# INTERCULTURAL ASPECTS OF CUSTOMER CARE IN SMALL- AND MEDIUM-SIZED COMPANIES IN THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN AREA

TONINO PENCARELLI
*University of Urbino "Carlo Bo", Italy*

LINDA GABIANELLI
*University of Urbino "Carlo Bo", Italy*

EMANUELA CONTI
*University of Urbino "Carlo Bo", Italy*

| 135 |

The objective of this paper is to investigate the intercultural implications of taking care of foreign customers. In particular, the aim of the study are twofold:
1.    Which is the influence of foreign market culture on customer relationship in terms of product features and after-sales services?
2.    How do Italian SMEs perceive the national culture of their foreign customers?
After a theoretical review about the studies about culture and the intercultural aspects of customer relationship management, the study illustrates how five firms located in the Euro-Mediterranean area and operating in the global market manage their foreign customers and which are the managerial implications. Results show that each firm changes the way to manage their foreign markets according to the culture of origin of the customers. Regarding the perception of the national culture, it emerges that the interviewee are, in general, aligned with the Hofstede framework. The study proposes also a conceptual advancement in terms of dimensions to analyse the national culture.

*Key words*: Internationalisation, culture, customer relationship management, product features, after-sales services

## INTRODUCTION

Companies facing the process of globalisation (Codignola 2012) must confront varying environmental context. Each of them demands a specific approach and code of interaction (Drogendijka and Slangenb 2006). The theme of cross-cultural management is extremely important in the global market as it describes both the behaviour of individuals hailing from differing cultural backgrounds within the internal context of a company and cultural differences that exist between organisations from dissimilar cultural contexts.

Creating a winning customer strategy is to deliver a customer value proposition based on a thorough understanding of the customer's culture, value and needs. Customer relationships are strategic assets, and the customer service centre must be made into a strategic part of the organisation and of the customer relationship management system. Nevertheless, most companies see customer service centres as cost centres (Wursten et al. 2009).

This study aims to answer to the following research questions:
1. Which is the influence of foreign market culture on customer relationship in terms of product features and after-sales services?
2. How do Italian SMEs perceive the national culture of their foreign customers?

This paper examines the intercultural aspects linked to customer management, analysing five case studies of firms located in the Euro-Mediterranean area that have to deal with customers from different foreign countries.

The analysis was performed by interviewing the entrepreneur, the sales manager and the export manager. The analysis will show that firms change the way to manage their foreign markets according to the culture of origin of the customers. This article begins with a section presenting the theoretical background about studies on culture and customer relationship management in a cross-cultural perspective. The subsequent section describes the research method and design. Next, the obtained findings are shown. Finally, a concluding section with the

discussion of the results, the theoretical and managerial implications and future research is presented.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *The Definition of Culture and the Role of the Context*

To take an in-depth look at the effect of the culture on commercial interaction with the global markets, one must analyse and observe the evolution of theories on culture. The literature doesn't suggest a unique definition of culture as many definitions have been formulated (Linton 1945; Goodenough 1971; Child and Kieser 1977). However, the complexity of the cultural dimension is accompanied by its progressive relevance in the internationalisation process analysis of enterprises, with particular reference to those business decisions that are most influenced by the social context. Hence the need, in a theoretical perspective, conceptualising the dimensions of culture to define useful reference models in business decisions. The main theories that have tried to define the national culture as objective as possible can be traced to Hofstede, Schwartz and Globe.

Hofstede's framework is the most used and cited in international marketing research. He defined culture as 'a system of shared values, which distinguishes members of one group or category of people from those of another group' (Hofstede et al. 2010, 2001, 2011). Therefore, culture is intrinsic in the mind of individuals, and it can be measured. The study was conducted using as a reference population of IBM employees. Between 1967 and 1973, he administered a questionnaire in 72 countries and in 20 different languages. Hofstede identified five dimensions that are inherent in cultures: power distance (social inequality), individualism (relationship on individuals in a group), masculinity (implications of gender), uncertainty avoidance (handling of uncertainty) and long-term orientation and indulgence (enjoying life and happiness).[3]

---

3   For the characteristics of each dimension in managerial terms, see Brijball Parumasur (2012).

Another model for the analysis of cultural differences is the Schwartz model (2008). The author defined culture as 'something that doesn't reside in the mind and in the action of individuals, but rather it is an external variable by which individuals, for the fact of living in a specific social context, are conditioned'. He identified 10 dimensions as determinants of cultural differences: power, personal success, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security.

Finally, the Globe model (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness) (2004), in which from 1994 to 1997 were surveyed managers of companies considering several social and psychological variables such as attitudes, values and work objectives. The cultural dimensions identified in the study are performance orientation, uncertainty avoidance, in-group collectivism, power distance, gender egalitarianism, human orientation, institutional collectivism, future orientation and assertiveness.

There are other contributions of analysis of culture as those proposed by Hall (1989) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), but they are quite far from a structured process of measurement. Some further frameworks about national culture can be attributed to Schein (1985), Steenkamp (2001), Adler (1980), Kluckholn and Strodtbeck (1961) and Schwarz (2014). At the most general level, a working definition that is useful in considering the effects of culture on global management of practice is 'culture is a set of knowledge structures consisting of systems of values, norms, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural meanings that are shared by members of a social group (society) and that are learned from previous generations' (Alon et al. 2017). Every culture is therefore a state of consciousness that shapes the way we perceive and decode the reality that surrounds us and that determines our 'way of life'.

A relevant factor that affects culture and the interaction between people of different culture is the context (Hall 1989), which is the set of situational factors involved in the various communicative exchanges. The greater is the role of context in a culture, the greater is the difficulty for negotiators of other

cultures in the transmission or acknowledge a message. The distinction is therefore between high-context cultures and low-context cultures.

In high-context cultures (such as China, Latin America, Southern Europe), the external environment, the situation and the nonverbal behaviours are fundamental. Relationships are protracted, personal ties are very strong and you will invest significant amounts of time and energy in creating a relationship of agreement and trust with the other part. In contrast, in low-context cultures (United States, Northern Europe), the emphasis is on the substance, on what is said and on facts. The environment, the situation and the nonverbal behaviours are secondary; rather, it is appreciated a direct style in which interpersonal relationships are of relatively short duration and the personal involvement hasn't a great importance. The research of Hall and other scholars confirms what international business people have learned from practical experience: differences in cross-cultural communication create invisible barriers to international trade.

*Customer Relationship Management in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*

The purpose of the marketing of relationships (Ferdous et al. 2016; Viio and Grönroos 2016) is to identify, consolidate, maintain, enhance and, where necessary, interrupt relationships with customers to achieve the objectives related to economic interests and other variables of all parties (Grönroos 2000). In relationship marketing, the purchase choice depends to a certain extent by mutual influences in the interaction, for which there is an interdependence between the parties.

Grönroos (1996) points out that the tactical elements of a strategy based on the relationship are to have a direct contact with customers and other business partners, to build a database containing the necessary information about customers and to develop a system of customer-oriented services. It emerges that the concept of trust, commitment and attraction has an important role (Usunier and Lee 2013; Schurr and Ozanne 1985). Trust can be defined as the expectation that the other part, in

a given situation, will behave in a predictable manner (Schurr and Ozanne 1985). Commitment means that one of the parties feels motivated to maintain relations with each other as the enduring desire to maintain a valuable relationship. Attraction is finally something that makes a supplier attractive for a particular customer or vice versa. Attraction may be based on financial, technological or social factors.

It is still unclear what the relationship is amongst trust, commitment and attraction on the one hand and the development of commercial relations on the other. However, the existence of trust and engagement with the partner may have a greater weight for customers who attribute greater value to the relationship itself.[4]

Culture, or rather the cultural transferability, plays an important role in the internationalisation of products and services as some markets may be indifferent to certain products and services or to prefer others (De Mooij and Hofstede 2011; Tam et al. 2016; Sharma et al. 2016). Some of the variable that a company has to consider to reduce the risk of failure in a foreign market are differences in product use and expected benefits; product and brand perception; preferences in style, colour and design, just to name a few. Therefore, the message is standardise as much as possible and customise as much as needed. International marketing strategy (Theodosiou and Leonidou 2003) will lead to superior performance only to the extent that it properly matches the unique set of circumstances that the firm is confronted by within a particular overseas market.

An assessment of the potential for adaptation and standardisation at different levels of a product attributes will be useful because consumers from different countries may assign different weights to similar product attributes. The following are the three layers of product attributes that lend themselves more or less to standardisation:

---

4    Numerous scholars have argued that commitment built on trust is essential for effective marketing relationships, and indeed, relationships cannot be created or managed without trust (Caldwell and Clapham 2003; Moorman et al. 1993; Morgan and Hunt 1994).

- Physical attributes (size, weight, colour, etc.). The standardisation of these attributes affords greatest potential for cost benefits since economics of scale are made principally at the manufacturing stage.
- Service attributes (maintenance, after-sales service, spare parts availability, etc). These attributes are fairly difficult to standardise as circumstances for service delivery differ widely from one country to another. It should be emphasised that most services are performed in direct relation to local customers. Service attributes are most dependent on culture.
- Symbolic attributes

The influence of these factors may require a company to either adapt or standardise its offering. Regarding *physical attributes*, the dilemma between standardisation and adaptation depends on the type of markets, the type of product and compatibility with the firms' strategic directions. Furthermore, there are more opportunities for standardisation across developed countries as more of the market factors will be similar. In the case of emerging economies, the opportunities for standardisation are reduced. There is likely to be a range of necessary product modifications, including the use of cheaper components, simpler packaging, fewer product features, all of which enable the product to be sold at lower price. Compulsory adaptation of physical attributes is often related to national regulations and standards such as industrial standard for supply of electricity, safety standards and hygiene regulations.

However, obligatory adaptations are often minor in comparison with the required adaptations to differences in consumer behaviour and in the national marketing environment. According to Levitt (1983), certain aspects or way of life would tend towards uniformity with differences in cultural preferences, national taste, standards and the institutional business environment being remnants of the past (i.e., Chinese food, country music and pizza). Concerning *service attributes*, they include repair and maintenance, after-sales service, installation, instructor manuals, waiting time, delivery dates, guarantees, spare parts availability and return of goods. Service requirements

differ widely from country to country because they are related to environmental factors such as level of technical expertise, level of labour costs, level of literacy, climatic differences and different ways of performing a seemingly identical service. In other words, the concept of service quality is difficult to define since in each culture exists a different conception of service quality (Furrer et al. 2000; Tsoukatos 2011).

The economy, however, can play an important role in the service quality. In developing countries, for example, the customer is willing to accept a lower level of service as it cannot afford higher standards. The same way when a country is in a serious financial crisis, the population eliminates all the unnecessary and take its decisions almost exclusively based on price rather than quality and other characteristics such as resistance (Linan 1996). From a customer perspective, differences have been found in service expectations, service evaluations and service reactions.

Several studies have shown consistency in the dimensions that are important to service quality and the relationship between service quality and satisfaction (Usunier and Lee 2013; Yap and Kew 2007; Gautam 2015). In addition, studies have reported relevant differences in the relationships and value placed on different elements of the product or service (Pepur et al. 2013). The SERVQUAL is the most used framework to assess service quality as it measures the gap between expectations and evaluations of performance, which influences satisfaction. It includes five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy. Service perceptions and evaluations also appear to differ across countries (Sharma 2019). *Symbolically*, the social meaning of many product is more important than their functional utility or at least as important. In terms of product standardisation/adaptation, two different issues should be addressed: the relationship between symbolic attitudes and national product images and the divergent symbolic interpretations. Herbig (2013) thus suggests being flexible in the offer to adapt the service to local markets, to offer assistance, to check before you enter a market, to check the existing restrictions and to take care of foreign customers.

## METHODOLOGY

This study aims to answer to the following research questions:
1. Which is the influence of foreign market culture on customer relationship in terms of product features and after-sales services?
2. How do Italian SMEs perceive the national culture of their foreign customers?

We adopted an intercultural research (Adler 1983; Drenth and Wilpert 1980; Earley and Singh 1995; Peterson 2001; Van de Vijver and Leung 1997) as it seeks to understand the interaction between culturally different individuals in organisational settings. In fact, the intercultural research considers the culture of both parties in the interaction as well as contextual explanations for observed similarities and differences. To answer the research questions, we adopted a multiple-case study analysis (Tsang 2013). 'Multiple cases should be considered like multiple experiments (or multiple surveys).'

In accordance with the strategy of multiple-case research, in this study, we decided to analyse five cases of international firms located in Italy (in the province of Pesaro and Urbino) and that are making business in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The survey has been conducted through a semi-structured interview with the entrepreneur or the sales manager of the companies. The interviewer had a track that illustrates the issues faced during the interview. He was free to set the conversation at his pleasure within a certain subject and ask for clarifications and explanations when it seemed to be necessary (Molteni and Troilo 2007). Once the interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed, they were analysed and interpreted to present the results. The presentation of results was performed according to a narrative perspective or through the story of episodes, and the description of cases often uses the same words of the respondents not to alter the material collected but to transmit the immediacy of the situations studied (Yin 2010; Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007).

The aspects investigated in the interview are

- the general profile of the firm in terms of activity, number of employees, why it became international, how it managed the process of internationalisation, and the intercultural aspect of the product in terms of features of the product that vary according to the culture of the foreign customer;
- the relationship with the foreign customers in terms of how the after-sales service is managed, who is the responsible of this activity and how the firm manages complaints and defects and

- the perception of the national culture of the main foreign market of the firm according to the Hofstede national culture model (as it is the most adopted in literature and for performing empirical studies).

The cases reported concern five companies not similar in terms of number of employees, turnover or activity, but they represent interesting cases of the international market approach of SMEs, and our purpose is to focus on the intercultural aspect of customer care indeed. In particular, we are talking about a furniture manufacturing company, a company that produces heat exchangers for domestic boilers, a firm that produces and sells equipment for agricultural irrigation, a company that produces artistic wooden objects and a goldsmith laboratory.

It is interesting to note that amongst the foreign markets, China is served by three firms, whilst Russia, Germany and United Arab Emirates are markets served by two firms. Other foreign markets involved are Turkey, Iran, France, Germany and Australia. The report of the interviews has been confirmed by the respondents, and the cases were analysed by the authors, thus increasing the internal validity of the multiple case study.


RESULTS

The findings were analysed following the research questions: firstly, showing the profile of the firms and their process of internationalisation; secondly, the product features adapted to foreign cultures and intercultural aspects of customer relationship

and thirdly, the perception of the foreign culture according to SMEs adopting the Hofstede dimensions.

*The Profile of the Firms*

The entrepreneur of the furniture manufacturing firm reports that 90% of the furniture manufacturing company's turnover is generated by the Russian market. The firm decided to offer its products to this market because the entrepreneur understood that whilst a large part of the consumer landscape skewed towards the industrialised modern furniture with a simple image, in some other markets, there was a strong demand for the classic traditional product with high-quality features. Since the company produces furniture exclusively of wood, the manufacturing and the quality of the material have an added value that was going to be lost in the domestic market.

The sales manager of the firm that produces heat exchangers for domestic boilers reported that 70% of the turnover is generated by export activity, of which 50% is from Turkey and the rest between Iran and China. These are the most important markets because Europe is a saturated one, a market where everyone has a boiler and then what you sell is the replacement and because there are policies to reduce emissions to protect the environment and that encourage customers to substitute them. However, Turkey, Iran and China are countries that are becoming very rich, and the middle class is growing having purchasing power.

In the last years, the Chinese government has allocated a considerable amount of money aimed at reducing emissions because more than one million Chinese a year die from pollution problems. The local producer which creates these low-emission systems, or components with low emissions, receives an incentive from the government. It thus represents a new market, and all the major European groups that are going there create the factory in China to produce and to sell to Chinese.

The export manager of the firm producing equipment for agricultural irrigation referred that 75%–80% of the turnover comes from the foreign markets—France, Germany, Russia and Australia. The firm that produces artistic wooden objects is

specialised in the production of original wooden objects, especially to decorate children's rooms.

The entrepreneur reported that 30% of the turnover comes from the foreign markets—12% UAE, 9% Germany, 4% Spain and the remaining 5% from other countries, especially Canada, the United Kingdom, Iran, South Africa and Kuwait. The firm decided to start the international process for three main reasons: first, to find ways to exploit its production capacity which was higher than the needs of the domestic market; second, to diversify the market and third, to exploit the product potential as foreign customers (especially from Germany and Spain) who visited its Italian shops appreciated its products. The goldsmith laboratory was founded in 1986 when the interviewee and his elder brother gave birth to a very small laboratory gold.

Over the years, the turnover has always increased, and simultaneously, the legitimate ambitions of one entrepreneur have increased as he saw that customers were no more the neighbours, but they began to be a little bit from outside the region.

The internationalisation process began in 2002, when, finding in ministerial sites foreign opportunities for small businesses, the firm was contacted by an ICE office in Paris, which proposed to do an exhibition at the Paris National Library. It followed shows in Brussels and London.

The next step was in the United States. The laboratory has been invited by an Italian government organisation to attend an important event to promote and enhance the Made in Italy in the USA. Another important experience in the USA was when in 2007, the laboratory was selected from Ben Bridge, an American jewellery chain with 78 shops in the USA. Ten years ago, the firm started the United Arab Emirates experience. The baptism was negative because the company proposed a very high-quality product at a fair price, but the customer, even if he appreciated the design and the style, he didn't like the price. He just wanted to pay in weight of gold.

Nowadays, the situation is different, and the laboratory has collected the most satisfaction with Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar because the company has figured out how to relate with and which product to offer. However, before starting the

international process, the entrepreneurs decided which product propose abroad; the choice was to bring a single product in every foreign market that is unique processing technique—the technique of filigree. It is a kind of gold embroidery, gold wires that are twisted so many times.

Continuing the internationalisation process three years ago, the firm tried to approach the Chinese market, opening a store in Northern China. The firm sells jewels in one of the most prestigious auction houses near Hong Kong. Today all this experiences and knowledge allow to distinguish not only the product features that the firm is going to propose but also the approach with the customer.

### The Intercultural Aspects of Customer Relationship

Regarding the furniture manufacturing firm, an important aspect has been the ability of the entrepreneur who has grasped the importance of cultural differences amongst countries in making business. 'If the first step was to enter the market with a product that was close enough to their preferences, the next step was to make arrangements with the product in accordance with their expectations crossing the beauty of Made in Italy products with the needs of customers with a strong purchasing power.'

Another important aspect of exporting in foreign countries is trust in customer relationship management. Trust is gained day by day. You conquer your partner, giving everything he wants and respecting what you promised to him. To do this, the firm provides, in all the projects, all relevant documents from the design stage. When the customer sends the countersigned offer and the first transfer, the company delivers the product on time. Relations with new markets are initially constructed by the personal knowledge of the entrepreneur, and then he proceeds to the construction of the commercial network.

In Russia, the company relies on agencies. Regarding the commercial network, the administrative and accounting level is managed by the firm whilst at the operational level, with local agents who are personally selected by the entrepreneur. The furniture manufacturing firm exports its products in the Chinese market too. It generates the 10% of the turnover.

In the Chinese market, the company offers only serially produced products because there are very long delivery times because of excessive time span for the transportation and customs clearance. However, the firm made a wrong analysis of the Chinese market because the serially produced in China suffer from high institutional constraints, impossible for a small family business to sustain. The right choice was therefore to offer only products made on the project. Regarding on the sales network, the firm has just an agent in China. Furthermore, in this market, trust is an important aspect transmitted at the exchange relation whilst payments and post assistance are managed in the same way as the Russian market.

Regarding the firm that produces heat exchangers for domestic boilers, to sell its product abroad, the firm has to comply with the European legislation (PED) because these products can endanger human life. This legislation was also adopted from foreign countries, and then with the same rules, the firm can sell in every country.

In Europe, Turkey and Iran, the firm usually sells three power boilers. In China, as the apartments are much smaller than Europeans, they need less power, and then the firm sells a less powerful boiler.

Regarding the sales network, the company must find people selling or other components of the boiler or builders. They are either nonexclusive agents or distributors. In Turkey, the company has a direct presence, whilst in China and Iran, it has distributors who also sell other components. Concerning customer relationships, culturally, Turks are very similar to Europeans. Iranians have very strict ethics; 'they have the word of honour'. Chinese customer 'exhausts you in price negotiations'. 'If a European negotiate for price, service, delivery, quality, a Chinese strive only for price and not caring about services and quality.'

Another important aspect is that foreign customers pay everything in advance. In Iran, a country that has an embargo by the United States and Europe, sales management is a little complicated because the customer can't make out the money from the country, so he must rely on foreign banks. In China, if you face your product with a Chinese manufacturer, it is a

suffering because Chinese promote the local producer. If the local producer sells in Europe, he is granted a tax refund. The government covers part of the cost incurred by the company to sell in Europe. The Chinese government encourages the export and the domestic market, whilst the exporter has a duty of 18% and will not sell ever. The firm can sell in this market because it offers an innovative product that Chinese are not still able to realise.

The interviewee reports that learning about the culture of foreign customers in exchange relations is very important. The Chinese focuses all on the relationship. When you start the business with a Chinese customer, you always have to go visit him, go to dinner with him where it takes you to toast, shake hands and make the usual photo to start a consolidated relationship. The Iranian is a real gentleman, keeps his word, signs the contract and keeps it from beginning to end without an eyelash batting. The Turkish is always looking for more discounts and better conditions and tries to deceive you. Regarding the assistance service, at the European level, when you supply this product, you must attach a sheet of compliance on any lot you deliver (the so-called PED) and a manual of use and maintenance.

The quality is fundamental because the product you provide is dangerous. The assistance is mainly to understand what happened to a defective product, and it is usually done in the laboratories of the client and of the firm to seek for a solution together. Defects are divided into two types: The first is the production defects, where the customer stops the product and sends it back, and in a few days, the company must guarantee it. The second is the functional defectiveness, where it has a defect that you can view in the time of assembly. It is important to check these errors because the client makes you pay both the piece that you need to replace and the service assistance.

In the sector of equipment for agricultural irrigation, each country has its own needs given the particular characteristics of the machine. For example, East countries buy standardised equipment without too many accessories, whilst more developed countries buy machines technologically equipped. For example, in Europe, machines are usually computed and fully

accessorised. Russians, on the contrary, buy machinery very large but very simple and not equipped since they have a large amount of manual labour. In Australia, in general, the company sells products fully accessorised as 'Australians spare no expense'.

In addition, in any country, people use machines of different sizes that fit the needs of local farmers and the geographical areas (depending on the type of soil, slope, size of the parcels, etc). In general, if the customer has particular needs, the firm is easily able to customise the product required. The sales network consists mostly by retailers (or big dealers of agricultural machinery and companies specialised in irrigation) and some agents. The retailer provides the installation, technical assistance, reliability and spare parts available. If there are problems during the period of warranty, the manufacturer sends their technicians, spare parts and components. In special cases, or important projects, the manufacturer is directly involved in it. The firm has also an after-sales office that manages technical problems and warranties.

Learning about the culture of foreign clients in customer relationships is essential. It is important to respect the local customs, which may change according to religion and traditions. For example, in Russia, during meal, it is a custom to thank customers and suppliers by standing, making a short speech and toasting with a 'tost'. In Islamic countries, where the negotiation between customer and supplier is sacred and necessary, 'it is a kind of sealing of the sale'. 'Islamic countries are those which require more attention and care.' Trust is the major component in the relationships with the foreign markets. It is equal as regards to payments. The company has loyal foreign customers to which it grants delayed terms of payment, but normally, foreign customers pay in advance (above all for countries outside the CEE).

Regarding the product features offered by the firm that produces artistic wooden objects, the product is appreciated in different countries, and the most requested are Pinocchio, the ladybug in flight (with open wings) and the classical dancer. The products do not require specific technical modifications to satisfy the preferences of foreign customers with rare exceptions. For example, the United Arab Emirates customers have requested to

create bigger objects (e.g., the license plate to put on the doors is 50% bigger than Italians). South Africa customers required to realise new animals of the savannah, the so-called Big Five: lion, zebra, giraffe, hippopotamus.

Regarding the legislation on consumer and environmental protection, the products of the firm are complying with the European legislation. As the European legislation is quite stringent, it allows the company to be almost complied with the legislations of other foreign countries. Rarely, they are slightly restrictive than the European one, for example, in the United States, for the clocks since they represent a critical component, not so much for reasons of consumer safety but as potentially dangerous objects because of terrorism. In that situation, rather than modify the product, the firm had to better explain the technical specifications, even if they were already compliant with the requirements.

With regard to the sales network, the company has approximately 100 retailers that distribute at brand stores (25) and in corner stores (75). In Canada, South Africa and the United Kingdom, the firm has a distribution agreement with territorial exclusivity. The entrepreneur is aware that learning the culture of the foreign country is crucial to develop successful relationships with foreign customers: 'It is very important to know the country through a preliminary study of the religious, cultural and geographical aspects, then to study in-depth the profile of the customer and, finally, to empathize with the customer.'

Arab customers are featured by a strong culture of commercial negotiations. With them, you have to be willing to deal: 'If you think you have given him the best possible commercial condition, usually they think that you could give him a little bit more.' Spanish customer is more sanguine, empathic. Usually, 'the negotiation with Spanish customers is very similar to that between Italians, you reach a compromise and have a drink at the bar.'

The German client is much more structured: 'Once you have defined a product at a certain price he will not ask you more, especially if the relationships is consolidated and trusting, as he knows that I give exactly what I can.' He respects the agreed conditions (e.g., payment terms), and at the same time, he demands respect (e.g., in terms of delivery).

In summary, there are three types of negotiations: the exasperating negotiation with the Arabs, the structured or schematic negotiation with the Germans and the creative negotiation with the Spanish. Referred to after-sales service, it is managed by dealers. If necessary, the firm uses mainly e-mails and videos on Skype for a matter of costs. Trust is the key component in business relations with the foreign markets: 'It takes a long time to build trust and it takes very little to destroy it, especially with countries such as Germany, while with Latin countries such as Spain you can find always a way to reach agreement.' Luckily, the products are very rarely defective, and the firm adopt always the logic to solve problems and never say 'I am not wrong', trying to turn every contact point to an opportunity to promote its products.

Regarding the goldsmith laboratory, the jewel is generally combined with precious stones or cameos which is a worked shell in their back in which you create drawings that often represent female figures, frequently with bared breasts. It is strongly not recommended to propose a cameo like that the Arabs because it isn't respectful. 'However, the small artisan generally does not market research as he considers to propose the same thing to everyone. Therefore, it is important to know well the different cultures and bring a product that respect the culture and doesn't offend the customer.'

A further important aspect is the sacredness of the stones. Chinese adore a jewel with the jade. If you propose the same jewel to an Italian or an American, he remains indifferent as it is considered less precious, not valuable. Chinese consider amber a little magic stone from miraculous properties, and therefore, it is very pleasing, especially when set in jewel. 'Although maintaining the same design there was the need to adapt to custom and traditions of the destination country.' The company won the challenge by typing the customer profile. The American customer appreciates the style, the elegance and the softness of the forms of jewel however wants a sophisticated and very high-quality product. The Arab customer doesn't give importance to the jewel design but gives high value to weight of the gold and to the price. The Chinese customer can stay in front of jewel for hours, looking it in all perspectives and in silence. He prefers

lighter forms, basic but embellished for something special. Amber, coral and ruby stones are those which give a lot of value. They will never ask the price of the stone. They want to know the story behind the jewel and the stone since the creation phase.

However, the Chinese customer is very difficult to conquer. Because he is very wary and careful of what he is buying, he does all the questions and then chooses. However, the relationship with the foreign customer is based on trust and respect. Another relevant aspect is how the firm manage the service assistance and complaints. In the UAE, the laboratory has an agent and the personal presence of the entrepreneur during the two main fair of the sector. In China and the USA, the assistance is managed by the stores and by the jewellery chain, respectively.

It is also necessary to know the customs regulations of the destination country. For example, in Bahrain, it is forbidden to enter products with pearls. For the Emirates, there is a list of stones that cannot enter the country, especially to political dynamics. (As the Emirates has problems with Tanzania, tanzanite stone cannot enter in the Emirates.)

*The Perception of Foreign Culture According to Italian SMEs*

To understand the interviewees' perception of the national culture of the foreign markets, we have adopted the Hofstede model. In particular, we asked them to give their impression of the national culture according to each dimension of the Hofstede model: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation. In addition, we compared the Italian SMEs perception with the results of the Hofstede study. In general, the thoughts of the interviewees are quite aligned with the results obtained by Hofstede (Table 1). The words in red show the differences between the opinion of the respondents and the results of the Hofstede study.

*Table 1: Perception of the interviewees about the national culture of foreign customs*

| | Power distance (PD) | Individualism vs Collectivism (IVC) | Masculinity vs Femininity (MVF) | Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) | Long-Term Orientation (LTO) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **China** | A. High B. High E. High (High) | A. Collectivism B. Collectivism E. Collectivism (Collectivism) | A. Masculinity B. Masculinity E. Masculinity (Masculinity) | A. Low B. Low E. Low (High) | A. Short B. Long E. Short (Short) |
| **Russia** | A. High C. High (High) | A. Collectivism C. Collectivism (Collectivism) | A. Femininity C. Femininity (Femininity) | A. High C. High (High) | A. Long C. Long (Long) |
| **Turkey** | B. High (High) | B. Collectivism (Collectivism) | B. Masculinity (Masculinity) | B. Low (High) | B. Short (Short) |
| **Iran** | B. High (High) | B. Collectivism (Collectivism) | B. Femininity (Femininity) | B. Low (Low) | B. Long (Long) |
| **France** | C. High (High) | C. Collectivism (Collectivism) | C. Femininity (Femininity) | C. High (High) | C. Long (Long) |
| **Germany** | C. Low D. Low (Low) | C. Collectivism D. Collectivism (Collectivism) | C. Masculinity D. Femininity (Masculinity) | C. Low D. Medium-High (Low) | C. Long D. Long (Long) |
| **Australia** | C. Low (Low) | C. Collectivism (Collectivism) | C. Masculinity (Masculinity) | C. Low (Low) | C. Long (Long) |
| **Spain** | D. Medium-Law (High) | D. Collectivism (Collectivism) | D. Femininity (Femininity) | D. Medium (High) | D. Short (Short) |
| **UAE** | D. High E. High (High) | D. Collectivism E. Collectivism (Collectivism) | D. Masculinity E. Masculinity (Masculinity) | D. High E. High (High) | D. Long E. High (NA) |
| **USA** | E. Low (Low) | E. Collectivism (Collectivism) | E. Masculinity (Masculinity) | E. Low (Low) | E. High (Low) |

Source: Authors' own analysis

Legend:
*A=The furniture manufacturing firm*
*B=The heat exchangers for domestic boilers manufacturer*
*C=The firm producing equipment for agricultural irrigation*
*D=The firm manufacturing artistic wooden objects*
*E=The goldsmith laboratory*
*( )=Hofstede Study*

Italian entrepreneurs have the same perception of the Russian national culture. There are some discrepancies in the perception of the Chinese (LTO), German (IVC, MVF, UA) and Arab culture (IVC, LTO). The main discrepancies concern the perception of the Turkey market as the interviewee considers it as an individualistic, masculinity society and with a low uncertainty avoidance, whilst Hofstede, in his study, defines Turkey as a collectivistic and femininity country with a high uncertainty avoidance. The producer of artistic wooden objects perceives the German culture as a collectivistic, femininity and with a high uncertainty avoidance, whilst the results of Hofstede are different. All these different perceptions could be reconducted to the presence of subcultures inside of the national culture or to the subjective perception of the interviewees (Taras, Kirkman and Steel 2010).

## DISCUSSION

### Main Results of the Study and Implications

Commerce is about personal selling and establishing continuity in the relationship with individual customers, organisational buyers and intermediates (Usunier and Lee 2013). As a matter of fact, the literature (Grönroos 2007, 2016) underlines that we are moving to a new competitive situation that we can describe as competitive of services (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014).

The first research question of the study tried to understand the influence of foreign market culture on customer relationship in terms of product features and after-sales services. It emerges clearly that culture influences the relationship with foreign customers both in terms of product features and after-sales services, so much so that each case study accepted the challenge of customer management, adapting the domestic culture to foreign culture. Referring to the international communication strategy, Table 2 shows that three firms adopt a glocal strategy except for the firm producing equipment for agriculture irrigation and the goldsmith laboratory, which adopt a local approach.

Table 2: International paradigms and after-sales services

| After-sales services | Standardised | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Adapted | Furniture manufacturing firm Heat exchangers for domestic boilers manufacturer Artistic wooden objects producer | Equipment for agriculture irrigation producer Goldsmith laboratory |
| | | Standardised | Adapted |
| | | Product | |

This means that three case studies offer a standardised product and adapt the after-sales service according to the culture of their customer, whilst two case studies offer a customised product and adapt the after-sales service activities in accordance with the culture of the foreign markets (Kraus et al. 2016). Analysing these five firms, it emerges that they have some aspects in common. The amount of the turnover generated by foreign market sales is relevant in all case studies, so the contribution to their sustainability is fundamental. An interviewee reported that 'internationalization has supported the company from the financial point of view as foreign customers pay before the withdrawal of the product'. This is a relevant aspect, above all, for small family businesses. All the cases reported have grasped the requirements to succeed in international markets, adapting products and services to local market and its culture and offering assistance, in brief, taking care of the foreign customer as Herbig (2013) suggested (Table 3).

Table 3: Relevant aspects emerging from case studies

| Aspects | Furniture manufacturing firm | Heat exchangers for domestic boilers manufacturer | Equipment for agriculture irrigation producer | Artistic wooden objects producer | Goldsmith laboratory |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Why become international | Saturation of the domestic market | Saturation of the European market | Natural process | 1. Saturation of the domestic market 2. Market diversification3. High potential appreciation of the product in the foreign markets | Ambition of one of the founding members |
| How to become international | Same product to different foreign markets | Same product except to China | Different product for different markets | Same product to different foreign markets with few exceptions | Different product for different markets |
| Main foreign market | China and Russia | China, Iran and Turkey | France, Germany, Russia and Australia | UAE, Germany and Spain | UAE, China and USA |
| Sales network | China: 1 agent Russia: 2 agencies for serials 1 for contract | Turkey: direct presence China Iran: retailers | Retailers | 100 retailers: 25 brand stores, 75 corner stores | UAE: direct participation to a fair sector and 1 agent China: 3 stores USA: jewellery chain |
| Assistance service provider | Dealer | Retailer | Retailer | Retailers, e-mail of firm | Agents, store and at least the firm |
| Keyword of customer relationship management | Trust and commitment | Trust, commitment and price | Trust and respect | Trust, respect and collaboration | Trust and respect |
| International approach | Think global, act local | Think global, act local | Think local, act local | Think global, act local | Think local, act local |
| Degree of attention to intercultural aspects | High | High | High | High | High |

Source: Authors' own analysis

As said in the theoretical background, international after-sales activities involve issues, including the dilemma between the opening of a customer service centre abroad with specially trained personnel and choosing a care provider or an independent local distributor. As a matter of fact, small enterprises are not able to open customer service centres in each country they export. The firms analysed have solved the dilemma between the opening of a customer service centre abroad and choosing a care provider or an independent local distributor, resorting to retailers or agents which provide assistance service to customers, according to their cultural expectations, reducing the cultural gap because they have the same culture as the customers. In particular, the firm producing furniture recourses for its sales network to agents, whilst the sales networks of other firms are based mainly on retailers.

In terms of service quality, all five firms based their competitive advantage on the service quality offered. The foreign customers have a good perception of the service quality they offer (Gummesson and Costabile 2006; Schiffman and Wisenblit 2015), and almost all the foreign markets are careful about it (such as Russia and Australia), whilst others pay more attention to price and discounts (such as Iran and China) even if they consider the technical assistance of the producer a relevant aspect. The quality concept in terms of excellence innate emerges clearly in the case of the firm that produces wood furniture, designed by Italian designers, as well as in the case of the goldsmith laboratory and the artistic wooden objects producer. The quality in terms of subjective matter emerges in the firm that produces and sells equipment that better fit to the needs of local farmers.

Customer assistance in terms of warranties, manuals and instructions (that is, conformity to certain specification) emerges in the case of the heat exchangers and domestic boiler manufacturer in which a prerogative for exporting its products is to attach a sheet of compliance (the so-called PED), the manual of use and maintenance, on any lot that it sells. Another aspect that firms have in common is the term of payment. Foreign customers pay in advance the product required. Regarding the Chinese market, it is interesting to note that firms confirm the

presence of high institutional constraints. It appears that the Chinese government promotes local producers and helps them (granting a tax refund) in selling abroad.

As regards the Russian market, it emerges that on the one hand, customers buy standard product that are simple and not equipped (such as for the purchasing of equipment for agricultural irrigation). On the other hand, they have a taste for the requested product, a traditional and high-quality one (in the case of furniture).

Despite their different culture of origin, the importance of the relationship with foreign customers, focusing it on trust, commitment and respect emerges. These elements are on the basis of customer relationship management, and trust is a critical variable in different cultures, confirming what emerges in literature (Usunier and Lee 2013; Schurr and Ozanne 1985). In addition, an extremely important condition to succeed in the global market and to adequately respond to customers' needs and preferences emerges, that is, to be aware of cultural differences (Pomirleanu et al. 2016; Gesteland 2012). Without cultural awareness, it is impossible to be effective in an international context.

Managing the knowledge of other culture is a key to succeed in the global markets because cultural background determines the reaction of a market to products and business proposals (Powers and Loika 2010). The relevance of the intercultural competence defined as the ability to communicate successfully with people from different cultures stimulated the attention of business studies to intercultural aspects as the business negotiations are, in fact, a moment of encounter in which people from different cultures with different attitudes and behaviours come into contact.

It is fundamental that successful sales managers develop a sensitivity to the cultural level, identifying cultural differences and their potential implications for the sales process (Herbig 2013; Ihtiyar and Fauziah 2014, 2015a, 2015b). They should also be informed about the practices in the field of trade of the countries with which they intend to treat (Browaeys and Price 2015; Lustig and Koester 2013). The profile of the interviewee seems to

adequately respond to these characteristics to successfully manage the foreign markets and to negotiate with people from different cultures. An additional managerial implication that emerges from the study could be the expanding marketing department tasks. It could monitor over time the needs of foreign customers and develop better relationships with foreign customers, considering the cultural variable and how it evolves over time.

The success in the foreign markets for all the small and medium enterprises studied is mainly because

- the products are offered with high-quality materials and suitable with the customer expectations,
- long-term relationships with foreign retailers are established to co-create value to deliver to the final customer,
- customers relate with retailers skilful, competent and of the same culture and
- customers acknowledge a high-technical quality of the offering.

The second objective of the study wanted to investigate how Italian SMEs perceive the national culture of their foreign customers. The perception of the national culture of the foreign markets confirms in general that the Hofstede model is still valid. In fact, the thoughts of the interviewees are quite aligned with the results obtained by Hofstede in his study (Table 3). In this sense, it could be a useful tool for export managers who intend to approach a foreign market for getting primary information about national culture. The study proposes a conceptual advancement. As the concept of service differs according to the culture of origin, it could be interesting to add to the Hofstede model the service perception as a new dimension to analyse the national culture.

In this way, a firm that has the intention to sell in a new market could get primary information about what the customers expect from it in terms of service. Beugelsdijk et al. (2017) make some suggestion in the usage of the Hofstede model: distinguish between country effects and culture effects, integrate additional cultural dimensions (Kirkman et al. 2006) and asses the effect size.

*Research Limitations and Future Research*

The study presents also some limits. We presented the preliminary results of an empirical study, which is the first step of the interviews realised. We should improve the results considering the triangulation. We could also strengthen the results by interviewing other firms belonging to different sectors or of different size to identify more features of the intercultural customer management. Extending the sample, we could generalise the results from a statistical point of view. Investigating the relationship with firms located in other countries of the Euro-Mediterranean area could be very interesting.

Further research studies could analyse the perception of retailers about the relationship with firms and make a comparison by asking them to evaluate the services offered. We could also deepen the characteristics of the national culture and try to understand how foreign markets perceive the Italian firms and the Italian culture. In this way, firms could get useful information to improve their activity and their offering.

REFERENCES

Adler, N. J. 1983. 'Cross-cultural management research: the ostrich and the trend'. *Academy of Management Review*, 8 (1): 226–232.

Adler, N. J. 1980. Cultural Synergy: The management of cross-cultural organizations. In Buke, W.W. and Goodstein, L.D. (Eds.), *Trends and Issues in Organizational Development: Current Theory and Practice*, edited by W. W. Buke and L. D. Goodstein, 163–184. San Diego: University Associates.

Ah Chong, L. M. and Thomas, D.C. 1997. 'Leadership perceptions in cross-cultural context: Pacific Islanders and Pakeha in New Zeland'. *Leadership Quarterly*, 8 (3): 275–293.

Alon, I., Jaffe, E., Prange, C. and Vianelli, D. 2017. *Global marketing: Contemporary theory, Practice, and* Cases. New York: Routledge.

Beugelsdijk, S., Kostova, T. and Roth, K. 2017. 'An overview of Hofstede-inspired country-level culture research in international business since 2006'. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 48 (2): 30–47.

Browaeyes, M., Price, R. 2015. *Understanding Cross-Cultural Management*. London: Prentice Hall.

Caldwell, C. and Clapham, S. 2003. 'Organizational trustworthiness: An international perspective'. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 47 (4): 349–364.

Child, J. and Kieser, A. 1977. A contrast in British and West German management practices: Are recipes of success culture bound?. Paper presented at the Conference on Cross-Cultural Studies on Organizational Functioning, Hawaii.

Codignola, F. 2012. Global Corporate Culture and Cross-Cultural Management. In *Managerial Economics and Global Corporations*, edited by S. Brondoni, 57–72. Torino: Giappichelli.

De Mooij, M. and Hofstede, G. 2011. 'Cross-Cultural Consumer Behavior: A Review of Research Findings'. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 23, 181–192.

Drent, P. J. D. and Wilpert, B. 1980. 'The Role of "Social Contracts" in Cross-Cultural Research'. *International review of Applied Psychology*, 29 (3): 293–306.

Drogendijka, R. and Slangenb, A. 2006. 'Hofstede, Schwartz, or Managerial Perceptions? The Effects of Different Cultural Distance Measures on Establishment Mode Choices by Multinational Enterprises'. *International Business Review,* 15 (4): 361–380.

Earley, P.C. and Singh, H. 1995. 'International and Intercultural Management Research: What's next?". *Academy of Management Journal*, 38 (2): 327–340.

Eisenhardt, K. M. and Graebner, M. E. 2007. 'Theory building from cases: opportunities and challenges'. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50 (1): 25–32.

Ferdous Hoque, S. F., Sinkovics, N. and Sinkovics, R. R. 2016. 'Supplier strategies to compensate for knowledge asymmetries in buyer-supplier relationships: implications for economic upgrading'. *European Journal of International Management*, 10 (3): 254–283.

Furrer, O., Shaw-Ching Liu, B. and Sudharshan, D. 2000. 'The relationships between culture and service quality perceptions'. *Journal of Service Research*, 2 (4): 355–371.

Gautam, V. 2015. 'Service Quality Perceptions of Customers about Mobile Telecommunication Services: A Case of India'. *Journal of Global Marketing,* 28 (1): 19–31.

Gesteland, R. R. 2012. *Cross-Cultural Business Behaviour: A Guide for Global Management*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press.

Gibbert, M., Ruigrok, W. and Wicki, B. 2008. 'What Passes as a Rigorous Case Study?'. *Strategic Management Journal*, 29 (13): 1465–1474.

Goodenough, W. H. 1971. *Culture, Language and Society, Modular Publications*, California: The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company, Inc.

Grönroos, C. and Grönroos, C. 2016. 'Internationalization Strategies for Services: A Retrospective'. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 30 (2): 129–132.

Grönroos, C. and Gummerus, J. 2014. "The Service Revolution and its Marketing Implications: Service Logic vs Service-dominant Logic", *Managing Service Quality*, 24 (3), 206-229.

Gronroos, C. 1996. 'Relationship Marketing Logic'. *Asia-Australia Marketing Journal*, 4 (1): 7–18.

Gronroos, C. 2000. *Service Management and Marketing: A Customer Relationship Management Approach*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Grönroos, C. 2007. *Service Management and Marketing: Customer Management in Service Competition*. Toronto: Wiley.

Gummesson, E. and Costabile, M. 2006. *Marketing Relazionale: Gestione del Marketing nei Network di Relazioni*. Milano: Hoepli

Hall, E.T. 1989. *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor Press.

Herbig, P. 2013. *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Marketing*. New York: Routledge.

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, M. (2010) *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G. 2001. *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Value, Behaviours, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Hofstede, G. 2011. 'Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context'. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2 (1): 3–26.

Holmqvist, J., Van Vaerenbergh, Y. and Grönroos, C. 2017. 'Language use in services: Recent advances and directions for future research'. *Journal of Business Research*, 72 (2): 114–118.

House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W. and Gupta, V. 2004. *Culture, Leadership and Organizations: The Globe Study of 62 Societies*. London: SAGE.

Ihtiyar, A. and Fauziah, S.A. 2015a. 'The impact of Intercultural Communication Competence on Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction'. *Services Marketing Quarterly*, 36 (2): 136–152.

Ihtiyar, A. and Fauziah, S. A. 2014. 'Intercultural Communication Competence as a Key Activator of Purchase Intention'. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 150 (21): 590–599.

Ihtiyar, A. and Fauziah, S. A. 2015b. 'The Role of Intercultural Communication Competence on Service Reliability and Customer Satisfaction'. *Journal of Economic and Social Studies*, 5 (1): 145–168.

Kirkman, B. L., Lowe, K. B. and Gibson, C. 2006. 'A quarter century of Culture's Consequences: A Review of the Empirical Research Incorporating Hofstede's Cultural Value Framework'. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 36 (3): 285–320.

Kluckhohn, F. R. and Strodtbeck, F. L. 1961. *Variations in Value Orientations*. New York: Row and Peterson.

Kraus, S., Meier, F., Eggers, F., Bouncken, R. B. and Schuessler, F. 2016. 'Standardisation vs. Adaption: A Conjoint Experiment on the Influence of Psychic, Cultural and Geographical Distance on International Marketing Mix Decisions'. *European Journal of International Management*, 10 (2): 127–156.

Levitt, T. 1983. 'The Globalization of Markets'. *Harward business review*, 61 (3): 92–102.

Linton, R. 1945. *The Cultural Background of Personality*. New York: Appleton-Century.

Lustig, L. W. and Koester, J. 2013. *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures.* London: Pearson.

Moorman, C., Zaltman, M. and Deshpandé, R. 1993. 'Relationship Marketing Between Providers and Users of Marketing Research: The Dynamic of Trust Within and Between Organisations'. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 29, (2): 314–328.

Morgan, R. and Hunt, S. 1994. 'The Commitment Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing'. *Journal of Marketing*, 58 (3): 20–38.

Pepur, M., Mihanović, Z. and Pepur, S. 2013. 'Analysis of the Effect of Perceived Service Quality to the Relationship Quality on the Business-to-Business Market'. *Management*, 18 (2): 97–109.

Peterson, M. F. 2001. 'International Collaboration in Organizational Behaviour Research'. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 22 (2): 59–81.

Pomirleanu, N., Mariadoss, V. B. and Chennamaneni, P. R. 2016. 'Managing Service Quality in High Customer Contact B2B Services Across Domestic and International Markets.' *Industrial Marketing Management*, 55 (2): 131–143.

Powers, T.L. and Loika, J. J. 2010. 'Adaptation of Marketing Mix Elements in International Markets'. *Journal of Global marketing*, 23 (1): 65–79.

Rosette, A. S., Brett, J. M., Barsness Z. and Lytle A. L. 2012. 'When Cultures Clash Electronically: The Impact of E-mail and Social Norms on Negotiation Behaviour and Outcomes'. *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, 43 (3): 628–643.

Schein, E. H. 1985. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

| 164 |

Schiffman, L. G. and Wisenblit, J. L. 2015. *Consumer Behavior, Global Edition*. New Jersey: Pearson.

Schurr, P. H. and Ozanne, J. L. 1985. 'Influence Exchange Process: Buyers' Preconceptions of a Seller's Trustworthiness and Bargaining Thoughts'. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 11 (4): 939–953.

Schwartz, S. H. 2014. 'Rethinking the Concept and Measurement of Societal Culture in Light of Empirical Findings'. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 45 (1): 5–13.

Schwartz, S. H. 2008. *Cultural Value Organizations: Nature and Implications of National Differences*. Moscow: State University – Higher School of Economics Press.

Sharma, P. 2019. *Intercultural Service Encounters: Cross-cultural Interactions and Service Quality*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sharma, P. and Wu, Z. 2015. 'Consumer Ethnocentrism vs. Intercultural Competence as Moderators in Intercultural Service Encounters'. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 29 (2): 103–111.

Sharma, P., Wu, Z. and Su, Y. 2016. 'Role of Personal Cultural Orientations in Intercultural Service Encounters'. *Journal of Services Marketing,* 30 (2): 223–237.

Steenkamp, J. B. E. M. 2001. 'The Role of National Culture in International Marketing Research.' *International Marketing Review*, 18 (1): 30–44.

Tam, J. L. M., Sharma, P. and Kim, N. 2016. 'Attribution of Success and Failure in Intercultural Service Encounters: the Moderating Role of Personal Cultural Orientations'. *Journal of Services Marketing* 30 (6): 643–658.

Theodosiou, M., Leonidou, L. C. 2003. 'Standardization Versus Adaptation of International Marketing Strategy: An Integrative Assessment of the Empirical Research'. *International Business Review*, 12 (2): 141–171.

Thomas, D. C. 1999. 'Cultural Diversity and Work Group Effectiveness: An Experimental Study'. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 30 (3): 242–263.

Thomas, D. C. and Ravlin, E. C. 1995. 'Responses of Employees to Cultural Adaptation by a Foreign Manager'. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80 (2): 133–146.

Thomas, D. C., Ravlin, E. C. and Wallace, A. W. 1996. 'Cultural Diversity in Work Teams'. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 14 (2): 1–13.

Trompenaars, F. and Hampden-Turner, C. 1997. *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business*. New York: McGraw-hill.