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Strategic Imperatives in Heterogeneous Markets and Customer Cultures in the MENA Region

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ABSTRACT

The 2014 precipitous fall in oil and gas prices by 50% or more set in motion cuts in the healthcare budget by some governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, often in excess of 30%. The aim of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies of international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region after the 2014 decreases in the healthcare budgets, following the decline in oil and gas prices. The research involved interviews of 6 middle and executive managers working in 2 international pharmaceutical companies located in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The cultural intelligence theory constituted the conceptual framework for this study and aided in gaining insight into the challenges associated with implementing marketing and organizational strategies by international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. Study participants were required to have 5 years of experience in planning and implementing marketing strategies in the MENA region. The findings from this study may reflect important internal organizational adaptation enacted by successful international pharmaceutical companies. in marketing to culturally diverse customers of the MENA region in the reduced healthcare budgetary environment. The important themes emerging from this study included: (a) recognition of culture and diversity, and (b) the importance of training and learning agility. The results of the study may advance the agenda of improving healthcare of the residents of this region as pharmaceutical and healthcare knowledge benefits the delivery of human health services.

Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region consists of approximately 22 countries and represent 60% of the world's oil reserves and 45% of the world's natural gas reserves. Most governmental budgets in the region are based on oil and gas revenues. The price of oil and gas affects the fiscal policies and economy of governments in the MENA region (Sommer et al., 2016). The fall in crude oil price from $120 a barrel, to below $60 in June 2014 and thereafter, created new challenges for governments in the MENA region (Wang & Li, 2016). The fluctuations in oil and gas prices have had a significant impact on all economic sectors in the MENA region countries, especially the healthcare industry. In this qualitative study, we explored some of the reasons for the successful marketing strategies that managers of international pharmaceutical companies have successfully implemented in the MENA region. The success despite the economic upheavals, post the 2014 period of reduced healthcare budgets, following the decline in oil and gas prices merited study from a business and organizational management knowledge standpoint.

Background of the Problem

Some countries in the MENA region, especially the Gulf Cooperation Council (G.C.C.) countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman), are home to expatriates from all over the world. Business success in the MENA is therefore usually contingent upon familiarity with language, cultural, and social challenges (Nair et al., 2013). Business leaders in the MENA region must take into consideration language and cultural differences within the organization, as well as in a culturally diverse population comprised of locals and expatriates. Enacting regional and customized marketing and communication strategies is therefore an imperative in a culturally diverse society in the region. The lack of cultural and language knowledge however often creates marketing difficulties, which can limit the opportunities of business success.

Diagnosis of the Problem

Revenues from oil, in the energy-based economies appear to be inextricably linked to healthcare budgets in the Gulf region (World Health Organization, 2016). The significant declines in oil and gas prices by about 56% in 2014 in the MENA region caused some governments to slash healthcare budgets by more than 30% (Gengler & Lambert, 2016). The general business problem is that with a decrease in healthcare budgets arising from the volatility in oil and gas prices, some international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region have struggled in marketing to target audiences. The specific business problem is that some managers of international pharmaceutical companies have found it difficult to implement region-specific marketing strategies to overcome the reduced government healthcare budgets after 2014.

The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the role of cultural knowledge in the implementation of marketing strategies in the Middle East and North Africa Region. The aim of this research was to gain insight into the organizational adaptation and marketing strategies deployed

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by successful international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region during periods of declines in healthcare budgets with the declines in oil and gas prices. The target population consisted of two international pharmaceutical companies, in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, which enacted marketing strategies and achieve profitability despite the economic upheavals. The verification of successful marketing, strategic outcomes and implementation were assessed by examining international pharmaceutical financial reports in the MENA region. Managers provided useful information on internal organizational awareness and marketing strategy implementation which aided in understanding the lifestyle and needs of the MENA region communities, as did review of pertinent literature by Fontana, Saster-Merino, and Baca, (2015) and others. Pharmaceutical companies are directly associated with the quality of healthcare by offering therapeutic and treatment options which contribute to saving lives and improving the quality of it. The role pharmaceutical organizations play is crucial in improving human health and in the contribution to local economies through the creation of jobs, amelioration in existing human welfare and contributing to positive social change (Li & Tan, 2013).

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was: What cultural factors impact the implementation of marketing strategies for international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region?

The following principal interview questions served to explore the successful regional marketing strategies implemented by pharmaceutical firm managers in the MENA region in the face of lowered healthcare budgets, consequent to the oil and gas price declines:

1. From your experiences in the MENA region, how, if at all, does language and culture affect the success of marketing strategy planning and implementation?
2. What approaches in terms of training and development have facilitated the implementation of suitable marketing strategies in the MENA region?

Conceptual Framework

The cultural intelligence theory (CQ) developed by Earley and Ang (2003) was chosen to underpin this study. The CQ theory representing the conceptual framework is based on Sternberg and Detterman's (1986) integration of the loci of intelligence residing within the person. CQ has been defined as the capability of individuals to function effectively in a variety of cultural national, ethnic, organizational, and generational contexts (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Magnusson, Westjohn, Semenov, Randrianasolo, and Zdravkovic (2013) stated that CQ knowledge had a significant effect on the formulation and execution of international marketing strategies. Many researchers have found that CQ has some similarities with various approaches to cultural competence, but differs, in that it can serve as a theoretical reference to understand and solve problems relating to effective adaptation of employees to different environment beyond just understanding of different cultures (Ng, Van Dyne, Ang, & Ryan, 2012). Cultural intelligence (CQ) concepts have served as a helpful reference to understand the ability of the organizations' managers to implement marketing strategies and align it with internal and external cultures.

Key Terms Defined in Context of Study

The following are key terms used in this research are defined to acquaint readers in the meaning and context used in this study:

Cultural intelligence (CQ): Peterson (2004) defined CQ as the ability to engage and interact with individuals who are culturally different (Putranto, Gustomo, & Ghazali, 2015).

Marketing strategy: A process used by a company to focus on optimal opportunities and achieve maximize profits potential and sustain the business. Mechanisms of a successful marketing strategy includes proper planning, implementation, evaluation, and control (Ramaseshan, Ishak, & Kingshott, 2013).

Multicultural team (MT): The terms and the acronym MT refers to a group of individuals from different cultures working together on activities that span national borders and thus represents a complex environment and affects on team's performance (Lisak & Erez, 2015).

Pharmaceutical companies: Companies engaged in research, development, manufacturing, and marketing of drugs for human use (Signore, 2016).

Transformational leadership: A trait and ability of leaders to take actions to try to increase their followers' awareness of what is right and important (Abbasi & Zamani-Miandashti, 2013).

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The topics and discussion in this literature review, include a critical review of the professional and academic papers pertaining to the challenges and intricacies of internal employee development in marketing, to targeting customers in a multicultural environment. The articles reviewed provided some pertinent background information and the study findings related to marketing strategies implementation and influential factors such as culture, leadership styles, organizational knowledge and flexibility, in managing multicultural marketing teams. This literature review is divided into several subsections, which are: The role of CQ knowledge in planning and implementing marketing strategies overseas, managing a multicultural team, and marketing strategies implementation. At the end of this section, a summary and conclusion are presented. .

Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Researchers have characterized the different forms of intelligence as emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and cognitive intelligence (IQ). Emotional intelligence can be defined as a set of emotional abilities that form a level of intelligence, while social intelligence is the ability to achieve a certain social goal. Cognitive intelligence or general intelligence is the ability to grasp and solve problems (Bücker & Korzilius, 2015).

CQ is a type of intelligence and is defined as the individual's ability to adapt and perform effectively in the contemporary cultural context (Putranto et al., 2015). The CQ theory which draws from Sternberg and Detterman's (1986) integrative theoretical framework of the various loci of intelligence, was developed in (2003) by Earley and Ang's, with a focus specifically on resolving cross-cultural problems, (Wood, & St. Peters, 2014) and underpinned this study. Keung and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2013) stressed the importance of CQ in contemporary business and considers it an essential factor in multicultural environments, often predicating the effectiveness of leadership performance when the level of this characteristic manifests in the abilities of management. By applying CQ concepts, leaders can develop a broad framework of understanding, skills, and behaviors for employees to engage them in a multicultural environment rather than focusing on certain cultures (Presbitero, 2016).

The MENA region as stated, comprises of culturally very diverse populations, comprising of expatriates and locals.

With the globalization of business, managers and employees need to develop CQ to fit organizational environments and diverse cultures, where individuals often react and behave differently and according to individual cultural contexts and backgrounds (Li, Mobley, & Kelly, 2016). CQ can serve as a framework of knowledge and skills, related to cultural metacognition, which helps to understand how individuals adapt to different environments and what shapes the cultural aspects of their environment (Bücker, Furrer, Postma, & Buynes, 2014). Koo Moon, Kwon Choi, and Shik Jung (2013) noted that by developing CQ, individuals can improve competencies to adapt effectively to a different cultural environment. Guðmundsdóttir (2015) observed, that in the current cultural settings, the understanding of CQ concept helps a leader to understand and manage a diverse workforce. In multinational organizations, CQ is a type of intelligence which can be focused on knowing employee capabilities, and thereby there is importance in marketing to inculcate a greater awareness and of respect for diversity and other cultures (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Several researchers have studied CQ in various aspects and revealed the positive influences on expatriate performance such as personality, language proficiency, role clarity, communication ability, and prior international experiences (Koo Moon et al., 2013).

To understand the individual differences, the application of CQ can serve to improving the ability of organizational members to adapt effectively to new cultural settings (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015). Presbitero (2016) outlined that Earley and Ang (2003) identified the four facets of CQ as cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral. Three of the four factors, metacognition, cognition, and motivation are considered mental abilities in internal cognitive systems, while the behavioral capabilities may encompass the entire spectrum of CQ (Eisenberg et al., 2013).

Cognitive CQ

The concept of CQ has been related to task performance in the sense that individuals who have high levels of cognitive CQ may be able to draw clear cultural schemas possibly facilitating personal awareness of any potential differences in an untoward intercultural situation (Presbitero, 2016). Individuals who work with a team with high levels of cognitive CQ, may have better task performance since they have high levels of observing, cataloging, and analyzing team member behavior (Moon, 2013). Ng, Van Dyne, Ang, and Ryan (2012) opined that where individuals are exposed to intercultural interface situations, the cognitive processes such as self-consciousness, pattern recognition, and analogical reasoning become important to study, as may serve as predictors of leadership and management performance. Li et al. (2016) defined cognitive CQ as an individual's ability to notice and understand both similarities and differences between cultures.

Bücker, Furrer, and Lin (2015) suggested that cognitive CQ is a competency based on awareness of norms and practices applicable in different cultures, obtained through education, training, and personal experience. These competencies include knowledge of all aspects of cultures such as legal, economic, and social systems as well as the value system of these cultures. A cross-cultural course is considered a process that supports intercultural learning through the development of cognitive, affective, and behavioral capabilities (Koo et al., 2013). Through training and learning, individuals can increase their cognitive CQ and gain knowledge about other cultures (Putranto et al., 2015). Presbitero (2016) highlighted the importance of training programs that demonstrates the differences between different cultural values and explained how to increase the cognitive CQ of employees, which often shapes their behaviors in diverse societies. Training programs developed with CQ elements, could develop employees to adapt appropriately with behavioral adjustments with basic cultural awareness and knowledge of the cultural values (MacNab & Worthley, 2012). Eisenberg et al. (2016) examined the impact of cross-cultural management courses CCM on cognitive CQ and found that these types of courses, has markedly positive effects on employees CQ. Cross-cultural training typically includes two broad groups of activities. The first includes practical information on the host country and the second consists of experiential learning activities (Bücker & Korzilius, 2015). These activities combine cognitive and behavioral techniques through cultural simulation, games, or cross-cultural role-plays (Bücker et al., 2015).

CCM courses have often been provided to expatriate employees with knowledge on intercultural communication, relocation, and cognitive skills, which could positively influence the adjustment of an individual, with other cultures (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015). Koo Moon et al. (2013) stated that the direct and indirect forms of communication among cultures aid expatriates was vital to understand the rules, norms, systems, and ways of thinking, therefore, usually help individuals to improve cognitive CQ. Presbitero (2016) opined that face-to-face communications between local employees and expatriates positively affect their knowledge of cultural differences and help to adjust their awareness to the cultural system, rules, and values. Managers with a high cognitive CQ were the strongest predictors of transformational leadership potential. Keung et al. (2013) found that individuals who have high cognitive CQ, were adaptive to new multicultural environments and were capable of leading in a transformational style, whereas leaders who struggled in new cultural environments spent most of their time trying to adapt to a new culture, which negatively affects leadership performance. Wood and Peters (2014) noted that cognitive CQ has a positive relationship with cultural judgment and decision making which could reinforce leadership style in different cultural environments.

Metacognitive CQ

One of the reasons for using CQ is that it is an integration of cognitive and dynamic processes and includes mental functioning of "metacognitive CQ" and "cognitive CQ" (Bücker& Korzillus, 2015). To organize and comprehend cultural knowledge, individuals in management often use meta cognitive CQ which entails a focus on higher order cognitive processes (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Bücker et al. (2015) defined metacognitive CQ as the consciousness of culture in dealing with individuals from other cultural backgrounds. Magnusson, Westjohn, Semenov, Randrianasolo, and Zdravkovic (2013) stated that metacognitive CQ has a significant effect on individual's cultural judgment and decision making, further, it enhances contextualized thinking and cognitive flexibility. Bücker and Korzillus (2015) supported the idea that individuals with a high metacognition can take superordinate judgments about their thoughts as well as those of others.

In contrast to cognitive CQ that is related positively to previous work experience overseas, metacognitive CQ and is usually positively related to previous working experience with foreign nationals (Koo Moon et al., 2013). To develop metacognitive CQ, Bücker and Korzillus (2015) suggested special training to increase the ability to recognize the processes that individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. Eisenberg et al. (2013), suggested, that CCM courses have had powerful effects on the metacognitive facet and helped to be better conscious of the cultural intentions of others before and during intercultural interactions. Such CQ courses and training could improve the level of metacognitive and life experiences among employees, along with other attributes and skills that can improve work performance (MacNab & Wothley, 2012). In contrast, Koo Moon et al. (2013) opined that expatriates might not be willing to develop personal meta cognitive CQ through learning or special training; however, researchers have often assumed that these skills will be acquired through direct work experiences and communications with foreign nationals. In this context, it may be difficult to improve metacognitive CQ in a short period, since it requires a significant change in the individual mindset or way of thinking toward other cultures (Guomundstotir, 2015).

Direct and indirect communications with foreign nationals help expatriates to develop metacognitive CQ, thus ensuring individuals understand the rules, values, system, and way of thinking in other cultures (Guomundstotir, 2015). In specific, indirect communications (virtual) to be effective, usually needs the personal introspective evaluation of assumptions and often warrants high levels of metacognitive CQ. Indirect communications also necessitate the drive and high levels of energy to engage in cross-cultural interactions (Presbitero, 2016). The interaction with local employees in a host country is positively related to the ability of a person to be conscious of other cultural differences, which makes it important to adapt to culture system, rules, and values of the environment (Koo Moon et al., 2013). In the business world, managers with higher metacognitive CQ skills collaborate more effectively across cultures and interact with those formulating and implementing marketing strategies, often reaping the rewards of enhanced organizational performance, especially in diverse and international markets (Magnusson et al., 2013).

Business managers with higher metacognitive CQ skills usually also display better capabilities in planning, observing, analyzing and optimizing team member behavior, to potentially improve organizational performance (Presbitero, 2016). Building on this logic, expatriate managers with high metacognitive CQ determine a suitable marketing strategy to implement and if there is a marketing adaptation required by the environment (Magnusson et al., 2013). Managers involved in international marketing must exercise good judgment and decision making in formulating and implementing marketing strategy, where displaying cultural awareness and knowledge of the differences in the internal and external environments of the organization and its sphere of operations is critical (Bücker et al., 2015).

Motivational CQ

Many researchers have affirmed that motivational CQ refers to the intellectual ability to direct attention and energy toward tasks or situations characterized by cultural differences (Ng et al., 2012). In the context of cross-cultural interactions, motivational CQ is a construct stemming from the stream of CQ research that may represent the necessary drive to attend to interactions and the capabilities for problem-solving in the real world (Putranto et al., 2015; Wood & Peters, 2014). As a capability, Keung et al. (2013) reaffirmed that motivational CQ is the ability and direction of energy toward learning and functioning in different cultural situations.

Koo Moon et al. (2013) suggested based on research related to CQ, that there is potential enhancement of motivational CQ especially when individuals acquire international work experience. In contrast, Ng et al. (2012) found that international work experience and the interaction with different cultures enhance all CQ factors except motivational CQ. Maldonado and Vera (2014) found that individual motivational CQ is a natural characteristic, where an individual with high motivational CQ often seeks participation in various international activities where engagement with other cultures is critical. Magnusson et al. (2013) stated that individuals with higher motivational CQ have better work adjustment in a foreign country in many sectors especially in sales and marketing strategies.

Individuals with high motivational CQ tend to learn and approach new cultural knowledge and awareness, through experiential learning in management education. CCM courses improved individual's motivational CQ and helped to adjust to new cultural environments (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Magnusson et al. (2013) urged companies to provide expatriate employees CQ training, as they found that motivational CQ can be learned, developed, and enhanced. Some researchers have disagreed on the impact of training courses on the improvement of motivational CQ. Several researchers have indicated, that training courses improve the individual's ability to maintain and sustain functional behaviors in culturally unfamiliar or diverse situations. Others have contrasted this idea and stated that cross-cultural training failed to increase any facets of CQ facets, especially motivational CQ (Bücker& Korzillus, 2015).

Several empirical investigators of motivational CQ have concluded that in international business, a significant relationship exists between international marketing strategies and employee performance (Magnusson et al., 2013). Chen, Liu, and Portnoy (2012) contended that organizations with high motivational CQ enhance employee performance, sales, and marketing strategies. The skills and competencies of expatriate managers play an important for companies to sustain a competitive advantage; therefore, this places the expatriate managers at the center of attention in implementing a successful marketing strategy for global firms (Koo Moon et al., 2013). Chen et al. (2012) have provided considerable insights about the influence of individuals who have higher motivational CQ. Managers are often effective negotiators in cross-cultural transactions and have stronger communication skills to overcome the obstacles of negotiations. Expatriate managers, furthermore, with a high level of motivational CQ appear to consistently focus on helping team members to overcome the challenges of consisting with diversity of team members (Moon, 2013). Regardless on how to improve motivational CQ, many researchers affirmed that high level of motivational CQ contributes to greater expatriate adjustment, and better quality in job performance (Magnusson et al., 2013).

Behavioral CQ

In the global business environment, international companies' leaders and employees need proficiency to harness and engage people from other cultures, values, and behavioral norms (Wood & Peters, 2014). The behavioral CQ dimension indicates to personal behaviors that a person engages in, which may reflect the ability in adapting behaviors suitable to a new culture (Guomundstotir, 2015). Presbitero (2016) stressed that individuals with behavioral CQ demonstrate appropriately verbal and non-verbal actions in cross-cultural situations. Ng et al. (2012) held the idea that the ability to demonstrate appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions are complemented by mental capabilities for understanding of prevailing cultural values. Behavioral CQ can be more enhanced in the international business when individuals directly engage other nationals from other cultures and reveals what a person does rather than what the individual thinks (Koo Moon et al., 2013).

Bücker et al. (2015) suggested that a significant relationship is evident between international experiences and behavioral CQ when individuals know how to use culturally appropriate words, tones, gestures, and facial expressions. In international leaders' school, behavioral, CQ was found as the best predictor of transformational leadership style, which is an inevitable factor of expatriate performance (Keung et al., 2013; Moon, 2013). Ng et al. (2012) contended that expatriate professionals with high behavioral CQ were the most efficient persons in meeting work performance expectations. In contrast, Koo Moon et al. (2013) observed that behavioral CQ and previous international work experiences for expatriates were not positively related in respect of metacognitive and cognitive CQ and inferred that because they found that expatriates relations in foreign nationals were based on work issues rather than learned through experience of cultural differences. Keung et al. (2013) argued the importance of behavioral CQ skills in the international business serves to increase innovation, task performance, and multicultural team effectiveness, and thereby increase intercultural negotiation effectiveness for leaders. In the case of lacking appropriate CQ behavior, leaders and employees must have the tendency to acquire these skills through special courses and training (Chen & Lin, 2013).

MacNab and Worthley (2012) advocated for intensive learning, courses in management education to improve all facets of CQ, and importantly and specifically behavioral CQ. The development of the employee capability for effective communication to manage culturally diverse clients could be through training courses on behavioral CQ such as other languages acquisition or learning different accents (Presbitero, 2016). Training courses of behavioral CQ related with basic cultural awareness can help expatriates in an international environment to adapt appropriate behavioral adjustments in host countries (MacNab & Worthley, 2012). Bücker and Korzillus (2015) stated that cross-cultural training typically includes political, cultural, economic, and cultural awareness information, and focuses on understanding the host country culture. In contrast to much empirical research, Eisenberg et al. (2013) opined that cross-cultural management courses (CCM) had no significant effects on behavioral CQ. The improvement of behavioral CQ skills together with available resources may help to provide appropriate answers in a cross-cultural interaction have an influence on reducing the level of anxiety in intercultural interactions (Bücker et al., 2014). Individuals with high behavioral CQ have a flexible enough repertoire of culturally diverse behaviors and can display and change these according to the cultural demands of the situation. Despite this repertoire, there are items in behavioral CQ that do not apply to cross-cultural interactions specifically in the context of virtual communication where these items focus on face-to-face interactions and facial expressions (Presbitero, 2016).

Managing Multicultural Teams

Globalization, the development of multinational companies, and demographic changes in many nations such as in Australia and Canada have created what some consider a problem, while others see as an opportunity (Dumitresco, Lie, & Dobrescu, 2014). Managing multinational companies have created a challenge for leaders leading multicultural teams (Levitt, 2015). Individuals sometimes hold or form different opinions and stereotypes in communication, learning, and interacting with others based on their culture; to overcome these challenges, it may be important to identify the traits and skills for multicultural team managers (Lisak & Erez, 2015). Researchers have found that individuals from diverse national backgrounds may suffer in a multicultural environment arising from their varied cultural identities. In contrast, several researchers after 2010, have observed, that improving the individual managers merits a greater understanding of cultural awareness and cognitive complexity, developing the ability to respond to cultural cues, and facilitating creativity within the organization (Fitzsimmons, 2013). Levitt (2015) opined that more diverse teams suffered from increased conflict but promoted more creativity and had higher levels of satisfaction in comparison to homogeneous teams.

To discuss homogeneity further, multicultural team members frequently seek a leader who (a) provides confidence, (b) communicates effectively with the entire team, and (c) creates trust among team members (Lisak & Erez, 2015). In a global business environment, managing a multicultural team requires a leader with a clear strategic objective to acquire and promote knowledge and understanding of the cultures and values (Ochieng, Price, Ruan, Egbu, & Moore, 2013). The ability to accept and respect diversity is an essential trait for leaders managing multicultural teams (Johnson, 2015). The benefit from the accepting and understanding of diversity is the ability of the team members learning from one another. Many conflicts in a multicultural team arise from misunderstanding, therefore, it is often very important for multinational companies to identify the important qualities for managers who lead multicultural teams. Dumitresco et al. (2014) defined the traits of a good multicultural manager (see figure 1).

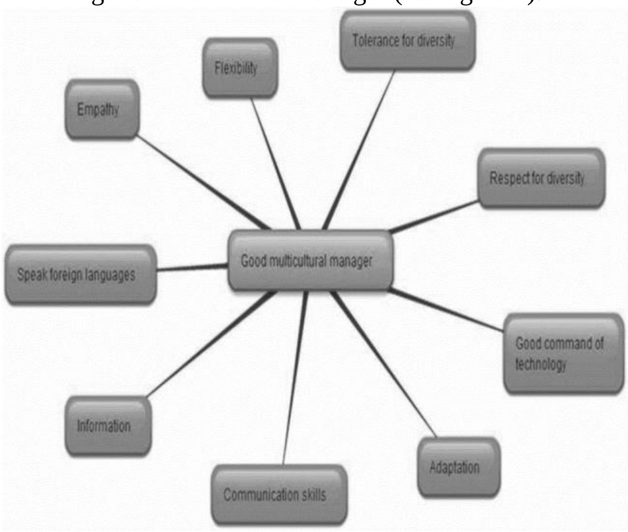

Figure 1: Profile of a good multicultural manager

Generational Diversity

Some researchers have studied multicultural teams from cultural differences and perspectives, while others have discussed generational differences (Dumitresco et al., 2014). It is not surprising to find that due to globalization to see individuals from different generations working together; this variety has created challenges for managers where each generation has its values, skills, and characteristics (Gursoy, Chi, & Karadag, 2013). Yi, Ribbens, Fu, and Cheng (2015) stated that managers in the contemporary business environment have challenges to understand generational differences in addition to cultural differences. In the current international healthcare environment, generational differences represent challenges for managers to lead the workforce, who often think and behave differently from previous decades (Hendricks & Cope, 2013). Generations were classified into four categories by the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund; however, Dumitrescu et al. (2014) in their study identified the fifth generation. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics and information for each generation.

Table 1. Characteristics of Different Generations

Generation	Born	Characteristics
Traditionalists or the veterans	Before 1945	• Team players • Loyal to a company all life long • Respect for authority • Obedient • Do not discuss rules
Baby boomers	Between 1946 and 1964	• Principal objective: personal growth • Sensitive to feedback • Optimistic • personal satisfaction is very important for them
Generation X	Between 1965 and 1980	• Positive attitude • Question authority • Goal oriented • Impatient • Able to multitask • Flexible
Generation Y or millennial generation	Between 1981 and 2000	• Sociable • Heroic spirit • Do not know how to deal with difficult people • Perseverant • Self-confident
Generation Z	After 2000	• More sociable • Media addicted • Use technology • Quick to accept difference • More tolerant

In multicultural teams, it is vital for managers to understand the structure and differences of the values underlying of each generation to create and maintain a healthy work environment that fosters motivation, communication, and generational synergy (Gursoy et al., 2013). Dumitresco et al. (2014) opined that managers of multicultural teams must be able to understand that young people want quick results and appreciation for their work while middle aged employees have to believe in a task to achieve better results. The older workers are generally very faithful to the organization and often avoid uncertainty. In the healthcare industry, Hendricks and Cope (2013) stated that all generations are different in the 3Cs, of commitment, communication, and compensation, therefore, managers need to consider several strategies to manage generational diversity in the healthcare workplace. Leaders should look at generational differences not merely for idiosyncratic inter-group differences, nor for age differences, but as a fact in society and workplace that continues to develop from generation to another. Leaders, therefore, must understand the differences among generations and conflicts in the workplaces to ensure organizational success (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Managers who focus on leveraging the positive traits of each generational cohort likely be able to develop an effective plan for business strategies, and thereby promote quality and productivity and decrease tensions and conflicts among workers (Hendricks & Cope, 2013).

Geographic Diversity

Cultural and generational diversity is the focus in several studies, with globalization, greater diversity arising from the recruitment of staff from different geographic locations. Geographic dispersion of team members has been considered as a new form of diversity that contributes to improved work groups performance and increased productivity (Levitt, 2015). In contrast, Lisak and Erez (2015) contended that geographical dispersion challenges multicultural team leaders because of the need to create a homogeneous team that can overcome different time zones, regulations, values, and expectations. Some leaders guiding geographically diverse teams, fail to create an effective communication channel in building the shared understanding which often constrains team member ability to cooperate, coordinate and consequently experience decreases in productivity (Lisak & Erez, 2015). These same negatives can also become a positive for leaders when geographic diversity is managed, controlled, and utilized in a professional way (Dumitresco et al., 2014). Arguably, it is also vital for leaders and team members to use geographic diversity advantageously and understand the imperatives needed to foster global collaboration in dispersed environments (Levitt, 2015).

Role of the Researchers in Study

Yin (2014) defined a researcher's responsibilities as: (a) setting and posing relevant questions, (b) interpreting participant answers, and (c) understanding the research problem. The success of a qualitative case study depends on the researcher practices and the ability to analyze data and draw conclusions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). A comprehensive data collection approach entails flexibility to collect the most relevant data and multiple sources of evidence may enhance validity and reduce researcher bias (Baskarada, 2014). In a qualitative case study, researcher bias may affect the outcomes and can change the research direction (Yin, 2014). Morse and Yin (2014) suggested a frequent review process, checking data during the interview process, and considering diverse and credible external sources to triangulate the primary collected data. While conducting this study, the aim included our commitment to remain neutral, unbiased, and cautious throughout the research process. Participants were not directed in any way or offered any personal insights during the interviews. The use of the research question matrix served as the Interview Guide and helped to prevent any biased questions.

With involvement in global pharmaceutical marketing, and in healthcare projects in the MENA region, we have experienced the challenges associated with this industry arising from a lack of cultural and management knowledge. The problems witnessed encouraged selection of this research topic and provided the impetus to explore and understand dilemmas that affect business sustainability in the region.

In this research, the ethical guidelines as outlined by the Belmont Report was followed and keeping all participants' information confidential in all study documents entailed specific steps and measures, as detailed herein. The aim of this study was to explore successful marketing strategies formulated and implemented by international pharmaceutical companies to increase or maintain business profitability. The sampling strategy included purposively recruiting six executive and middle managers working in international pharmaceutical companies in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates who were open to sharing the depth of personal experiences in implementing marketing strategies. The interview protocol is important because participants want to be comfortable in discussing personal point of views, especially if the research focus is on a sensitive topic (Yin, 2014).

Eligibility Criteria and Participant Screening

The quality and credibility of a multiple case study is enhanced when there is adequate information provided for the reader to understand the study design and participants' views and experiences (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Homogeneous purposive sampling was a strategy used in this multiple case study to explore participants' experiences. Using a homogeneous purposive sampling strategy helped reduced variation and likely facilitated focus on similarities by choosing individuals who shared the same traits and characteristics, as the aim was to engage in an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study (Griffith, 2013; Palinkas, 2015). The total sample size in this study included six executive and middle level managers from international pharmaceutical companies in Dubai entrusted with responsibilities to manage a company's marketing strategies. The inclusionary criteria to participate in this study also required a minimum of serving in this role for at least 2 years. The selection of six participants ensured an adequate level of information to achieve data saturation after the fourth interview, however, completing six interviews ensured the fulfillment of this objective. Marketing leaders were knowledgeable about the day-to-day practices, processes, and challenges of planning and implementing marketing strategies.

Through this study, we had the opportunity to professionally engage with many pharmaceutical companies in the region. Good rapport was established with the executive leaders of these organizations. In this study, leveraging these relationships helped to recruit six managers to participate in the research interviews. The methods to recruit and communicate with participants included e-mails and telephone calls. To ensure voluntary and informed participation, during the initial contact, the process entailed providing participants with a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, a brief overview, and the benefits to society that may result from the study. Baskarda (2014) stated that potential participants should be aware of the research period, purpose, their roles, and the expected outcomes. Next, a formal invitation was sent for managers to participate in the interview for final review and a signature was requested on the consent form, which completed the recruitment of participants. During the planning and scheduling phase of the interviews, prospective participants indicated willingness to answer questions and all pertinent information about the time and duration of the interview and the nature of the research questions.

Maintaining ethical values was crucial throughout the research process as suggested by researchers Fiske and Hauser, (2014). In this study, following transparent procedures and protocols helped ensure the ethical protection of participants. Researcher bias may have an influence on the behaviors of the participants, so the priority in undertaking quality research must include building a strong relationship with the study participants, which may lead to minimizing researcher bias, and further possible by using the technique of bracketing (Baskarada, 2014). In upholding the privacy of research participants, a researcher maintains public confidence and assures the protection of confidential and private information (Yin, 2014). All data related to participants, companies, and recorded interviews were safeguarded in a locked filing cabinet and computer files password protected personal computers of the researchers. The study participants and the names of the companies are recorded and indicated in the study using assigned codes instead of actual identities and professional designations.

Population and Sampling

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that international companies in the pharmaceutical industry in the MENA region use to maintain and increase sales and profitability. The participants for this study included managers from international pharmaceutical companies located in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. Marketing professionals who have been involved in marketing for at least 2 years, and responsible for formulating and implementing business strategies specific to the MENA region, received an invitation to participate this study. In a multiple case study, purposeful sampling procedures are deemed more suitable in selecting individuals who are knowledgeable or experienced in relation to phenomenon intended to be studied (Yin, 2014). In using purposeful sampling, researchers must select study participants based on a careful assessment using predefined criteria to gauge for the requisite depth in experience and potential contribution in insight and knowledge (Kornhaber, Wilson, Abu-Qamar, & Mclean, 2014).

Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood, (2013) stated that in the case of limited resources, purposeful sampling is a method used by researchers for the selection and identification of information-rich data. Purposeful sampling includes selecting participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study, and have ability to participate, and express willingness to share experiences and opinions (Palinkas et al., 2013). As in any design, purposeful sampling has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of purposive sampling in a multiple case study design are the low cost and that there is no need for a list of all the population elements related to the study. The disadvantages are the inability of the researcher to control or measure bias, and that the findings often cannot be generalized (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). The purposeful sample in this study consisted of six executive and middle managers from international pharmaceutical firms who met the following eligibility criteria: (a) were based in the MENA region for at least 2 years, (b) involved in at least 2 years of planning and implementing marketing strategies, (c) work experience in the pharmaceutical industry for at least 5 years.

For this research, a purposeful sample of six participants ensured an adequate level of depth in collected information to achieve data saturation after four interviews, however completing six interviews ensured satisfactory fulfillment of this objective. Tran, Porcher, Falissard, and Ravaud (2016) defined data saturation as the point in data collection when sufficiency in data collection, and further interviews do not yield new information.

Ethical Research

In a qualitative multiple case study, the relationship that arises between the researcher and participants, often creates supplementary ethical demands that not only confine data gathering, but also the process of analysis of findings and publication of results (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). In the study, the key concepts of the Belmont Report (1979), which consists of three general principles of (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice, helped provide ethical guidelines, and served to protect participants and minimize the risk of harm. In this study, each participant received an invitation letter for voluntary participation explaining the purpose of the study, and a brief overview. Prospective research subjects, upon expressing interest in participating in this study, received an email with the consent form and the interview questions. The consent form included information about the purpose of the study, procedure, and background so that the participants became familiar with the research topic during the interview. Questions or concerns raised by targeted or selected individuals, provided the opportunity to clarify the interview purpose and addressed any potential issues, at any stage of the research, including before commencement, and after completion of the study, to ensure transparency.

The consent form included details of the study that also helped to reduce researcher bias, provided open communications, minimized misunderstanding with study participants, and assured the confidentiality of information. There was no intention to share the names of the participants or the organizations and are only referred to by alphanumeric codes to ensure confidentiality of identities. By preserving the confidentiality of study participant, a researcher must make sure that private information will remain protected (Gibson et al., 2013).

Data Collection for Study

In qualitative research, selection of the most appropriate instruments and techniques for data collection is essential in ensuring the credibility of analysis (Elo et al., 2014). A multiple case study design was suitable in this study to collect in-depth data from participants; and to also seek additional review of documents, in keeping with the procedures and techniques of the data collection plan, as recommended by leading research exponents (Yin, 2014). The details presented herein includes an explanation of the data collection interview guide, research techniques, and the organization, and analysis used for this study.

Demonstration of the value of the data collection is the primary facet that supports a researcher's final argument concerning the feasibility of a study (Elo et al., 2014). To ensure trustworthiness throughout the data collection effort, a researcher must have a clear vision of the purpose of the study to make unbiased decisions (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Yin, 2014). The researcher in a qualitative study is the primary data collection instrument, which was true in this study as well.

Semistructured interviewing, the most common type of interviewing in qualitative research, involves the use of predetermined questions; the researcher is then free to seek further explanation of participants' responses (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The use of semistructured interviews with open-ended questions provides participants freedom and space to answer in as much detail as possible; the researcher can encourage interviewees to share insights, vision, and knowledge gained through experience. As Elo et al. (2014) cautioned, however, researchers who choose semistructured data collection, must be careful not to steer interviewees in a pre-ordained direction to obtain information. With this type of open-ended interviewing, a researcher can reformulate questions or prompt participants for more information if something interesting or novel emerges during an interview (Baškarada, 2014). The rationale for using semistructured interviewing in this study, was that it is an accurate approach to attaining information about the challenges of marketing strategy implementation and to exploring the role of managers to reinforce existing studies in this area.

Interviews was the primary data collection method for this study. Face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions are consistent with the multiple case study design (Ingham-Broomfield, 2015; Yin, 2014). We scheduled interviews for 1 hour each; which was extended based on participant responses, as data saturation was the aim. Doody and Noonan (2013) recommended providing participants with research questions a few days before an interview helps to prepare for the required information for answers; this contact also served as a reminder of the coming interview.

Data Collection

Through multiple case study research, it is possible to obtain a deep understanding of instances of a phenomenon while exploring participant behaviors and experiences based on personal perspectives (Baškarada, 2014). For this study, the most appropriate means of collecting data was face-to-face interviews. Face-to-face interviewing is one of the oldest forms of data collection and the most flexible research instrument (Ortiz et al., 2016). With the flexibility and great potential, the face-to-face interview has long been considered a superior and effective data collection technique for exploring and understanding complicated phenomena (Rohde, Lewinsohn, & Seeley, 2014). Open ended and highly complex questions can be used during face-to-face interviews, and participants can answer with all kinds of verbal responses, as well as visual stimuli such as objects, pictures, advertisement copy, and video (Vogl, 2013). In this study, the duration of each interview was about one hour in duration, during which participants answered 8 open-ended interview questions. During the interviews, seeking further detail through additional questions and open discussions served to solicit more explanation from participants, when needed.

In qualitative research, member checking represents a form of trustworthiness to improve the credibility of data (Nottingham & Henning, 2014). Elo et al. (2014) stated that member checking is an opportunity for participants to review transcriptions, to review interpretation, and is an important step to check the trustworthiness of the analysis. Attention to member checking aided in obtaining broad information, to ensure accuracy, enhance credibility, while also serving to achieve data saturation. The recorded interviews were transcribed, and copies sent to participants to recommend any edits or changes that might benefit the study, who upon request, also approved a final review, and thereby ensured that the data was accurate.

Data Organization

Upon completion of all interviews, the first step was to transcribe the audio recordings using Microsoft Word, then categorize participants by alphanumeric codes, and sending a transcript to each participant for verification and confirmation to ensure accuracy (Harvey, 2015). During the data analysis process, assigning codes served in defining themes and patterns while organizing the data (Yin, 2014). By assigning generic codes to participants, a researcher can assure confidentiality. Throughout the research, it was important to keep track of: (a) signed consent forms, (b) audio recordings, (c) transcripts and interpretations for all participants, as well as (d) maintain a personal reflective journal entry. Majid (2016) stated that reflective journals provide an annotated chronological record of experiences generated by the participants, which might be difficult to reveal through other methods.

All raw data, such as interview audio recordings, notes, transcripts, and all related documents, were saved on a personal computer, which aided in organization of the research. A hard copy stored in a locked cabinet served as a back-up of data collected. Limiting access of these documents to any external entity minimized the possibility of breach in confidentiality of participants. Leong et al. (2013) stated that 5 years after completion of a study, all raw data, including hard and soft copies should be destroyed. Destroying all data 5 years after the completion of this study will be undertaken by us, based on the established norms and measures to preserve participant confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a case study context often involves several steps, which include examining, categorizing, and testing data to draw conclusions based on evidence (Yin, 2014). Houghton et al. (2013) observed that using methodological triangulation, researchers seek two or more data sources to confer a fuller insight of the research topic and ensure more validity, which is not obtainable by using a single source. In this study, methodological triangulation was an appropriate strategy to align the information obtained during the interviews with the initial codes. The primary source of data in this study was face-to-face interviews, conducted by following an interview protocol to ensure consistency. Additional resources for methodological triangulation that provided relevant data, included member checking and healthcare reports from the Saudi Food and Drugs Administration (Saudi FDA), which helped in the analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

Qualitative data analysis is essential to identifying, coding, categorizing, explaining, and exploring collected data (Yin, 2014). Before data collection, creating a list of codes corresponding to themes from the literature review helped in the development of existing and emerging themes and patterns during the interview process. The second step involved sampling that facilitated the reduction of bias inherent in data collection. The third step was to categorize and arrange common themes in the most efficient manner (Percy et al., 2015). Assigning each participant with a random alphanumeric code, helped to preserve confidentiality. The last step was to determine the relationships between the codes and themes under study and further expand and develop new ideas, theories, and also discern successful marketing strategies used by participant pharmaceutical managers.

The features of the qualitative data analytical software ATLAS.ti can help researchers manage large amounts of data collected by facilitating coding, categorizing transcripts and in examining possible connections between codes. The software features provide a visual workspace in which a researcher can explore the relationships between codes. The use of ATLAS.ti features include capabilities to aid in (a) analysis of qualitative data, (b) identification of themes, and (c) reducing data management time. The features of this software made it possible to organize themes into logical groups and to assign codes to each element. Organizing all interview transcripts, questions, and quotations into groups, the software served to create an output report of the primary codes. Finally, the features of ATLAS.ti facilitated conducting content analysis and aided in exploring the relationship between codes based on topics and themes. Based on the outcomes of data analysis, the focus was on key themes related to culture, challenges, and strategies, as identified from the literature and the underpinning of the conceptual framework of this study.

Reliability and Validity in a Qualitative Context

Reliability and validity of qualitative research are important to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Boesch, Schwaninger, & Scholz, 2013). Houghton et al. (2013) stated that to establish validity and reliability and determine rigor in qualitative research, the researcher must use the criteria of confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability. With these principles in mind, the researcher must endeavor to attain reliability and validity as much as possible in a qualitative study, which was followed in this study as well.

To ensure the reliability of this qualitative multiple case study, the development of a research protocol expectedly helped to determine data collection process, ensured alignment between interview questions and research question, and the dependability of the data (Yin, 2014). Elo et al. (2014) suggested using a pilot test of the interview questions in a qualitative study to refine the questions and assure that the data collected during the interviews is dependable. The researcher can conduct a pilot test to review the interview questions for minimize bias and tests for participant clarity and understanding (Harvey, 2015). In this study, a pilot test was an opportunity to improve and test the interview questions and process, using a panel of experts. The pilot test for this research entailed using three individuals with pharmaceutical marketing experience in the MENA region, who were excluded from the research. Participants had experience in marketing strategy formulation, planning and implementation in international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. Lincoln and Guba (2011) suggested the concept of dependability as an alternative criterion for judging the reliability and trustworthiness of qualitative research. In qualitative research, dependability is not measurable and needs other methods to enrich the trustworthiness of the research, such as member checking (Nottingham & Henning, 2014).

The member checking process is a method used in qualitative research to ensure credibility, accuracy, and validity by allowing participants to review interview transcriptions, which serv to increase the trustworthiness of the data and analysis (Muchinsky & Raines, 2013). Using the member checking process usually helps to minimize possible incorrect interpretation of data (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). In qualitative case studies research, member checking also assures that the research is conducted in a rigorous manner (Houghton et al., 2013). In this study, each participant received a summarized interpretation copy of the personal interview data analysis by email and had an opportunity to provide feedback, request amendments. Participants through iteration, could also endorse mutually aggregable interpretations of the data findings and analysis.

In a qualitative study, validity is an essential approach to ensure accuracy of information and indicate to readers that the results are trustworthy (Merriam, 2014). Data triangulation and member checking are the two essential approaches to enhance the credibility of this study. Data triangulation helps to achieve credibility by supporting the gathered data from participants with additional information from government or healthcare reports, which help in the assessment, interpretation, and conclusion of results (Duc, Mockus, Hackbarth, & Palframan, 2014). Member checking is a process to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the interview data through the participants' review, which can assure verification and authenticity of data collected and interpretation of results (Harvey, 2015).

Merriam (2014) stated that transferability in qualitative research is an external validity equivalent indicator, denoting the degree by which the findings are generalizable or applicable in other situations. The measures to increase the transferability of the study may provide insights to understand the challenges facing international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. Also, it is crucial to provide the reader the information to indicate how the research findings may apply to pharmaceutical marketing strategies in the MENA region. Baškarda (2014) stated that the triangulation of the data based on observations obtained by the data collection process and enhances the credibility and transferability of the research findings.

Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality of the researcher and that the results of a study are shaped through participants' responses during the interview (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Houghton et al. (2013) opined that ensuring confirmability includes creating an audit trail by registering all decisions made by participants during the research process, which serves to enhance the trustworthiness of the research. The analysis and the results of the data in this study are derived exclusively from the responses of the participants, which also helped to enhance confirmability and objectivity. Data saturation occurs and represents the stage when no new data adds to the findings or themes, after conducting interviews, and further engagement with participant does not yield new information. Reaching data saturation necessitates researcher and participant engagement in the analysis during data collection (Merriam, 2014). By collecting and analyzing data throughout the research process, the researcher can recognize data saturation by noticing replication of themes, patterns, and categories (Baškarada, 2014). In this study, the interviews continued until no new ideas, information, or themes appeared in the data, which rendered further interviews unnecessary and warranted cessation of an interview, signifying the attainment and discernment of reaching of data saturation.

Presentation of the Findings

Before conducting the interviews, each participant received an invitation email to participate in the study and the consent form. Each participant responded to this email with the phrase; I consent and confirm acceptance to participate in the research study. Within a two-week period, conducting and recording six face-to-face recorded interviews, each of which lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, resulted in the level of depth and detail required to obtain the required insight and knowledge. Reaching data saturation at the five-individual interview mark necessitated continuing the interview of the sixth participant, to ensure robustness in the study and collected data. Fush & Ness (2015) explained that a researcher often reaches data saturation when the interview responses begin to repeat, and no new information or themes emerge, rendering further interviews meaningless, or of little value.

To facilitate analysis, the process included downloading the transcripts into Atlas.ti, where the software features helped in analysis of qualitative data, identification of themes, and reducing data management time. Based on the interview questions, and analysis of the data led to the identification of 45 codes and abstracted them into two themes. The major themes comprised of: (a) recognition of culture and diversity, and (b) the importance of training and learning agility.

Theme 1: Recognition of Culture and Diversity

A set of conversations from which this theme emerged, relates to study participant views on the impact of cultures and habits on marketing strategy implementation within multinational pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. This theme emerged from the analysis of the most frequently occurring conversations and sentiments expressed by participants, in response to interview questions 1and 2 in which participants were asked to explain the impact of culture, language, and diversity within the organization on business operation and marketing strategies implementation. Figures 2, 3 and table 2 represent a depiction of the themes that emerged from participant responses to interview question 1, regarding the importance of culture and diversity in marketing.

Figure 2: Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview questions 1.

Figure 3: Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview questions 2.

Table 2. Recognition of culture and diversity (Interview Questions 1and 2)

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question 1	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
C2P2 stated that: "In most countries they speak Arabic and English, some countries like Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco also speak French". Participant C2P1 stated that: "The MENA region is divided into three different clusters: Levant, GCC, and North Africa and these three clusters have different cultures." C1P3: "the diversity within the company is not about nationality is more about diversities of ideas and method of thinking." In case 2, "the cultural diversity within the organization is strengths instead of weaknesses and they are pushing for these diversities." C2P3: "The main challenge of culture comes from outside stakeholders."	A significant number of participants indicated that language is not a problem for international companies in the MENA region, however, they shared different points of view regarding the impact of the culture and diversity.	Culture and diversity, Innovation, language, and conflict.

Six of six participants assured us that there is little impact of language on the marketing strategies planning and implementation. Participant C1P1 said:

> Arabic is the main language in 95% of the MENA region countries; however, all individuals who are working in the healthcare industry speak English as a second language, which could help in the communications and to transfer ideas. Also, in some countries like Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia they speak French.

Participant C1P2 pointed out that language matters when communicating with a group of patients, and you often have to translate in Arabic, but within the organizations, there is no direct impact for language on business operation.

Participant C2P1 stated that the MENA region is divided into three different clusters: Levant, GCC, and North Africa and these three clusters have different cultures. The role of managers is critical to embed a cultural quality within the organization in terms of adaptation, resources, and problems that the company faces in each cluster. In case 1, individuals who are coming abroad must participate in special training and to read about the region culture to be aware of the cultural differences, idiosyncrasies, and norms. Leaders in case 2 considered that the cultural diversity within the organization is strengths instead of weaknesses and they expressed leveraging these diversities to good advantage. Participant C2P2 went further and explained:

> For us diversity brings innovation, and in time where there are significant changes in the external environment, it is essential to have individuals who can listen to each other and accept each other to brainstorm and generate ideas.

From the results, it was evident that when there is diversity within the management team, marketers can judiciously harness diverse opinions and come up with solutions optimal for the organization to implement marketing and other strategic initiatives. The role of leaders when there is diversity in the organization is to create a high performing and efficient teams, avoid conflicts and provide more space for innovation. According to participant C1P3, the diversity within the company is not about nationality, rather it is more about diversities of ideas and different ways in thinking.

The internal challenge of harnessing and recognizing diverse cultures is easy to overcome with managerial training and good leadership. According to participant C2P3, the challenge of harnessing advantageously the varied culture and diversity inside the company can be optimized with communication and promoting a synergizing a harmonious environment, which facilitates and fosters collaboration. The main challenge of culture comes from outside stakeholders, as explained by a participant:

> The challenge of cultures comes from different levels of authority because of the management issues and lack of expertise. We often have difficulties to convince them the importance of the products and ethical process and rules that we follow as a multinational company.

A participant from case 1 supported the idea of participant C2P3 and added that there is a shortage of diversity in talents, possibly reflecting limited cultural awareness in some countries, and limited representation of individuals in decision-making positions. Table 3 reflects the common thoughts that emerged from participant responses.

Table 3. Recognition of Culture and Diversity

Common thoughts	**No. of participants who shared views**	**% of participants who shared views**
Culture and diversity	6	100%
Language	6	100%
Innovation	3	50%
Conflict	4	65%

Theme 2: The Importance of Training and Learning Agility

This theme revealed the near consensus of participant opinions on how training and agility helps in mitigating risks and possibly reduces marketing failures. Four participants among the six voiced views on the importance of training on enhancing the implementation of marketing strategies, and they described how ongoing training encompasses different topics that improve employee performance (See Figure 4 and Table 4).

Figure 4: Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 2.

Table4. The Importance of Training and Learning Agility

Common thoughts	**No. of participants who shared views**	**% of participants who shared views**
Training agility	4	65%
Employees' performance	2	34%
External training	1	17%

Developing and training employees is an important aspect, essential for the sustainability of a company, and entails improving employee performance and productivity in the short term, which often serves to maintain corporate reputation and standing in the long run (Law, Hills, and Hau, 2017).

According to participant C1P1, training is essential for employees to be able to adapt employees to new strategies and changes for the organization, and to understand the competitive challenges, which vary from one country to another. Participant 3 from case 1 added:

> During economic crises, we need to build our internal capabilities by starting to develop our people to understand what does health economic mean, and how we can shift the discussion from pricing into product value. To achieve this goal, we have a structural approach to do educational training sessions abroad at least twice per year to ensure that employees understood the reality.

Participant C1P2 stressed the importance of the learning agility to avoid marketing strategy failure and stated:

> Market volatility increased the need for the learning agility, and people who don't have learning agility, they are not able to adapt to any

> new situation emerging in the market, and they cannot survive.

In case 2, participant 1 shared the same vision as participant 2 in case 1. The primary challenge which every organization usually faces is the competence of marketers entrusted with implementing strategy in the wake of economic change, as was true of the setting of this study. A challenge is also in the training of staff to understand and implement strategies warranted during times of crises, and to fully comprehend the objective of the responsibilities given. The reason why several international pharmaceutical companies implemented marketing strategies successfully during the economic crisis was because these companies had well-trained teams who understood the marketing strategy and believed in what they were doing. Participant C1P2 stressed the need for the training not just within the organization, but also for other stakeholders. The participant suggested several pieces of training for authorities and physicians and said:

> It is a pity that in countries like the MENA region where the highest standards in sciences in medicine were pioneered, there is lack of investment in academia and clinical research. We regularly invite physicians to contribute and participate to a great extent in clinical development programs that rely on international speakers who are coming to give training on different clinical experiences on the new products.

Tying Study Findings to Conceptual Frameworks and the Existing Literature

CQ and strategic flexibility are the two conceptual frameworks that underpinned this study. CQ is a framework of knowledge and skills, related by cultural metacognition that serves as a theoretical lens in discerning how people adapt, select, and shape the cultural aspects of their environment, in situations and geographies, where individuals have different cultural norms, values, and behaviors (Bücker, Furrer, Postma, & Buynes, 2014). In assessing the themes which emerged from participant responses, it was evident that culture and diversity within the organizations can be harnessed positively by the organizations and their management. The diversity in an organization often fosters different mindsets to collaborate and share ideas. The climate and propensity for innovation in a diverse workforce bodes well for employees to overcome significant changes in the external environment. The challenge of culture and diversity come from the authorities and external stakeholders.

Application to Professional Practice

Several studies have shown that the MENA region has become an attractive market for foreign companies in all industries during the last 20 years and for the near future. Since 1998, Dubai has encouraged all international companies in the MENA region to have their headquarters in the UAE, while Qatar has attracted investors after winning the rights for the hosting of the 2022 World Cup. Recently, Saudi Arabia has garnered attention after launching the "NEON" project to build a new city on the red sea coast. The results of this study may serve to highlight and draw attention to the importance and significance of business leaders in the MENA region. The study findings may indicate the significance of cultural awareness in marketing, and the role of governments in attracting investors to the MENA region, the findings of this study may be valuable to senior managers in the pharmaceutical industry in respect to the importance the role of leadership style, culture, and management stereotype.

Managers as participants in this study in the organizations studied considered professional training and cultural awareness as effective strategies to improve employee skills and overcome cultural and differences. Holland (2017) stressed the importance of professional training and cultural awareness in the healthcare sector to improve employee performance, which in turn serves to provide quality service for patients. For an international pharmaceutical company to be competitive in the MENA region and implement successful marketing strategies, it must adopt the right strategies to respond efficiently to cultural differences, diversity, and leadership styles (Abu-Rahma, & Jaleel, 2017). The findings of this study may also shed light on the challenges in collaborating with internal and external stakeholders, the latter, such as insurance companies, regulatory authorities, and governments, to develop communication, cultural, negotiation, and other skills. This qualitative multiple case study involved two international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region; however, the lessons and emerging strategic imperatives for internal employee and leadership adaptation and marketing to diverse cultures, arising from finding of this study may be valuable to the other international companies in the MENA region, as the factors addressed in this study may hold true for most international companies. The results of this study would also likely hold value for domestic company leaders in the MENA region.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this study, the focus included presenting insight into the factors that influence the internal organizational adaptation and the marketing practices of business leaders in multicultural pharmaceutical companies, as well as the implication on business performance and sustainability. The recommendation based on our extensive personal experience, and the results of this study is that, the focus and opportunity of future research in the healthcare on some elements related to culture and ethics, could include and extend to human dynamics, notably, the imperatives for a deeper understanding of the habits and behaviors of patients and customers.

From an internal organizational development imperative, strengthening of the adaptation and awareness to multicultural environments appeared a critical success factor in marketing to culturally diverse organizations and customers in the GCC, and the MENA region overall. In this context, the opportunities for future research may include a focus on diversity, training, and communication of marketing and business leadership. The research findings from this study indicated that cultural awareness, communication, and training have a positive impact on improving employee performance and in planning and implementing successful marketing strategies. Another recommendation is to conduct a quantitative study in future research to examine the interrelationships between leader practices, employee empowerment, training, and communication, and how the improvement of these relationships could affect business.

This study has some limitations, as discussed. The recommendations to overcoming the limitations of this study, is for researchers to conduct further studies using different geographical locations, and with similar cultural settings. One of the limitations of this study was the ability of participants to share experiences and insights freely. Political and other conditions could have impeded expatriate participants to share valid and worthy perspectives because the discourse would likely require deeper conversations, which may be contentious and spark negative speech, condemnation, and disparaging remarks. Another limitation of this study was that despite differences in cultures and traditions among the MENA region countries, international pharmaceutical companies with headquarters in the UAE implemented uniform marketing strategies in all regions, with little customization and adaptation, perhaps signifying that the heterogeneity of cultures is a challenge, as well as diverse cultures within an organization poses difficulties. A recommendation is that researchers in future studies must compare the impacts of leadership styles, cultural awareness, training, and communication on marketing strategies implemented in different countries. Marketers must therefore strive to use a blend of standardized and customized marketing, to appeal to different audiences and stakeholders in the region.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategic imperatives and successes in the culturally heterogeneous environments of marketing pharmaceutical organizations and customers respectively in the MENA region. The aim was to glean insight into the innovative adaptive organizational and marketing strategies found suitable to contend with the decrease in healthcare budgets arising from the drastic reduction in oil and gas prices. Researchers in the healthcare industry have a deep interest in strategic organizational dynamics, imperatives, and successful strategies in implementing marketing strategies to improve the healthcare system and provide patients better services, which also leads to greater business and financial success. The data and knowledge generated from this study led to lead to a deeper understanding into how pharmaceutical company leaders and authorities achieve business success and sustainability, in an uncertain climate and amidst the upheaval of a changing world of energy. Six executive and senior managers from two international pharmaceutical companies participated in this study and shared personal experiences related to implementing marketing strategies successfully in the MENA region. The primary method to collect data entailed using face-to-face semistructured recorded interviews followed by transcribing and analyzing the data using the qualitative analytical software Atlas.ti. The analysis of the data yielded four patterns: (a) product launch strategy and operating model, (b) transformation of leaders by vision and guidance, (c) recognition of culture and diversity, and (d) the importance of training and learning agility.

The findings revealed that participants recognized the importance of leadership competencies and cultural knowledge in the internal and external environments in managing international companies in the MENA region. The findings also showed that international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region face several challenges while implementing marketing strategies due to lack of primary and secondary data. The findings indicated that the different strategies developed and implemented e by marketing leaders within the MENA region, must be from awareness of the differences in government regulations and the different cultures of marketers and patients in the region. In conducting future studies, researchers may repeat this study, however by using different permutations of methods and designs and include other international companies. The results from this study may contribute in highlighting the challenges international pharmaceutical companies face to improve the healthcare industry performance and provide best drugs and optimal services that serve the needs of patients.

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