



Marketing Strategies of International Pharmaceutical Companies in the Middle East and North Africa Region

Ali Abou Abbas and Lionel de Souza

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ABSTRACT

The economies of many countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are largely oil based. Steep declines in oil and gas prices in 2014 by 50% or more led some governments in MENA region to decrease healthcare budgets by more than 30%. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that managers of international pharmaceutical companies have successfully implemented in the MENA region to sustain profitability despite the decreases in the healthcare budgets, consequent to the 2014 declines in oil and gas prices. The study involved data collection using semistructured interviews of 6 middle and executive managers working in 2 international pharmaceutical companies located in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. The strategic flexibility theory underpinned the study in furthering the exploration of challenges associated with implementing marketing strategies by international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. Study participants selected to partake in this research had a minimum of 5 years of experience in planning and implementing marketing strategies in the region. The findings from the data analysis led to the identification of major marketing strategies, which have helped to maintain business sustainability of pharmaceutical companies, despite difficulties with the reduction in healthcare budgets in the MENA region. The important themes emerging from this study included: (a) product launch strategy and operating model, (b) transformation of leaders by vision and guidance. The results of the study may contribute to positive social change as pharmaceutical and healthcare knowledge benefits human health and may also serve to influence positive job creation and enrichment of the economies of the region.

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Background of the Problem

The goal of business organizations to develop, grow, and sustain profitable operations under existing economic conditions (Cassidy & Wynn, 2013). The organization's ability to implement successful marketing strategies in alignment with its mission and business management goals is critical to increase market share and growth (Rosemann & Vom Brocke, 2015). Many healthcare firms however fail to achieve business objectives with the implementation of marketing strategies, which often results in financial losses arising from sub-optimal resource allocation, without achieving the commensurate return on investments (MacLennan, 2011).

The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) region represents 22 countries, accounts for 60% of the world's oil reserves and 45% of the world's natural gas reserves. The need for healthcare services in the region has increased in recent years with the population growth, lifestyle change, and improved life expectancy (Nair, Ibrahim, & Celentano, 2013). In the wake of a slowed economy in many countries in the MENA region, the healthcare industry comprising of governmental agencies, and private entities face various. Chahine & Tohme (2016) noted, that the core problem in the healthcare industry is the lack of highly skilled marketers who can meet customer and patient needs, especially with lowered government healthcare budgets arising from the decline in oil and gas prices in 2014 following the global financial recession of 2008.

Problem Statement

In countries where oil constitutes the predominant revenue source, healthcare budgets allocated is drastically lowered when there are precipitous and sustained declines in oil prices, as is true in the Gulf region (World Health Organization, 2016). Since 2014, the decrease in oil and gas prices by about 56% led governments in the MENA region to slash healthcare budgets by more than 30% (Gengler & Lambert, 2016). The general business problem is that lowered oil prices have caused pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region to face marketing and growth challenges with the diminished government spending allocations for healthcare. The specific business problem evident, is that some managers of international pharmaceutical companies lacked region-specific marketing strategies to counter the effect of reduced government healthcare budgets after 2014, from declining oil and gas prices.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies enacted by successful strategists of international pharmaceutical companies. Success was gauged by successful implementation of marketing strategies formulated and successfully implemented in the MENA region to ensure profitability with the decrease in oil prices and the consequent 2014 decreases in healthcare budgets. The targeted population comprised of marketing managers of two international pharmaceutical

companies, located in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates who have implemented successful marketing strategies to ensure profitability despite the adverse economic climate arising from the steep decline in oil and gas prices. Our verification of successful marketing strategies implementation was by examining pharmaceutical financial reports from this industry, specific to the MENA region. The managers interviewed, also provided useful information strategy implementation that aided our understanding of the lifestyle and needs of the MENA region communities, to add to the knowledge gleaned from researchers Fontana, Saster-Merino, and Baca (2015). Pharmaceutical companies are directly associated with the quality of healthcare by offering therapeutic options which contribute to improving the quality of human life. Pharmaceutical organizations and its management have played a key role in contributions to improving human health and the welfare of local economies, notably through the creation of jobs and are universally known as good contributors to ensuing positive social change (Li & Tan, 2013).

Nature of the Study

In evaluating research methods, the qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study to explore the successful marketing strategy implementation. The inclusion criteria for participation in the study included selection of successful and by experienced pharmaceutical marketing professionals, who managed to post economic gains and profitability, the economic downturns notwithstanding. Researchers often use qualitative research to understand the perspectives and experiences of individuals or groups in exploring a phenomenon. Qualitative research involves interviewing participants using open-ended questions, related documents, and observing behavior, while the quantitative method entails relying on numeric data generated from an instrument administered to participants to examine relationships or differences among variables (O'Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed, & Cook, 2014). Mixed methods research, a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, involve collecting and analyzing data to create a stronger understanding of phenomena than either individual method (Yin, 2014). The quantitative and mixed research methods were infeasible and not suitable for this research because the purpose of the study was to obtain deep insights from pharmaceutical marketing professionals. The goal was to understand the reasons and drivers of successful strategy implementation in the MENA region, consequent to governments reducing healthcare budgets stemming from declining oil and gas prices.

Some common designs in qualitative research studies are ethnography, phenomenology, ground theory, and case study research. The ethnographic design is based on social research wherein researchers explore the beliefs, feelings, and relationships among people who share the same culture (Lopez-Dicastillo & Bellintxon, 2014). Ethnography was not considered appropriate for this study, as the purpose was not to explore a general or cultural related phenomenon. The phenomenological paradigm is appropriate when the purpose of the research is to understand a phenomenon through participant experiences (Bevan, 2014), while researchers use the grounded theory design to discover, develop, and verify theories for explaining phenomena. The phenomenological and grounded theory designs were hence unsuited to this study. The case study approach entails identifying and exploring participant experiences while focusing on commonalities and differences within a fixed framework

(Yin, 2014). A descriptive qualitative multiple case study design was after careful deliberation, as discussed herein, found suitable for this research study. The focus was in acquiring a deeper understanding of the successful business and marketing strategies implemented by pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region in the wake of address decreases in healthcare budgets with the declines in oil and gas prices.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was: What marketing strategies do successful pharmaceutical companies use in the MENA region, faced with reduced healthcare budgets and consequent to the declines in oil prices?

The following interview questions served to elicit responses that subscribed to the theme of the overarching research question:

1. What are your responsibilities as a manager in marketing strategy implementation?
2. What marketing strategies have you used that resulted in ensuring your company's profitability during periods of fluctuation in oil and gas prices?
3. What are the main challenges associated with marketing strategy implementation in the MENA region?
4. What approaches have facilitated the implementation of a successful marketing strategy in the MENA region?
5. What do you do to avoid marketing strategy failure in the MENA region?

Conceptual Framework

The theory chosen to underpin the study was the strategic flexibility theory, postulated by Evans (1991). The lens of the theory of strategic flexibility provided a vantage point to understand the responsiveness of firms to economic and other pressures, the benefits of a proactive rather than a reactive attitude, and the ability to do something other than originally intended (Bock, Opsahl, George, & Gann, 2012). Conceptually, the developers of the strategic flexibility theory have suggested, that the ability of the organization to take appropriate action in response to external changes often reflects the strategic capability and disposition of a business (Robert & Stockport, 2014). Aaker and Mascarenhas (1984) employed the strategic flexibility theory to understand how an uncertain environment create the need for strategic adaptation while Sanchez (1995) suggested that the strategic flexibility reflects the inherent flexibility of companies to apply resources in innovative, adaptive, and alternative ways and measures, to negotiate a constantly changing environment (Robert & Stockport, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts that researchers assume to be true, however, cannot be proven. Incorrect assumptions can lead to a negative impact on the integrity and honesty of research findings (Fan, 2013). Researchers must seek to confirm and determine potential assumptions to increase the general level of understanding and avoid misrepresentation in empirical research. In this research study, there were several assumptions. First, all participants in this study were expected to have suitable experiences in marketing strategy implementation. Second, because data were collected through face-to-face interviews, the assumption was that participants would be able express themselves and share views and perceptions openly. Third, ethical and unbiased response expectation by the participants represented another assumption.

The final assumption was that further economic difficulties and curtailments of government on healthcare spending during the period of study would not have a major impact on the results.

Limitations

All research studies have strengths and weaknesses; however, limitations represent the internal and external potential weaknesses that potentially may affect the study (Connelly, 2013). In this qualitative multiple case study, the primary limitation was the anticipated reservations by participants to willing to answer the interview questions, or accurately share personal and company experiences. Another limitation was the lack of available and accurate data related to the pharmaceutical industry in the MENA region, and the absence of research studies on the healthcare industry.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries of the study, denoting what is under the researcher's control (Welch, 2014). The first delimitation of this research was specific focus on organizational activities related to marketing strategy implementation; The second delimitation of this research was the geographic location, of the UAE, where most of the international healthcare companies in the MENA region are based. The level of expertise and time that managers spend on marketing strategy development and implementation vary from one organization to another. The participant inclusionary criteria in this research therefore required that all participants were directly involved in marketing strategy implementation in the MENA region for at least 3 years, to qualify to participate in the study.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may be of importance to leaders of international healthcare and pharmaceutical organizations, as could provide knowledge and insight to the imperatives in achieving profitability during periods of government reduced healthcare budgets stemming from declines in oil and gas prices.

The findings of this study thus may be of significance to managers of international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region, as the knowledge generated may contribute to overcoming obstacles to developing and implementing effective marketing strategies. Pharmaceutical marketing and business managers may use the findings of this study to elevate current marketing strategy development and implementation knowledge and maintain sustainability. The current knowledge deficit regarding marketing strategy and role of associated cultural factors in business success in the MENA region during periods of declines in oil and gas prices potentially made this study and its results of potential significance for international pharmaceutical and healthcare organizations.

The findings of this study may also contribute to positive social change by the knowledge benefiting human health. Despite the positive social change due to the existence of foreign companies in the UAE, inflation of living costs has adversely affected the middle and low-income levels of society (Al Faris & Soto, 2016). The results of the study may serve to influence positive job creation, as with the success of pharmaceutical companies in the region, increased employment is a potential outcome. During 2012, there were 6,500 international active registered companies in the UAE, perhaps reflecting the role of foreign companies in job creation and enrichment of the economies of the region (Ewers, 2016).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies used by successful marketers and leaders of international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. Despite extensive research on the effects of marketing strategies on business sustainability in the MENA region, few researchers have sought to reveal the factors that may help international pharmaceutical company leaders to implement successful marketing strategies. The literature review for this study also encompasses different scholarly insights and concepts to add to the depth of the research study and inquiry.

Topics discussed in this literature review includes a critical review of the professional and academic papers pertaining to the challenges and intricacies of effectively implementing marketing strategies. The sources for the literature review included peer-reviewed scholarly studies from a leading University Library. The literature was sourced from academic database of Pro-Quest, Emerald Management Journals, and Sage Full-Text Collections. Additional resources were obtained through searching various journal articles, published books, and other credible online publications such as Thoreau, the EBSCOhost database, the WHO (World Healthcare organization) website, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, Questia, Saudi FDA, and others credible sources of information and journal sources.

Strategic Flexibility

The theory of strategic flexibility served to advance understanding of the ability of marketing leaders to adapt to internal and external change by rapidly responding to also mitigating risks (Sushil, 2015). The conceptual framework of strategic flexibility proposed by Evans (1991) denotes flexibility of actions taken prior and after any change has taken place (Fan, Wu, & Wu, 2013). Fernandez-Perez, García-Morales, and Pullés (2016) stressed the importance to customize resources quickly to respond to internal and environmental change. Companies with higher strategic flexibility are adaptive and capable of marshalling its resources to also counteract to competitor maneuvers. Firms with lower strategic flexibility often in contrast often lack the ability to adapt to changing situations and environment (Kurt & Hulland, 2013).

Many strategists have stressed the importance of strategic flexibility within the organization at the level of planning, development, and technology, and to embrace change (Fernández-Pérez, José Verdú-Jóver, & Benitez-Amado, 2013). Nurdiani, Fricker, and Börstler (2014) affirmed that there are two levels of change associated with strategic flexibility: strategic and operational. Some strategists have linked adaptive capabilities to organizational structure and development process within the organization. Instilling a strategic flexibility disposition, is often associated with fostering and innovative culture that limits resistance to change and promotes an organization structure of less complexity, which often bodes well for the management to focus on new opportunities (Bock et al., 2012).

Kurt et al. (2013) opined that strategic flexibility could be connected to various functional areas within the organization such as management, marketing, operation, and finance. A high level of strategic flexibility capability contributes to long-term sustainability and growth of any organization and build a maturity level for the ecosystem (Sushil, 2015). Bock et al. (2012) shared the view of Sushil (2015), affirming that companies with high level of strategic flexibility can respond quickly to changing environments

through the adjustment of organizational learning and innovation, which gives the organization longevity. To achieve efficient strategic flexibility, business innovators requires a nuanced assessment of the relationship between structural changes, managerial awareness, and change control (Fan et al., 2013). Al-Zu'bi (2016) stressed the importance of building strategic flexibility in an organization to achieve competitive advantage, agility, and adaptive capabilities to the realities of the environment in which it operates in. In the context of the organization, leaders' style and efficient knowledge management are fundamental to strategic flexibility success (Bock et al., 2012).

Among the different concepts of strategic flexibility, managerial perspectives and leader responsibilities often play an important role in reacting rapidly to current and emerging environmental change. The strategic flexibility capability therefore, helps managers and decision-makers to build an environment with higher degrees of productivity (Ahmadi, Salamzadeh, Daraei, & Akbari, 2012). From the cognitive perspective, Fernandez-Perez et al. (2016) stressed the influence of the external relationship leaders with other actors outside their organization in achieving strategic flexibility. Innovative leaders often seek to extend the organization activities by exploring novel opportunities and creating strategic options, therefore, enhancing strategic flexibility (Bock et al., 2012). Increasing external social networking with top managers of other companies in the same industry enable leaders to be aware of the valuable information, knowledge, available resources that can utilize to mitigate uncertainties and help make the right decisions (Fernandez-Perez et al., 2013). The operational flexibilities within an organization are related to the ability and knowledge of leaders to acquire resources to provide a base for any company to practice strategic flexibility, as it would require to re-employ resources in accordance with the strategic change (Sushil, 2015). Kurt and Hulland (2013) shared the view of Sushil (2015) that managers who command significantly greater resources need to have comprehensive knowledge and understanding on the advantages of implementing strategic flexibility. to make appropriate decisions. Fernandez-Perez et al. (2013) stressed on the importance the personality and disposition of leaders, contributing to promote strategic flexibility efficiently, in achieving higher performance within the organization.

Innovative marketing strategies are considered as one of the core concepts for companies to maintain sustainability. The success of such decisions related to marketing strategies usually hinges on the manager's sophisticated awareness of local regulations, resources, and customers preferences as well as desire to make necessary adaptations (Magnusson et al., 2013). Kurt et al. (2013) noted that previous studies related to strategic flexibility have not considered the impacts on organizational marketing strategies. Kurt et al. contended that strategic flexibility of rivals is the primary factor for the relationship between marketing strategy and firm's value, where companies allocate significant amounts of funds to gain competitive merit over their competitors. Al-Zu'bi (2016) stated that firm which maintain an adequate level of flexibility in marketing strategies through developing new products, entering new markets, and modifying products according to the demand of the changing market; however, the success of this strategy depends on whether the company has sufficient financial resources. Fan et al. (2013) shared the view of Al-Zu'bi and confirmed that the application of strategic flexibility is the key to success for the

implementation of marketing strategies because it improves customers' satisfaction, creates higher customer value, and raises a company's success stakes in markets.

Transformational Leadership

In a globalized setting, leaders must be aware of cross-cultural differences and be willing modify behavior regardless their cultural background (Lee, Veasna, & Wu, 2013). During the past decades, the transformational leadership point-of-view considered critical for successful operations, therefore much research has been carried out to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and follower behavior and performance (Rao & Kareem Abdul, 2015). Transformational leadership can be defined as the process of consciously influencing organizational members to embrace change and thereby achieve company goals (Al-Abrow, 2013). Transformational leaders do affect performance of organization's through communication and action, raise the consciousness of the employees to the importance of meeting organizational goals and missions (Abbasi&Zamani-Miandashti,2013).To achieve organizational goals, the transformational leader uses four basic dimensions that may affect the self-efficacy of employees which in turn positively affects their ability to increase creativity and innovation in organizational settings (Hassan, Bashir, Abrar, Baig, & Zubair, 2015). Al-Abrow (2013) stated that the four components of transformational leadership behavior consist of:

- Inspirational motivation refers to the ability of leaders to inspire followers, through instilling confidence, optimism, and enthusiasm.
- Idealized influence, refers to the charisma of leaders, and their vision, values, and principles, that make them well respected by followers.
- Intellectual stimulation refers to the willingness of leaders to encourage followers to seek solutions for challenges from a new perspective.
- Individualized consideration refers to leaders' ability to support and listen to the personal needs of followers.

In the healthcare industry, a transformational leadership style provides a setting to develop the individual and team competencies and improve work performance (Gabel, 2013). In 2013, the American College of Healthcare Executives determined the qualities of healthcare leadership as the capability to motivate and inspire, set the organizational vision, and manage changes to fulfill a successful strategic performance. Some research in the healthcare industry in developing countries has been carried out in exploring the impact of transformational leadership on the improvement of organizational performance through organizational learning (Al-Abrow, 2013).Ebadifard Azar and Sarabi Asiabar (2015) stressed the importance of transformational leadership in the healthcare industry and its influence on organizational performance by focusing on the investment in both organizational learning and intellectual capital. Martin and Waring (2013) found that in Europe and internationally, there has been a sustained focus on the role of transformational leaders in improving health care quality and setting by seeking to empower professionals through development and training. In the MENA region, transformational leadership qualities can enhance organizational performance, reflected in satisfied both employees and patients, which confirmed the findings of prior studies (Al-Abrow, 2013).

The views as determined from the findings in empirical research on leadership styles, have questioned if transformational style could be applicable outside North

America where it originated and developed (Sheikh, Newman, & Al Azzeh, 2013). Rao and Kareem Abdul (2015) found that leaders in the MENA region were less transformational and more passive-avoidant than leaders in the United States and Europe, possibly because of reticence in sharing personal beliefs, values, and a future vision with followers. Galanou and Farrag (2015) shared the same point of view with Rao and Kareem Abdul (2015) and affirmed that in the MENA region companies must pay more attention to the Islamic leadership style that is related to the cultural heritage and religion of individuals. In contrast, Sheikh et al. (2013) opined that leadership style in the MENA region is becoming increasingly reliant on American and European style due to the increasing number of expatriate employees in local companies, which has hastened the implementation of the Western management style. The interactions among local leaders and expatriates forces them to adjust leadership styles to succeed. Expatriates managers must adapt leadership styles in host countries to achieve higher performance goals in multicultural environments (Lee et al., 2013).

The relationship between transformational leadership and expatriate worker performance is related to the level of CQ knowledge and the ability to interact with other people from cross-cultural backgrounds (Keung & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). Transformational leadership behaviors with a high level of cultural knowledge of the host country can positively affect innovation orientation and followers' performance (Engelen, Schmidt, Strenger, & Brettel, 2014). This point of view was confirmed by the findings of Lee et al. (2013) contending, that managers who have a high level of CQ and transformational leadership behaviors were capable of accomplishing goals in high performance in a national host culture. Muenjohn and Armstrong (2015) suggested that leaders who demonstrate transformational leadership qualities usually are more efficient in managing people and companies than those who practiced other types of leadership behaviors, regardless of cultures, countries, and organizations. The advantage of both cultural knowledge and the transformational leadership is that expatriate managers will be able to mitigate all negative effects of group heterogeneity within the organization and its work environment (Wang, Rode, Shi, Luo, & Chen, 2013). Expatriates leaders who display transformational leadership have a high standard of expectancy and self-confidence and are willing to work harder to achieve challenging goals (Muenjohn and Armstrong, 2015). A primary focus of leaders' schools is the intercultural training to improve CQ knowledge and transformational leadership, therefore, organizational learning covers two facets of cultural intelligence: behavioral and cognitive (Al-Abrow, 2013; Keung & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013).

Earlier studies revealed that transformational leaders could be trained. Smit (2013) stated the leaders need to develop skills through education and training courses to set in alignment with organizational objectives and to preserve sustainability. Braun, Peus, Weisweller, and Frey (2013) found that all trainings that address transformational leadership style and behaviors provide managers with additional knowledge and skills. Organizational learning is a crucial factor for a company to develop a new product process efficiently, which is strongly related to transformational leadership behaviors (Sattayaraksa & Boonitt, 2016). Organizational learning must encompass all persons and groups to understand the organizational vision, goals, culture, design, and technology (Al-Abrow, 2013).

As in many fields, education and training courses in the healthcare industry have a positive impact on the relationship between leader and followers that benefit from the application of transformational leadership (Gabel, 2013). Transformational leaders and managers often need to understand the diversity within the organization to shape and efficient relationships between employees and leaders, which impact organizational outcomes (Muchiri & Ayoko, 2013). Organizations that seek active learning and offer training courses in transformational leadership behaviors have the chance to improve employee performance and may increase productivity and profitability (Lee et al., 2013). Organizational learning provides individuals the opportunity to share information and knowledge from personal experience with others in the organization (Abbasi & Zamani-Miandashti, 2013). Al-Abrow (2013) stressed the importance of training in healthcare organizations, especially for high managerial positions to aid the progression of suitable individuals to become transformational leaders. The significant positive impact of transformational leadership on organizational performance, productivity, and administrative reform depends on organizational learning across the enterprise (Moynihan, Pandey, & Wright, 2012). Abbasi and Zamani-Miandashti (2013) assured this positive effect of these two factors improves internal and external organizational performance.

In studying the performance of teams and organizations, the perspective of organizational learning may help leaders to create a significant relationship between team's performance, organizational culture, and innovation (Long, Abdul Aziz, Kowang, & Ismail, 2015).

Organizations should put in place human resource and talent management programs which actively enhance transformational leadership and mitigate possible negative effects of conflict between different roles and responsibilities of organizational members on the achievements and successes of firm (Muchiri & Ayoko, 2013). The National Center for Healthcare Leadership (NCHL) defined five ground rules to improve performance and manage innovation in the healthcare industry to maintain sustainability: (a) ensuring alignment between leadership development and organizational strategies, (b) outlining the role of the organizational board, (c) developing learning skills and oriented action, (d) integrating human resource strategy and talent management, and (e) setting goals with a measurable outcomes list. Scott-Jackson et al. (2014) highlighted interesting findings regarding training methods used in the MENA region. These researchers found that most companies fail to use developmental methods to improve local talent skills. Rao and Kareem Abdul (2015) stated that the human resource department must be engaged in designing and assessing training program needs and link training practices to all human resource practices.

Developing and Implementing a Marketing Strategy

To develop and implement a successful marketing strategy, decision makers often follow a two-step process: study and analyze potential markets to choose between them and create a marketing mix to satisfy the chosen market. A company's target market is the potential clients toward whom directs its marketing effort. To fit the needs of a chosen target market, an organization's marketing manager needs to blend the seven components of the marketing mix often denoted as the 7Ps (Figure 1).

Price. Price is one of the fundamental factors in the healthcare marketing mix (Ahmad, Alsarqi, & Kadi, 2013).

Mohammad (2015) revealed that price perceptions directly influence patientsatisfaction. The price needs to be reasonable, but this doesn't mean that the organization must be the cheapest in the market to make a profit (Samani, Hashemi, Shahbazi, & Sarhadi, 2017). Among the main aspects of the marketing mix in the healthcare industry, price earned the top priority on patient's satisfaction (Abedi & Abedini, 2017). Ahmad et al. (2013) suggested that the pricing strategy has a significant impact on the healthcare industry in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).



Figure 1. From “The 7Ps marketing mix,” by Mishra. A, 2016. Professional Academy.

Product. In the marketing mix, product is defined as any tangible or intangible services offered with the aim to satisfy needs and demands of customers (Mohammad, 2015). In the healthcare sector, products are the medical services offered to safeguard or treat a patient's health, through procedures carried out by professionals in this industry (Ahmad et al., 2013). Samani et al. (2017) stated that it is critical for the organizations to take into consideration the performance of employees who provide the service. In the healthcare industry, quality in the product or service differentiation is of greatest importance attracting patients to private organizations. The price is a critical aspect in attracting patients to public companies, and the product or service similarly attracting patients in private firms (Abedi & Abedini, 2017). The reach of Ahmad et al. (2013) showed that health service strategy has a significant impact on the healthcare industry in the MENA region overall, and particularly in the KSA.

Place. Place or distribution covers all organizational activities such as the distribution channel and coverage, outlet locations, inventory levels and location (Mohammad, 2015). Samani et al. (2017) suggested that proximity to a service or to access quickly has a significant influence in the tendency to choose the product. Ahmad et al. (2013) stated that in healthcare service deliver, leaders must take into consideration three important considerations: (a) physical access which means that the location is convenient for customers, (b) time access, for instance where the provider is open all day and during the weekend, and (c) promotional access that is rely on the advertisements or patient's recommendation rather than physician recommendation.

Promotion. The purpose of promotion is to build brand consciousness and reputation that help companies to encourage customers to buy their products (Luo, Roach, & Jiratchot, 2016). In a broader sense, promotion is a method of communication between the organization and consumers to promote what it does and what it can offer (Samani et al., 2017). Ahmad et al. (2013) opined that communication mix involves a blend of different tools that the company uses to achieve its marketing strategic goals such as advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and direct

marketing. The caveat however is that an organization must be careful to test its marketing and promotion, as a company's reputation is often at stake if when advertised information is not accurate. Ahmad et al. found that the most prominent method of promotion in healthcare organizations in the MENA region is by “word of mouth” where a patient recommends the services of an organization to other customers.

People. In service organizations, people play a crucial role in the success especially when the employees have a direct interaction with customers (Mohammad, 2015). Luo et al. (2016) concurred with the view of Mohammad (2015) and stressed the importance of employees' behaviors in the success of the organization in implementing marketing mix. Abedi & Abedini (2017) contended that employees reflect the company's image; therefore, the organization must improve employee performance through communication, training, skills, learning, and listening to customers views to achieve the optimum value of the product and the company. Ahmad et al. (2013) suggested that the healthcare industry in the KSA has focused on improving employee abilities to improve service quality and maintain a achieve competitive differentiation.

Process. The marketing process can be defined as a framework to ensure meeting and surpassing customer needs, with successful planning and implementation of the services offered (Luo et al., 2016). Companies should build an efficient service process to acquire and retain customers; therefore, a significant relationship must be established between service process and customer satisfaction to improve company's performance and service (Mohammad, 2015). Ahmad et al. (2013) suggested that in the healthcare industry, positive patients' experience of the service process has an influence on t decisions to use or buy products and services. The medical service process is the most critical activity in the healthcare system in the MENA region, where healthcare companies strive to ensure customer satisfaction in delivering health services for two reasons: display and fulfill corporate social responsibility obligations, and to maintain and outmaneuver competition (Ahmad et al., 2013).

Physical evidence. The physical evidence consists of the company environment and facilities such as parking area, furnishings, color, noise level, air conditioning system (Luo et al., 2016). In the MENA region, healthcare organizations ensure to build a customer-friendly environment and easy access to health care service (Ahmad et al., 2013). The physical surroundings of the service atmosphere can create a significant impact on patient satisfaction and their behaviors (Mohammad, 2015). A physical evidence strategy in healthcare helps patients reduce the degree of anxiety by providing the environment facilities conducive to a serene and hospitable setting.

Ahmad et al. (2013) offered insight into marketing strategy formulation and implementation imperatives in the MENA region. The researchers concluded that the seven components of marketing mix namely; health service, pricing, distribution, promotion, physical evidence, process, and personal strategies has significant impacts on healthcare industry, as measured by client satisfaction. An organization marketing strategy plan is a vision of how and what the future will be, and then planning based on a clear objective, and the method of implementing, monitoring, and controlling the progress, may reflect astute strategy implementation (Sandada, Poee, & Dhurup, 2014). Drawing from the findings of Dubihlela and Sandada (2014), the lessons are that

strategic marketing planning has a significant effect on the performance of small and medium businesses, especially if it takes into consideration the robustness of employee participation, implementation of appropriate rewards and incentives, control, and the leadership and guidance of the manager in execution.

From a managerial standpoint, Ramaseshan, Ishak, and Kingshott, (2013) found that it is significant for an executive manager to perceive the role of an innovative culture during the planning stage of marketing strategy through the engagement of all stakeholders and that of the marketing director. The researchers stressed the importance of the commitment and support of top management to the marketing manager during the planning process of marketing strategy. João Bettencourt Gomes de Carvalho Simas, Francisco Bertinetti Lengler, & José dos Santos António (2013) shared the view of Ramaseshan et al. (2013) and stated that the role of top management in the planning of a strategy raise the knowledge and understanding as being a normal function within the organization.

Good strategic planning is not enough to guarantee success; marketing managers must ensure effective implementation, evaluation, and control mechanism to implement a successful marketing strategy (Ramaseshan et al., 2013). In this context, the role of marketing and executive managers is crucial in implementing the marketing strategy and of turning a plan into action (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014). During the implementation process of the marketing strategy plan, an organization's leader must take into consideration ethics and balance, as well as the integration of internal and external factors that affect strategy implementation such as the economic, social environment and organization vision (Leonardi, 2015). João Bettencourt Gomes de Carvalho Simas et al. (2013) opined that the implementation of a marketing strategy requires strong leadership to manage the relationship between the employees and the organization; therefore, any conflicts in this relationship can lead to failure in strategy implementation.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is responsible for developing a study to gain a better understanding of a complex problem, take appropriate action, and make decisions based on that understanding (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In a qualitative multiple case study, the researcher is the primary player to perform all tasks associated with data collection and analysis (Broadhurst, 2015). Baskarada (2014) stressed the need to manage bias imposed by the researcher's personal beliefs and experiences. Avoiding personal explanation may reduce researcher bias reduction and maintaining a chain of evidence often leads to eliminating any possibility of arriving at incorrect, or faulty conclusions (Baskarada, 2014). In this study, reducing or eliminating bias was by following Morse and Yin's recommendations, and reviewing data from the interviews in a continuous cycle while setting aside personal judgments. In the professional sphere, with personal backgrounds involving over 10 years' experience in the pharmaceutical industry helped in setting aside personal opinions and was critical in this research study. This experience in the healthcare industry provide knowledge and familiarity with the healthcare system in the MENA region and the leadership structures of international pharmaceutical companies based in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

In a qualitative multiple case study, researchers must follow a basic code of conduct (Yin, 2014). The recommendations of the Belmont Report (National

Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978) highlighted the ethical guidelines of research in three general principles: (a) respect for persons by explaining to participants all risks and benefits, (b) increasing benefits and minimizing risks, and (c) justice through focus on the two key questions of how to distribute the potential benefits and burdens of the research and who stands to benefit from, or bear the burden of the research (Adam & Miles, 2013).

Marketing leaders with a successful track record of marketing strategy implementation from the pharmaceutical industry, participated in face-to-face interview sessions and answered semistructured research questions. The participants with the required experience, upon request, voluntarily gave permission to record interviews, which were transcribed to facilitate accuracy, with notes taken during the interviews to supplement the process, consistent with the steps recommended by Baskarada (2014).

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The research method and design can constrain a research project and needs careful consideration. A researcher can select a qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach to conduct a study (Boeije, Van Wesel, & Slagt, 2014). When there is a lack of information about a phenomenon under study or when the research problem is complex, the qualitative method is often best suited (Bowling, 2014). The qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study because there was a significant paucity of information related to the pharmaceutical industry in the Middle East region of the world. The absence of studies and the lack of information related to marketing and business strategies in the pharmaceutical industry in the MENA region presented the need for further research. Qualitative research is considered suitable to explore a phenomenon in-depth from the perspectives and experiences of the marketing professionals involved (Yilmaz, 2013); hence, constituted justification as the research approach chosen and implemented in this study.

In this study, the qualitative methodology helped to understand how executive and marketing managers formulate a strategy, who in the organization implements the strategy, and how success or failure is gauged, as advocated by influential researchers (Yin, 2014). In a qualitative study, the focus of researcher primarily includes seeking information from participants about real-world events and processes or about personal experiences (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). Researchers often use the qualitative approach to understand the perspectives and experiences of individuals or groups and to explore phenomena, often by relying on interviewing participants through open-ended questions, related documents, and observing behavior (O'Brien et al., 2014).

Research Design

A multiple case study approach was suitable to use from among the other four designs, as researchers have expressed the limitations of the other designs in providing flexibility, diversity, and knowledge needed for a problem context (Hyett et al., 2014). A multiple case study design helped to understand the marketing strategies international pharmaceutical leaders have used to achieve profitability and maintain organizational sustainability. The multiple case study design provides the researcher with a deep holistic view about the research problem under study and affords the opportunity to understand and properly explain the situation (Baskarada, 2014).

A case study is often constructed and designed to fit the problem and research question and demonstrate broad diversity in the study design (Hyett et al., 2014). The selection of a descriptive qualitative multiple case study design served to gain an innate understanding of the factors that affect the implementation of business and marketing strategies in the pharmaceutical industry in the MENA region.

Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2015) noted that data saturation is a technique that applies to all qualitative studies as researchers employ interviews as the primary data collection strategy. Fusch and Ness (2015) defined data saturation as the point when a researcher has collected enough information from study participants, either in one or multiple interview sessions. The data saturation stage is reached when beyond the single or multiple interviews with the study sample, no new information pertinent to the research objective emerges, indicative that the completeness of information sought has been reached and denoting that the cessation in data collection is logical. For this study, a homogeneous purposeful sample of six executive and middle managers in international pharmaceutical companies helped to guarantee an acceptable pool of interview data. In a qualitative study, the consistency in design of the interview questions facilitate asking all participants the same questions, as the aim is to reach data saturation and uniformity in a structured, logical, and informative discourse.

Presentation of the Findings

As indicated, eight open-ended and semistructured interview questions served to explore the marketing strategies that managers of international pharmaceutical companies successfully implemented in the MENA region. The goal was to glean insight into successful marketing strategist abilities to ensure profitability with the post 2014 decreases in the healthcare budgets following the economic upheaval and the decline in oil and gas prices. The overarching research question that guided this study was: What marketing strategies do successful pharmaceutical companies use in the MENA region, faced with lowered healthcare budgets and consequent to the declines in oil prices? The process of data collection included interviewing six participants, with specific experience in planning and implementing marketing strategies in the MENA region. The analysis of the data led to the identification of important themes, marketing imperatives and strategies that marketing leaders in these pharmaceutical companies use and need, and possibly may serve others to implement to successfully implement in the region as oil price volatility is inextricably linked to healthcare budgetary allocation. The open-ended questions facilitated participants to freely express and share a diversity of experiences, insights, and best practices in the realm of marketing in the UAE.

After the recording of interviews, transcription of each interview followed, which created the data for analysis. Coding helped to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants, by disguising participant names as sequential codes (e.g., CXPX) where the first letter in each code refers to the company and the second letter refers to the participant. In the study, following the code of conduct as enunciated by the Belmont Report (Cugini, 2015), also aided in maintaining participant confidentiality. Each participant received a copy of the interview transcript, with a request to confirm the accuracy. After transcript reviews, participants subsequently also received a copy of the data analysis and the interpretation

to review and offer comments, as a measure to increase the trustworthiness and validity of the results.

The major themes which emerged from the analysis of data were related to (a) product launch strategy and operating model, (b) transformation of leaders by vision and guidance, The knowledge from exploring successful marketing strategies implemented by international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region may hold value for local and international organizations. The economy of the region and marketing strategies may have some commonalities in terms of the imperatives across diverse industries.

Theme 1: Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model

Theme 1 emerged from the analysis of participant responses to interview questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 where the participants were asked to explain opinions about marketing strategy planning and implementation, and the challenges faced. Three main components of participant responses were directly related to the prevailing economic situation, healthcare reimbursement, and governments' regulations. The Word cloud output from the ATLAS qualitative data analytical software, display the participant marketer favored strategies, tactics, and insights into implementing marketing strategies successfully (Figures 2,3, 4, & 5).



Figure 2. Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 2.

Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 represent portrayal of the analysis of the dominant views and the consequent emerged themes on participant strategies to launch new products.

Table 1. Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model (Interview Question 2).

Excerpts of Interview responses to Question # 2:	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
<p>C1P3 “We established partnership and built our internal capabilities.”C2P2 stated that: “start introducing concept of collaboration with authorities and open communications.”C1P2 stated: “we look at the value proposition of the product that we bring in.”C2P1“... providing the right services to the patient...”C2P3 “... we adapt the global marketing strategies locally in our market.” C1P1 stated: “ we try to apply in different markets..... and help to build necessary capabilities in the region.”</p>	<p>An analysis of the responses indicated that companies used different strategies to maintain sustainability.</p>	<p>Collaborations, open communications, and offering value propositions for customers/patients, and fulfilling promises.</p>



Figure 3. Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 3.

Table 2. Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model (Interview Question 3).

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question # 3.	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
C1P2: The main challenges in the MENA region is there imbursement.”C1P3 added: price pressure and governments... economic difficulties” regulations.” C2P3 stated: the main challenges in the region are related to ethics and lack of data.”	Participants viewed that governments’ regulations and the reimbursement system are important challenges for pharmaceutical industry to succeed.	Reimbursement system, regulation s, and economic difficulties.



Figure 5. Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 5.

Table 4. Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model (Interview Question 5).

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question # 5.	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
C2P2 “Quality of people who are able to implement changes.” C2P1 stated: “frequent evaluation...” C2P2 “we start planning for launching new products year in advance...” C1P2 “... we look at the patients’ journey...” C1P3: ... have plan A and plan B... , ... have the ability to adapt and change the strategy if they exist one doesn’t work...”	Participants’ answers showed the quality of people is important to avoid failure and a good planning.	Evaluation, training, and good planning.



Figure 4. Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 4.

Table 3. Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model (Interview Question 4).

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question # 4.	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
Per the view of C1P1, “potential markets are the priority to focus on....” C2P1 “frequent evaluation and adjust your strategy.” C2P2” dialog and collaborations with stakeholders...”	Participant’s responses revealed different approaches facilitate the implementation of marketing strategies successfully.	Evaluation, communication s.

Marketing leaders for international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region appear to take into consideration these three factors when preparing and implementing marketing strategies to launch a new product. Table 5 reflects the common views and thoughts which emerged from participants' responses, pursuant to using a process of data reduction and constant comparison of the pertinent interview question responses.

Table 5. Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model.

Common thoughts	No. of participants who shared views	% of participants who shared views
Governments' regulations	4	65%
Economic challenges	6	100%
Reimbursement	4	65%
Communication and collaboration with authorities	4	65%

Participant C1P1 indicated that the MENA region consists of 18 countries and have different regulatory timelines for granting approvals to launch a new product. C2P3, similarly indicated that some governments often delay the registration and approval of new products, which affects the marketing strategy of an organization. The top management participating and in Case 1, expressed that usually its marketing directors have the authority to reduce the focus on the markets where the registration of a new product takes time. In view of possible delays, bureaucracy, and time constrains, sometimes it may be important therefore to focus on other potential markets where there are provisions for expedited and quicker approvals. Participant C2P1 attributed

the reasons for the delay of drug registrations to the austerity measures in place consequent to the decline in oil prices, and even the lack of regulatory expertise and quality data to make informed approval decisions. Some governments in the MENA region have recently introduced a variety of legislation regulating the healthcare industry. This legislation includes specific laws concerning registration of the medicines Participant C1P2 supported this view:

The critical challenge in specific markets is the time it takes to get product registration. In a country like the UAE, because they are competing and need to be the first in the world, they have the fastest market registration process to register any drug.

C2P1 divided the MENA region into three different clusters: The GCC countries, Levant, and North Africa. According to the C2P1, in the Levant cluster, the government and the private sector request high-quality products. In North Africa, the healthcare industry is entirely dominated by the government, and all decisions are centralized, which impacts the implementation of the company strategies. In the Gulf countries, the governments do not have a choice to provide best treatment and services, because these are rich countries and people entitled to the best healthcare services and drugs.

Five of the 6 participants discussed their organization's approach in the MENA region, and the efforts to overcome the economic situation arising from the precipitous fall in oil prices, as participant C2P3 explained:

What happened as a consequence of the drop in all and gas prices that there were a lot austerity measures implemented by the governments, including monitoring inventory and stock levels, measuring pricing, strategies and managing the balance between demand and supply chain.

C1P1 additionally stated that the political situation in most countries in the MENA region added an extra burden on government budgets. The abrupt decisions from governments to cancel orders and tenders in millions of dollars created problems and challenges for international pharmaceutical companies in launching new products. The Arab Spring and the political instability in the MENA region have had a significant negative impact on the economic situation and the governments' budgets (Karam & Zaki, 2016). C2P2 shared the same point of view but from another perspective and said:

"Since 2014, we can notice that the total budgets in some countries in the region increased, however, the problem is that some governments transfer money from the ministry of healthcare to the ministry of defense."

Participants C1P2 and C2P1 pointed to the importance of the value proposition of the product during this period where the governments put pressure on drug prices. Participant C1P2 stated that they look at the value proposition of the drug from medical, economic, and humanistic perspectives. In Case 2, participant P1 linked marketing strategies to the "value propositions" of product and presented it to all stakeholders (payers, physicians, insurance companies) to understand why you are doing what you are doing, because the goal is to ensure that patients get the best services.

The approach used by participant C2P2 to overcome the challenges of price pressure and the government constraints, included initiating greater dialog and collaboration open dialog and collaboration between government and his pharmaceutical company. The open communication with all authorities and stakeholders protects the business and creates a collaborative environment to tie marketing strategy with the new situation. Participants C2P3 and C1P2 also addressed the importance of the communication with stakeholders to

generate data related to healthcare because there is a lack of data, or the existing data in the MENA region is not always accurate. The two participants considered the lack of quality data a challenge facing international pharmaceutical companies to launch new products or to prepare a marketing strategy. Participant C2P3 said:

The accurate data considered as the main factor to prepare a marketing strategy and to launch a new product. What we do as an organization, we use European or published data and validate these data with local doctors to ensure that we have enough idea about the market need.

Another need for open communication and discussion with authorities is the reimbursement, per the view expressed by participant C1P1. The three participants, C1P1, C1P2, and C2P3, considered the reimbursement as a challenge facing the international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. The markets are fragmented in the region, and there is no unified reimbursement system in any of these countries. C1P2 explained:

In some countries like the GCC region, 85% of the healthcare bills are paid by the governments, however, in a market like Egypt, the government doesn't provide healthcare service, and patients usually must pay for out-of-pocket for medical treatment and drugs.

In more developed markets like Lebanon and the UAE, as expressed by C1P1, since the insurance system is more advanced, medical reimbursement is often negotiated by insurance firms, drug companies, and the healthcare system. Participant C2P3 shared the same point of views as C1P2 and C1P1 and added:

In a heterogenous market such as Saudi Arabia, where there is collaboration between the private sector and the government, companies must have a good pricing strategy when launching a new and higher priced drug. Also, it is incumbent upon pharmaceutical companies to explain the price difference between the existing and the new price for payers. For new product launches, pharmaceutical companies must a) provide the justification for higher prices, b) demonstrate therapeutic superiority, and c) show improved clinical benefit over currently available drugs.

Theme 2. Transformation of Leaders by Vision and Guidance.

The second theme emerging from the interviews was the transformation of leaders by vision and guidance.



Figure 6. Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 1 and 5.

Table 6. Transformation of Leaders by Vision and Guidance (Interview Questions 1 and 5).

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Questions # 1.	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
C2P2: "The role of leader is to provide employees' clear information and properly align the internal and external communications." C2P1 stated that: "The role of leaders is to select the best candidates and to facilitated innovation and barnstorming." C1P3: "leader's responsibility is to ensure that all functions are aligned with the direction that leads to the final objective of the company and that the information provided to employees is clear." C1P3: "Leaders' vision and charisma are the attractive characteristics of employees and could be a kind of motivation."	All participants noted, that leaders consider as planning the key to success in successfully implementing marketing strategies. Leaders should have the ability, personality, and knowledge to empower and motivate employees.	Leader vision and charisma, strong personality, and experience needed for adaptive and successful fit with the cultural and other norms of the region for leadership.

Participants shared different points of view concerning the role of leaders within the organization and with regulatory and other authorities (Table 7). The healthcare leadership competency is directly associated with the ability to communicate and has been required in all healthcare sectors (Vasconcelos et al., 2017). Participant C2P2 stressed the importance of internal and external dialog to overcome challenges related to the implementation of marketing strategies. Leaders communication with external stakeholders often provides the ability to protect the business and creates an effective collaborative environment. Communications with external stakeholders also gives leaders a warning if something is moving in a different direction to what they are expecting, which often facilitates taking immediate corrective and remedial actions.

Effective internal communication within the organization is an essential competency and strategy for leaders to display during the turbulent periods, as this skill may provide employees precise information about the challenges and approaches to overcome tenuous situations. Participant C1P3 further explained:

Organizational leaders must ensure consistency in communications from the firm to internal and external stakeholders. Communications from all levels of employees in the internal and external environments, must therefore depict alignment with the stated mission and purpose of the organization.

The main responsibility of healthcare leaders is to identify competencies within the organization to realize the anticipations related with job performance and the executions of tasks (Taylor-Ford & Abell, 2015). To be successful, marketing strategists and managers must obtain develop a strong leadership team and qualified people who work closely and collaborate extensively. Participant C1P1 stated that to avoid strategy failure, leaders must arrange for regular open communication meetings with all teams to discuss how they are performing against competitors and how to adapt strategies with clear performance expectations. In Case 1, participant 3 explained the difficulties faced with the company headquarters to convince them to modify the marketing strategy during the economic crisis after the 2014 decline and fluctuation in oil and gas prices:

I can tell you that I spent a lot of times to convince my boss in the headquarter that things have changed in the MENA region and that we have to change our strategy and our expectation for the coming two years.

The responsibility of leaders is to select the best candidates, with the marketing expertise to implement organizational business strategies, with the adaptive skills to current and future events. Participant C2P1 stated that leaders must understand well the market, competitors, and the

organization's position in the market. In Case 2, interviewees indicated that leaders guide employees and subordinates, using frequent training, to ensure successful implementation of marketing strategies. According to participant C2P2, the role of the leaders while implementing marketing strategies is to ensure that all functions are aligned with the direction that results in meeting and surpassing marketing and financial objectives, which necessitates that the information provided to employees is explicit and unambiguous. The vision and charisma of leader is usually deemed to be the attractive characteristics in the eyes of employees and could be a kind of motivation and empowerment for employees to strive diligently meet marketing other organizational goals and objectives. Participants C1P1 stated:

Leader's vision for the future and people ability to collaborate with managers are the essential elements to achieve success in marketing strategy changes. What I believe is that people follow leaders and not do not follow organizations.

Table 7. Transformation of Leaders by Vision and Guidance.

Common thoughts	No. of participants who shared views	% of participants who shared views
Role of the leaders	6	100%
Employee quality	3	50%
Leader vision	4	65%
Internal and external communication	4	65%

Tying Study Findings to Conceptual Frameworks and the Existing Literature

The theory of strategic flexibility can serve leaders to understand the responsiveness of organizations to internal and external change, modifying strategies and doing something other than originally intended where warranted, and pursuant to diligent and informed decision-making (Bock et al., 2012). As with 85% of the participants, C2P2 noted that ultimately leaders need dialog and open communication with all stakeholders to overcome challenges stemming from cultural differences in the internal and external operating environment. All participants held strong opinions on how to prevent marketing strategy failure by anticipating risks, in the ability to adapt to current and emergent change, and the importance of agility to adapt and modify strategies based on change and evolution in the environment. Al-Zu'bi (2016) stated that the capabilities of strategic flexibility within the enterprise often endows a firm with an adequate level of flexibility in marketing, pertinent to: (a) developing new products, (b) entering new markets, and (c) modifying products according to the demand of the changing market; however, the success of this strategy depends on whether the

company has sufficient financial flexibility and wherewithal. All participants stressed the importance of leadership in managing the implementation of marketing strategies by setting a clear vision, guiding and training people, selecting qualified staff, motivating employees, and providing adequate information and other resources. The role and acuity of the leaders is apparently very crucial in terms of strongly understanding the strengths and weaknesses of competitors, and in planning effective marketing strategies when launching new products.

Application to Professional Practice

The pharmaceutical market in the MENA region is quickly growing, and some international pharmaceutical companies have partnered with local companies to manufacture products. In 2016, the total pharmaceutical sales in the United Arab Emirates represented 16.2 % of total healthcare budget and is projected to reach 18% of the healthcare spending in 2021. The total pharmaceutical sales are expected to reach \$ 3.58 billion in 2020 and \$3.84 billion in 2021 (American Embassy in the U.A.E., 2018).

The discoveries from this study may expand current knowledge on marketing strategies. The insights from this study could also contribute to furthering awareness of business practices and strategic imperatives, which may add to the options of international pharmaceutical companies operating in the MENA region on enhancing the effectiveness in formulating and implementing successful marketing strategies. The aim of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the successful marketing strategies that international pharmaceutical companies have used to overcome the challenges when lowered healthcare budgets result from declines in oil and gas price in the MENA region. Elbanna and Fadol (2016) noted that in the MENA region the implementing of marketing strategies is often linked to several factors that influence organizational sustainability and success.

The political climate also has a significant, often a negative, impact on strategies implementation. The lack of communication, data, and coordination between the organizations and regulatory and other authorities is often considered essential challenge due to the conflict that may arise from the interaction between these entities. The outlining of the challenges associated with marketing strategy implementation may make the findings of this study relevant and applicable to the professional practices of international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study may be of significance to pharmaceutical marketers and managers and could contribute to positive social welfare upliftment, since pharmaceutical companies strive to provide better healthcare solutions for patients and the medical community. The value of the study may lie in potentially advancing the knowledge of marketing managers of pharmaceutical companies and may contribute to improving the business practices of international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. The implementation of successful marketing strategies may also have positive social change benefit, since pharmaceutical companies are in the business of human health. Research often fosters collaboration between different stakeholders and serves to advance the agenda of social change (Gelech, Desjardins, Matthews, & Graumans, 2017). Using the information from these findings may serve company leaders in contributing to job creation and enrichment of the economies of the region.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings and discoveries from this study may provide the impetus and foundation for future research in the realm of the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry. The quest for knowledge will require ongoing learning and understanding of the best practices in astutely planning and implementing of business and marketing strategies in the region. Future research can deepen understanding of challenges facing international pharmaceutical companies and global healthcare firms in the MENA region. The findings of this study may contribute and add knowledge in respect of the roles, strategies, and best practices implemented and executed by executive and middle level managers to mitigate risks facing healthcare and pharma firms in the region. An expansion of the multiple case study, to encompass the perspectives of other leaders in the healthcare industry in addition to pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region, could serve to extend the transferability of the knowledge to other industries. In this study, the focus included presenting insight into the factors that influence the marketing practices of business leaders in multi-national pharmaceutical companies, and the implication on business performance and sustainability. The recommendation and the results of this study is that, the focus and opportunity of future research in the healthcare on some elements related to training, and communication of marketing and business leadership, may yield the desirable dividends of market growth and sustainability for healthcare firms in the MENA region.

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