culture of international cultures demands further studies.

## 3.5 Suggested International Marketing Strategy

The results provided under this section were based on the question, *“which are the most effective international marketing strategies that should be considered in the Saudi Arabia market?”* Multiple suggestions were recorded from the respondents concerning the feasible international marketing strategies to deploy in the Saudi Arabian market. A single theme, *international marketing strategy varies from one company to another*, emerged from the feedback received from the companies. The theme emerged from the fact that out of the ten companies involved in the survey, only three suggested somehow correlated marketing strategy. The other seven companies proposed different strategies. The three companies that shared a common thought recommended social media as a feasible international marketing strategy. Company Y stated, “We use social media, especially Twitter and we use studies to observe the behavior of the Saudi costumers.” Hence, according to the company, the use of Twitter is the most effective international marketing strategy. A similar thought was presented by Company C that uses social media because many young Saudis use it. It is hypothetical from the response that the majority of the company’s targeted clients are youths.

Company D's statement, "Saudi market is becoming more relying on technology and social media and that any strategy that takes into consideration new media streams would be successful," also supported the use of social media as an effective marketing strategy. Notably, from the three companies highlighting the use of social media, only one (Company D) gives a recommendation. The other two are just mentioned the strategy they use in their firm, which makes it quite inappropriate to validate their strategies are actually the best international marketing strategies that other international firms should consider. The other seven companies provided divergent opinions. However, the most appealing suggestion strongly supported in the previous study was the one put forth by Company B. According to the company, the most appropriate international marketing strategy, particularly when operating in the Saudi market, involves being very careful when it comes to religion/traditions and values of the Saudi people. This coincides with the suggestion that while carrying out international marketing, the marketer must first convert all his or her thinking and cultural perspectives into the cultural perspectives of the targeted market (Cateora et al., 2020, p. 131). Similarly, the findings strengthen the prior argument by French and Gordon (2019, p. 273) that it is imperative to rethink traditional concepts like  ‘value’ and ‘exchange’ in the social context of international marketing while proceeding on to nature as well as the application of social marketing. Overly, while the companies provided divergent opinions on the marketing strategies they deemed effective, it is observable from their feedback that international marketing centered on traditions and/or pointing at one or more traditional values could be considered as a successful international strategy.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The dissertation explores and analyzed international companies’ marketing strategies in international markets dominated by diverse cultural and political beliefs.

From the study, the following key results emerged. Firstly, culture plays a significant role in marketing, and it is a prerequisite for every international company to adhere to the consumers’ cultural values and beliefs to be successful. With respect to this finding, it is recommendable that companies should consider recruiting staff who are conversant with the cultural values in the international market to take up the role of a marketing manager. The implementation of the recommendation will help the firms to perfectly align their marketing strategies with the cultural values of the market with lots of conveniences.

Secondly, Islamic culture is the Saudi culture - every international firm operating in the Saudi market must conform to the religious culture. Third, cultural beliefs and values significantly influence the marketing strategies, marketing plan, marketing content, as well as products offered in the market. However, the study presented mixed results on the role of national culture in molding corporate culture. Besides, the results have outlined multiple international marketing strategies, with the use of social media being the dominant suggestion. With regards to the second and third results, it is recommendable that companies should train their teams on the importance of conforming to market values and how to embrace them. Equipping the staff with the knowledge will help them to remain adherent to market cultures while carrying out any marketing task in order to achieve the highest marketing outcome. The findings map that the best solution for businesses struggling to succeed in the international markets is to align their marketing strategies on the traditions and cultural values dominating the international market.

## Research Questions

* *What are the dominant international marketing approaches in international marketing?*

The research question focused on determining the common marketing strategies used by the international companies in the market, and whether the marketing strategies are aligned to the cultural and political values of the market. The findings obtained from this question highlighted that promotion is the dominant marketing strategy for International firms in the Saudi Arabian market and that majorityof the international firms align their marketing with cultural and political viewpoints of the market.

* *How do different cultures and values of customers influence the implementation and success of marketing approaches in the international market?*

The question examined the dominant habits in the Saudi Arabia market, how the habit is culturally influenced, and how these, in turn, influence the international marketing strategies used in the market. The results showed that consumers’ habits are culturally influenced and that consumers’ cultural habit influence marketing strategies and products availed in the market

* Which are the common values and cultures that shape the adoption of international marketing approaches?

The question focused on the analysis of how the intercultural differences influence international marketing strategies adopted in the market. The results showed that religious culture dominates the Saudi Arabia market and that the religious cultures significantly influences the marketing contents. Similarly, the findings demonstrated that nonadherence to local Saudi culture results in the failure of companies.

* *Which are the most effective international marketing strategies that should be considered in the Saudi Arabia market?*

The results highlighted that international marketing strategies vary from one company to another. However, the most effective approach is strict adherence to the cultural values prevailing in the market.

* *To find out the different international marketing strategies used in international marketing.*

The study objective was to ensure that the researcher identifies the most common marketing approaches that firms use in the international markets.

* *To explore the varied customer cultures and values influencing international marketing.*

The objective was to ensure that the researcher comes out with adequate information regarding how different consumer cultures and values influence international marketing processes.

* *To determine how cultures and values of customers affect the success of dominant international marketing approaches.*

This objective focused exclusively on the values and norms of the customers; the aim was to understand how their individual cultures influence the international marketing strategies used in the market.

* *To establish a suitable marketing approach in an International cultural market.*

With this objective, the researcher was able to explore the appropriate marketing strategies that firms should consider incorporating for international marketing.

# ABSTRACT

The internationalization of firms is increasing sporadically, and the need to gain knowledge of international marketing through local strategies is becoming critical. The current study has explored and analyzed international companies’ marketing strategies in international markets dominated by diverse cultural and political beliefs. Qualitative research design was deployed and primary data collected through semi-structured interviews. Collected data have been analyzed thematically. The results indicated that culture plays a significant role in marketing and it is a prerequisite for every international company to adhere to the consumers’ cultural values and beliefs to be successful. Besides, the results showed that Islamic culture is the Saudi culture that every international firm operating in the Saudi market must conform to the religious culture. Also, the results showed that cultural beliefs and values significantly influence the marketing strategies, marketing plan, marketing content, as well as products offered in the market. Mixed results were obtained on the role of national culture in molding corporate culture. Similarly, the results outlined multiple international marketing strategies.

*Key terms*: **International marketing, religious culture, national culture, corporate culture.**

# KEYWORDS

International marketing

Consumer culture

Religious culture

National culture

Corporate culture

# REFERENCES

**International Economics**

Cader, A. A. 2015. Islamic challenges to advertising: a Saudi Arabian perspective. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, *12*(3), 100-115.

Cateora, P. R., Meyer, R. B. M. F., Gilly, M. C., and Graham, J. L. 2020. *International marketing*. McGraw-Hill Education. New York (NY). ISBN-13: 978-1259712357

Cateora, P., c Gilly, M., and Graham, J. L. 2015. *International marketing*. McGraw-Hill Higher Education, New York (NY). ISBN13: 9781259712357

Fregidou-Malama, M., and Hyder, A. S. 2015. Impact of culture on marketing of health services–Elekta in Brazil. *International Business Review*, *24*(3), 530-540.

Gunduz, Z. 2017. A critical approach to culture and society definitions. *People: International Journal of Social Sciences*, *3*(2), 140-151.

Stahl, G. K., and Tung, R. L. 2015. Towards a more balanced treatment of culture in international business studies: The need for positive cross-cultural scholarship. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *46*(4), 391-414.

**Health and Education**

Alqahtani, M. M., and Altamimi, N. 2016. Code of ethics and professionalism in light of cultural competency: A guideline for Saudi psychologists, supervisors, and trainees. *Psychological Studies*, *61*(2), 103-112.

Bowen, W. H. 2014. *The History of Saudi Arabia*. ABC-CLIO, California, United States (US). ISBN-13 : 978-076145498

Cooper, R. 2019. *CultureShock! Thailand: A survival guide to customs and etiquette*. Marshall Cavendish International Asia Pte Ltd. Singapore. ASIN: B07SH784DL

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., and Alkassim, R. S. 2016. Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American journal of theoretical and applied statistics*, *5*(1), 1-4.

Featherstone, M. 2019. Consumer culture, symbolic power and universalism. In *Mass Culture, Popular Culture, and Social Life in the Middle East* (pp. 17-46). Routledge. http://postmodernopenings.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/6-Consumer-Culture-and-Postmodernism.pdf

Gavin, H. 2008. *Understanding research methods and statistics in psychology*. Sage Publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446214565.

Gilgun, J. F. 2001. Grounded theory and other inductive research methods. *The handbook of social work research methods*, Vol 2(3), 345-364.

**Microeconomics**

Armstrong, G., Adam, S., Denize, S., and Kotler, P. 2014. *Principles of marketing*. Pearson Australia. https://www.pearson.com.au/9781488611841

Arnould, E. J., and Thompson, C. J. 2015. Introduction: consumer culture theory: ten years gone (and beyond). In *Consumer culture theory*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Vol. 17. ISBN: 978-1-78560-323-5

Askegaard, S. (2014). Consumer Culture Theory–Neo-liberalism’s ‘useful idiots? *Marketing Theory*, *14*(4), 507-511.

Baack, D., Czarnecka B., and Baack, D. 2018. *International Marketing*, 2nd Edition. London: Sage, 2018. ISBN: 978-15-264-6312-8.

Baker, M. J. 2014. *Marketing strategy and management*. Macmillan International Higher Education. ISBN 978–1–137–02582–1

Cavallone, M. 2017. *Marketing and Customer Loyalty The Extra Step Approach*, 1st Edition. Pennsylvania: Springer, 2017. ISBN: 978-33-195-1991-3

De Mooij, M. 2015. Cross-cultural research in international marketing: clearing up some of the confusion. *International Marketing Review*.

French, J., and Gordon, R.(2019). *Strategic Social Marketing For Behaviour and Social Change*, 2nd Edition. Queensland: Sage, 2019. ISBN: 978-15-264-7164-2

De Mooij, M. 2018. *Global marketing and advertising: Understanding cultural paradoxes*. SAGE Publications Limited. ISBN: 978-15-443-1814-1.

Javalgi, R. G., Hall, K. D., and Cavusgil, S. T. 2014. Corporate entrepreneurship, customer-oriented selling, absorptive capacity, and international sales performance in the international B2B setting: Conceptual framework and research propositions. *International Business Review*, *23*(6), 1193-1202.

Kouamé, S., and Langley, A. 2018. Relating microprocesses to macro‐outcomes in qualitative strategy process and practice research. *Strategic Management Journal*, *39*(3), 559-581.

Malhotra, N. K., and Dash, S. 2016. *Marketing research: An applied orientation*. Pearson. London, United Kingdom (UK). ISBN: 9789332559523

McDaniel, C. and Gates, R. 2013. *Marketing research*. Singapore. Retrieved from: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9cdd/c4542e6f211121fd833b96ea358e59b520a0.pdf

Surugiu, M. R., and Surugiu, C. 2015. International trade, globalization and economic interdependence between European countries: implications for businesses and marketing framework. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, *32*(15), 131-138.

Varadarajan, R. 2015. Strategic marketing, marketing strategy and market strategy. *AMS review*, *5*(3-4), 78-90.

Zittoun, T., and Gillespie, A. 2015. Internalization: How culture becomes mind. *Culture and Psychology*, *21*(4), 477-491.

**Other special topics**

Algumzi, A. 2017. *The impact of Islamic culture on business ethics: Saudi Arabia and the practice of Wasta* (Doctoral dissertation, Lancaster University).

Anishchenkova, V. 2020. *Modern Saudi Arabia*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO.

Berman, E. A. 2017. An exploratory sequential mixed methods approach to understanding researchers’ data management practices at UVM: Integrated findings to develop research data services.

Biagetti, S., and Lugli, F. (Eds.). 2016. *The intangible elements of culture in ethnoarchaeological research*. Springer. ISBN: 978-3-319-23153-2. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23153-2

Coccia, M. 2014. Religious culture, Democratization and patterns of technological innovation. *International Journal of sustainable society*, *6*(4), 397-418.

Kaynak, E., and Herbig, P. 2014. *Handbook of cross-cultural marketing*. Routledge. New York (NY), London. ISBN: 0-7890-0154-3.

Lewis, R. 2015. *Muslim fashion: Contemporary style cultures*. Duke University Press. SBN: 978-0-8223-5934-0

Lücking, M. 2014. Making'Arab'One's Own: Muslim Pilgrimage Experiences in Central Java, Indonesia. In *Internationales Asien Forum. International Quarterly for Asian Studies* (Vol. 45, No. 1/2, p. 129). Arnold Bergsträsser Institute.

Modood, T. 2016. Muslims, religious equality and secularism. *Contesting Secularism: Comparative Perspectives*, Vol. 2(3), *69-78*.

Harbi, S.A., Thursfield, D. and Bright, D., 2017. Culture, wasta and perceptions of performance appraisal in Saudi Arabia. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *28*(19), pp.279-287.

Newcomer, K. E., Hatry, H. P., and Wholey, J. S. 2015. *Handbook of practical program evaluation*. John Wiley and Sons. ISBN: 9781118893609.

Papadopoulos, N., and Heslop, L. A. 2014. *Product-country images: Impact and role in international marketing*. Routledge. Binghamton, New York (NY). ISBN: 1-56024-236-1.

Peterson, J. E. 2020. *Historical Dictionary of Saudi Arabia*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. Lanham, Maryland. ISBN: 9781538119792 153811979X.

Rasmussen, H. N., and Lavish, L. 2014. Broad definitions of culture in the field of multicultural psychology. In *Perspectives on the intersection of multiculturalism and positive psychology* (pp. 17-30). Retrieved from: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-017-8654-6\_2.

Rubin, B. 2015. *The Middle East: A Guide to Politics, Economics, Society and Culture*. Routledge. New York (NY). ISBN: 13:9780-7656-80945.

Sarstedt, M., and Mooi, E. 2014. A concise guide to market research. *The Process, Data, and*, *12*.

Schulze, R. 2013. Mass culture and Islamic cultural production in 19th century Middle East. *The history of the book in the Middle East*, 3(7), 421-454.

Sheikh, Z., Islam, T., Rana, S., Hameed, Z., and Saeed, U. 2017. Acceptance of social commerce framework in Saudi Arabia. *Telematics and Informatics*, *34*(8), 1693-1708.

Shusterman, R. 2016. *Practicing philosophy: Pragmatism and the philosophical life*. Routledge. Milton Park, Abingdon. ISBN-13:978-0-415-91394-2.

Simpson, B. 2017. Pragmatism: A philosophy of practice. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods: History and Traditions*, 21 (7), 54-68.

Smith, B., and Sparkes, A. C. 2016. Introduction: An invitation to qualitative research. In *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 23-30). Routledge.

Wien, P. 2017. *Arab Nationalism: The Politics of History and Culture in the Modern Middle East*. Taylor and Francis. Milton Park, Abingdon. ISBN: 978-0-415-49938-5.

Woiceshyn, J., and Daellenbach, U. 2018. Evaluating inductive vs deductive research in management studies. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*.

# APPENDIX

## Appendix 1: Semi-structured Interviews

1. What are the marketing strategies deployed in your firm to ensure its success in the Saudi Market?

........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

1. Do your firm’s marketing strategies conform to the cultural and political values of your targeted market?

........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

1. Are there customer habits in Saudi Arabia that influence the marketing strategies adopted by your firm? If so, provide examples and explain briefly.

........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

1. What are the different predominant cultures in the Saudi market that influence your marketing tactics?

........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

1. Does religious culture in your market influence the content of your advertisement and marketing plan?

...................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

1. What are the major causes of failure in international marketing strategies in the market?

........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

1. Does the Saudi national culture have roles in molding the corporate culture? If any, explain the roles?

........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

1. What are most feasible international marketing strategies would you propose for firms seeking to enter Saudi market and other international markets

........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

## Appendix 2: Sample Interview Transcription

*Interview Nespresso by Nestle via Phone*

1. **What are the marketing strategies deployed in your firm to ensure its success in the Saudi Market?**

The coffee brand is relatively new in the Saudi market. We produce coffee machines that uses specific coffee capsules. We usually focus on revenues of capsules rather than the machines. Our best approach is the offer of the basic coffee machine for free if large quantity of capsules is purchased.

1. **Do your firm’s marketing strategies conform to the cultural and political values of your targeted market?**

Yes, it does.

1. **Are there customer habits in Saudi Arabia that influence the marketing strategies adopted by your firm? If so, provide examples and explain briefly.**

For years, coffee has been part of the culture in the Arabian Peninsula. However, the type of coffee that is used in Saudi Arabia is different. In recent years, customer habits tend to change or modernize closely to western standards. Morning coffee became the habit of both Saudi and non-Saudi residents.

1. **What are the different predominant cultures in the Saudi market that influence your marketing tactics?**

Mainly religious culture, then partly traditions.

1. **Does religious culture in your market influence the content of your advertisement and marketing plan?**

Yes, it does.

1. **What are the major causes of failure in international marketing strategies in the Saudi Arabia Market?**

We believe that lack of information or studies on the Saudi market could cause failure of any marketing strategy.

1. **Does the Saudi national culture have roles in molding the corporate culture? If any, explain the roles**

It does, and this is highly common in the middle eastern markets. Corporate culture should always be influenced by local culture. In our case, religious culture.

1. **What are most feasible international marketing strategies would you propose for firms seeking to enter Saudi market and other international markets?**

Every company must tailor-make its own strategy depending on product and targeted segment. It would be difficult to advise any company to copy-cat specific strategy because it may cause its failure.