Intercultural Competence: Environmental Scan Analysis

The need for people, and especially professionals, to understand cultures other than theirs has increased with rising globalization. Organizations looking to expand in new markets are looking for people with experience of working in a foreign culture. People with intercultural competency skills can function smoothly across different cultures, make decisions that are in line with cultural expectations, and work with those from different backgrounds. According to Liu, Volcic, and Gallois (2014), one has to understand how culture influences communication, in addition to the recognition of the multifaceted nature of communication, and the components and characteristics of the communication. Students that hope to work in a foreign culture learn how to live and work in environments that have values, experiences, and beliefs that are different from their culture. I am a Chinese student currently studying in Canada, and I would like to work in future as a marketing manager for Transsion Holdings, preferably facilitating the introduction of the company's products in other countries. It is necessary to conduct a brief environmental scan on the company to establish global organizational context, available sources of information and how valuable they are, contents of the sources in relation to my desired career, nature of the sources of information, how the global context differs from my current work or life, the global qualities or relationships that can be seen with the organization, and the intercultural differences or conflicts to be anticipated and how I can address them.

Transsion Holdings Environmental Scan

The Global Organization Position/Context to Be Researched

The global organizational position being researched in the current paper is a marketing manager for Transsion Holdings. The position is of interest to me due to a variety of reasons. In recent years, China has emerged as a major player in the global economy. The country has grown dramatically in recent years and has surpassed the United States as the largest tradition partner with several countries in Africa and Latin America ("China's Growing Influence," 2019). The growth means that more Chinese companies are moving into new markets to introduce and promote their products. Some of the key investments that the firms are pushing into new markets include infrastructure, aerospace, artificial intelligence, and newer communication technologies such as 5G. The companies, therefore, require people that are skilled in intercultural communication to handle marketing activities in foreign markets.

While there are many Chinese companies that one can represent in foreign countries, I am particularly interested in Transsion Holdings because of several reasons. Firstly, the firm operates in an area that I would like to work – the development, manufacture, and sale of mobile phones. The Company was established in 2006 and manufactured three phone brands (Itel, Tecno, and Infinix). While Transsion Holdings initially focused on emerging markets in Africa and South Asia, it has made great strides to the point that one of its phone brands (Tecno) has reached top 10 best-selling phones in the world ("TECNO Mobile Reaches Top 10 in the World," n.d.). The company is at a stage where it may want to move into bigger markets in Asia, Europe, and America. Therefore, as opposed to other Chinese technology companies (such as Oppo, Lenovo, Huawei, and Xiomi) that have already established themselves globally, Transsion Holdings has numerous opportunities for culturally competent marketers.

Sources of Information Available

Transsion Holdings is relatively new in the league of large multinational firms. The company has traditionally sold its mobile phone products in developing markets in Africa and South Asia and, therefore, little is known about its products outside there. Sources of information regarding the company's position in the markets it operates, growth strategies, and other plans are limited. Being the parent company, Transsion Holdings keeps a low profile, and its specific phone brands are much known than the company. Consumers are not even aware of the fact that the phone brands are owned by the same mother company. There are several studies on specific phone brands, such as Tecno and Infinix, which are published in English. The company's website seems to be the best information source as it documents various activities undertaken by the firm. From the website, it can be noted that the company has a particular focus on the African market, including having research and design teams in Kenya and Nigeria to help in the development of culturally appropriate products. One reputable study that discusses the Tecno Mobile's growth strategies in Africa is conducted by India Business Studies Center for Management Research (ICMR) and is published on the organization's website. Another reputable source is a market research study assessing the market entry strategies adopted by multinational smartphone companies in Kenya, and particularly focuses on Tecno Mobile. The research articles are important to me because they provide information on how the company has managed to focus and successfully market its products in the African cultural context and other markets in Asia. Some sources are basically in the form of news or online magazine articles that provide information on strategies and advances by the different brands under Transsion Holdings.

Information Outlined by the Sources

As noted earlier, my primary interest is information that facilitates the understanding of the cultural context within which Transsion Holdings operates, particularly concerning how it markets its products in foreign cultures. The first valuable source is the ICMR article, "TECNO Mobile's Growth Strategies in Africa." It outlines specific information on how the Tecno brand entered the African market, including marketing activities, community empowerment, the success in the African market, other regions the brand is moving into, and the challenges experienced. Concerning marketing, the source has helped me learn the marketing strategies employed by the brand. The first step was to design products that were suited to the African market. The second one was to ensure that its products were widely distributed in Africa, well-advertised, and available for purchase in physical stores ("TECNO Mobile's Growth Strategies," 2018). The advertisement was designed to be highly visible, from shopping malls, billboards, to streetlights. The source also provides information that is more culturally appropriate on Tecno's move into Africa. According to the article, corporate social responsibility (CSR) formed part of the brand's approach ("TECNO Mobile's Growth Strategies," 2018). The brand played a leading role in improving the livelihoods of the African communities, besides having its employees pursue roles in public interest undertakings. The Masters Research project source from the University of Nairobi corroborates the information and adds that Tecno used joint ventures to enter the Kenyan market. I have learned that through joint ventures, the company was able to address its shortfalls regarding knowledge of a foreign culture, as the local partner dealt with cultural aspects of the market (Onyalo, 2016). Bits of information from other websites also have helped me understand the marketing success achieved by the Transsion Holdings conglomerate. An article published on Quartz, titled "A Low-Profile, Chinese Handset

Maker Has Taken Over Africa's Mobile Market," gives a glimpse of how the conglomerate has been successful in Africa (Dahir, 2018). The information from the sources is sufficient for my needs.

Where the Information Comes From

The information comes from a variety of sources, including the company's website, marketing research articles by marketing organizations and universities, and online Magazines. However, slight differences exist in the way the information is presented by authors from different areas. For instance, the author from India (writing about strategies employed by Tecno in Africa) emphasizes on marketing success and the involvement of the company in CSR. However, the research done by a Kenyan shows that joint ventures with local companies could contribute significantly to the success of the Tecno brand in the Kenyan market. Most of the authors, including Dahir (2018) are from countries where Tecno and other Transsion brands have a presence, notably Kenya, Ethiopia, India, and Pakistan. The information may, therefore, have elements of experience with the brand, which increases the objectivity of the source. The two articles are academic works and are, therefore, considered to be more credible compared to other sources such as websites. The two academic articles offer a very detailed explanation of the strategies taken by the Transsion in penetrating the African market. There is more information the phone brands controlled by the conglomerate than the conglomerate itself. While the information available is minimal, it is sufficient for the present analysis. One can effectively use the information to build the international cultural context in which the company operates. The information is also sufficient in comparing my context and the organizational context. One challenge experienced with the sources is that credible ones are few and, hence, it is not possible to effectively compare them and correctly determine the extent of author bias.

Key Differences between the Organization's Global Context and My Life Context

There are key differences between the global context of Transsion Holdings and that of my life. Based on the sources, it can be established that while the Company is Chinese in Origin, it is more focused on the African and Southern Asian markets for its phone brands. The success registered by the phone maker in Africa is way higher than its home country, China. It is, therefore, assumed that the organization's global context for its phone brands is mainly focused on the African market. The assumption is reinforced by the fact that the conglomerate has R&D centers in Kenya and Nigeria, a phone manufacturing factory in Ethiopia, and by far the largest market share in Africa ("Company Profile," n.d.). The context contrasts with that of my current life. Though I come from China, I am currently studying in Canada. I have been in the country for a number of years and have managed to learn a number of aspects in which the Western culture differs with the Chinese culture. While both contexts represent foreign cultures, my foreign cultural experience is Western, as opposed to the African culture that forms the core focus of the conglomerate. I am however aware of what I should do to improve cultural communication when I am in a culture other than my own. While the company initially focused on the African market, it has now moved into new markets in Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia and intends to enter Western ones in the future. Therefore, my current cultural context will still be useful in marketing its products when it finally moves into the English-speaking western world. I can however fit in any other country that uses English as one of the languages they use for communication.

Transsion Holdings Global Relationship/Leadership Qualities

Readily available information about the conglomerate identifies it with success achieved in the African market. The success is based on the company's phone brands that currently hold the largest market share in the Africa continent. In 2018, it sold over 124 million mobile phones worldwide and was ranked fourth in global mobile phone brands ("Company Profile," n.d.). Hidden data shows that the firm is spreading globally and now has sales centers in more than 70 countries. The company also provides other services that enable it to cooperate with large technology firms such as Google, Orange, Media Tek, and Facebook. Widespread R&D centers ensure that it develops products that meet the needs of its clientele. In Africa, the company has well-staffed R&D teams in Kenya and Nigeria that work to make sure that the devices developed for the African market are in line with the needs of the people, besides providing value for money. It has also been noted that the company has used joint ventures and franchising arrangements in order to relate better with local market players. By engaging local partners, the company escapes the need to employ individuals that are familiar with the culture of the countries in which it operates. The company has also established manufacturing plants in several countries it operates such as Bangladesh and Ethiopia. The factories are staffed with local workers. In such countries, there is a sense of ownership in the citizens on the devices manufactured by the company. Moreover, Transsion Holdings gives excellent after-sales service, with more than 2000 service contact points in markets it operates ("Company Profile," n.d.). The company seeks to become a global leader in the provision of mobile communication solutions.

Intercultural Differences or Challenges That May Occur

While not likely, a few intercultural challenges or differences may occur in my role as an international marketer for Transsion Holdings. First, there are many people of Chinese origin naturalized in major western countries, such as the United States and Canada. The fact that I am pursuing my education in Canada implies that I am getting accustomed to all cultural communication aspects of Western culture. However, challenges may occur if I am posted to a country that I will be linguistically disadvantaged, such as Germany or France. There could be minor challenges in areas such as comprehension of specific cultural messages in response to brand marketing. For instance, cross-cultural differences have been established concerning how Eastern and Western cultures react to brand dilution. The results indicate that the failure in typical extension leads to less brand dilution in Western culture when individuals are highly motivated, but the exact opposite happens in Eastern cultures (Liu et al., 2014). Other differences may be occasioned by the differences between the devices manufactured by Transsion and western phone manufacturers. Chinese products sometimes face hurdles when penetrating western markets due to the belief that they are poor quality. The company however possesses the capacity to manufacture communication products that meet the cultural needs of western countries. Such cultural aspects that require much deeper cultural understandings are the only ones that I think might be challenging for my future desired work. Therefore, I have to align my cultural context with that intended by the company in relation to the foreign culture in order to succeed.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural understanding is one of the most important competencies in the increasingly

globalized world. Students intending to work in a different culture must equip themselves with skills to ensure smooth cultural communication. In the future, I would like to work as a marketing manager for Transsion Holdings, which is a Chinese company that manufactures mobile communication products under Tecno, Itel, and Infinix brand names. The company has an established presence in Africa and other developing countries where it has attained much success. The firm is on an upward trajectory, and I desire to work with it in future, introducing and marketing its products in Western countries.

References

1. China’s growing influence: Is America getting left behind. (2019). U.S. Global Leadership Coalition. Retrieved from https://www.usglc.org/chinas-growing-influence-is-america-getting-left-behind/
2. Company profile. (n.d.). Transsion Holdings. Retrieved from http://www.transsion.com/en/mobile/about/profile.html
3. Dahir, L. A. (2018). A low-profile, Chinese handset maker has taken over Africa’s mobile market. QUARTZ. Retrieved from https://qz.com/africa/1374404/chinas-transsion-dominates-africas-phone-market-with-tecno-itel/
4. Liu, S., Volcic, Z., & Gallois, C. (2014). Introducing intercultural communication: Global cultures and contexts. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
5. Onyalo, W. (2016). Market entry strategies adopted by multinational smartphone companies in Kenya: A case study of TECNO Mobile (Masters Dissertation). The University of Nairobi, Kenya.
6. TECNO Mobile reaches top 10 in the world. (n.d.). Free Browsing Link. Retrieved from https://www.freebrowsinglink.com/tecno-mobile-reaches-top-ten-in-the-world/
7. TECNO Mobile’s growth strategies in Africa. (2018). ICMR. Retrieved from https://www.icmrindia.org/casestudies/catalogue/Business%20Strategy/BSTR548.htm