

MK3111 - International Marketing

2018

Assessment Cover Sheet for Assignment One

Assessment Due Date: 13th December 2018

Please complete the following:

I confirm that this assignment which I have submitted is all my own work and the source of any information or material I have used (including the internet) has been fully identified and properly acknowledged as required in the school guidelines I have received.

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This essay will critically evaluate how a company that hopes to enter both the United Kingdom (UK) and Iran would need to alter itself in order to navigate its entry and suit the cultures of these two countries. A three-pronged approach is adopted in this analysis, structured around the most relevant aspects of the SLEPTS algorithm (Doole et al., 2016, p. 6-16), the marketing mix (Armstrong et al., 2017, p. 78-79), and finally, concluding whether methods of standardisation or differentiation (Keller & Kotler, 2016, p. 392-395) are the best strategic marketing approaches.

By considering Iran according to its official name, the Islamic Republic of Iran, this immediately demonstrates the country's sociocultural, religious, political, and even its legal orientation (Hollensen, 2008, p. 150). Beginning with the social aspects from the SLEPTS algorithm, Iran is a deeply conservative and devout state in which the values of religious beliefs are directly applied to all aspects of societal functionality. An example of which is that it remains mandatory for all females over the age of nine to wear the hijab when in public (Hatam, 2018; Cunningham, 2018).

This statewide policy holds a significant impact on the types of promotion that the Iranian authorities will allow as any depictions of women without wearing the traditional Islamic hijab will most likely be rejected (Brownsnell, 2015). However, non-Islamic companies may take this for granted, for example personal toiletry companies in Western countries often depict women with very little clothing as is evidential in adverts from Veet UK (2018) and Sanex (2015).

The toiletries industry, in order to succeed in Iran, would need to implement a differentiated marketing strategy that is entirely distinct from its strategy employed in European countries. Focusing on the advertising and packaging of such products, they will either need to feature women modestly in order to keep within the lines of religious conservatism, or avoid depicting women at all in order to steer well clear of any issues with religious leaders.

However, this would most likely have a damaging effect on the popularity of the product as it cannot be demonstrated to the consumers in a visual way which would make entering Iran very difficult to navigate, and further proves how a standardised marketing strategy would not work in the case of this country.

The issue of promotion in Iran directly stems from the media laws in the country which prohibit any depiction of descent from the policies of the regime or the depiction of a person's adherence to non-Islamic religious acts and values (ZIGMA8! 360 Degree Creative Communications, 2018) which are both considered haram (Doole & Lowe, 2012, p. 69) and would therefore not pass advertising regulations. This causes the need for adverts and product packaging in Iran to be produced specifically for the Iranian market, thus resulting in greater costs in time, labour, and financial resources due to the need for a differentiated approach (Dibb et al., 2012, p. 409).

To combat this, when budgeting and scheduling for promotion and packaging in Iran, the company must take into consideration the greater levels of cost as well as factoring in more time to create specific adverts for the Iranian market. Considering this in terms of scheduling and budgeting remains the most effective way for a company to still grasp the wealth of the eighty-two million consumers in Iran (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017) whilst simultaneously complying with the country's political and cultural norms.

Another important obstacle to advertising in Iran is the bureaucracy that requires navigating in order to get adverts broadcasted in the country as all promotions must be submitted and passed by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (2018), therefore a good knowledge of this ministry's policies is suggested in order to accelerate the acceptance process.

If a company wishes to achieve success in Iran, it must employ a marketing strategy that is explicitly Islamic in orientation and appearance (Askegaard et al., 2016, p. 606-608) which involves the observance of Islamic holidays, beliefs regarding modesty, as well as remembering the sensitivities regarding the depiction of the prophet Muhammad.

Furthermore, the tendency of the government to block social media sites poses another issue for the ability of companies to promote themselves in the country (Frenkel, 2018) as social media has become the primary way in which companies reach their target consumers as part of the Information Revolution (Green & Keegan, 2015, p. 45). To overcome this, companies could orient their marketing strategies towards more traditional forms of media that are less vulnerable to government blocks.

However, these traditional forms of media, such as newspapers and magazines, still remain heavily censored by the Iranian government, therefore we can conclude that attempting to avoid governmental involvement in promotional operations is almost impossible (Khodabakhshi, 2018) in the context of Iran.

It is of great importance to understand the wider role of women in Iranian society in order to make a conclusive judgement about how the company in question would be able to market its products towards this segment. A prominent obstacle is that men in Iranian households tend to make the final decisions regarding anything that will affect the family due to the patriarchal structure of Iranian society (Blair, 2015).

Therefore, it would be prudent to suggest that a company orients all its promotions towards men as they hold the main purchasing power within families (Blythe, 2013, p. 258-260) in Iran which is divergent from many Western countries whereby women often hold the highest purchasing power (Krasny, 2012). This reaffirms to marketers that they should focus on targeting men as they hold the deciding vote in almost every aspect of life, despite this being divergent from the company's marketing strategy in other countries, thus demonstrating another example of the need for marketing differentiation/adaptation.

Additionally, the religious elements of the Iranian regime must be focused on by marketers in order to successfully launch their brand in the country. An example is the Iranian government's forbiddance of homosexual relationships which demonstrates implications for advertising, whereas in the United Kingdom, it has become common to see homosexual relationships depicted in the media and advertising for powerful brands like Coca-Cola (2017).

Therefore, a company advertising in Iran must avoid the depiction, or even the inference of homosexual relationships in its adverts if it hopes to operate successfully in the country which may again strike a divergence from the company's operations and values in other countries which further demonstrates a need for differentiation.

As another example of the religious impacts on companies, both alcohol and pork are strictly forbidden in the country which would make it impossible for companies selling those products to enter the market. Further to this, advertisers all need to be aware that the depiction of people drinking alcohol or eating pork would not pass through the advertising authorities in Iran (The British Iranian Chamber of Commerce, 2018) which again holds implications for all companies to be aware of and finally, demonstrates the significance of religion and its pervading nature and importance above all other aspects of Iranian culture.

In 2016, Airbus gained worldwide news coverage after it announced that the Iranian government would be buying 114 of their aircraft (Bozorgmehr, 2016) directly following the Iranian Nuclear

Peace Agreement. As another example, Renault, which also entered the Iranian market at a similar time to Airbus, is now said to be doubting its decision to produce 150,000 cars a year in Iran (Matlack, Reiter, & Sachgau, 2018) largely due to political uncertainty and economic instability.

These current economic affairs of Iran are integral to understanding the implications for a company wanting to enter the marketplace there as is exemplified by these two companies and how they are now doubting their entry into Iran. One of the principal indicators that effects economic stability is the youth unemployment rate and in Iran, it is 29.936% (International Labour Organisation, 2018) for those aged between 15-24 and 12.516% across all working ages in 2017. In addition, the Iranian rial depreciated 15% against the US dollar in March 2018 compared to December 2017 (The World Bank, 2018).

Companies must not only be aware of this information, but they must incorporate this into their marketing strategies which would include adjusting the prices of their products to suit unemployed consumers who will have lower and fluctuating incomes (World Bank, 2018), or by pivoting the company's corporate social responsibility towards getting the youth into work.

As another approach, the marketing of fashion, food, and electronic consumable products could be conducted in such a way that emphasises them as luxuries to persuade consumers to escape from the political and economic reality. Even if prices have to be lowered in Iran compared to the product's prices in the UK for example, it remains imperative to position products according to the incomes of consumers (Doole & Lowe, 2012, p. 358-359).

Despite this, Iran does have a wealthy elite class that supports the luxury goods industry which may be the chosen market for a fashion company entering the country so that it can keep its prices level with its product prices in other countries. However, to counter that argument, the recent sanctions put onto the country are said to hold grave financial consequences for many Iranian citizens, hence their public protestations (Dehghanpisheh, 2018) and the general economic unrest (Fattahi & Karimi, 2018).

Following on from that, the most important economic element of Iran that must be taken into consideration for companies entering the country are the sanctions, particularly the most recent sanctions (Al Jazeera News, 2018) that focus on Iran's ability to export oil. To avoiding undermining or violating these sanctions, companies entering Iran must closely manage their operations and balance their public relations so that they are not represented too often of dealing with a hostile nation.

Turning to the political elements effecting a company entering the UK, since the 2016 Brexit referendum, the UK has been propelled into a whirlwind of political unrest and widespread distrust of the negotiations being conducted by the senior members of the government (BBC News, 2018; Lyons et al., 2018; Faulconbridge & Piper, 2018). There are major concerns as to the stability of international trade relations between the UK and the EU and the rest of the world after Brexit is put into motion which will have implications for companies depending on the type of trade deals the UK government can achieve.

Companies are not planning ahead for more than six months due to the political state of affairs, the instability of the pound (Bruce, 2018), and the general uncertainty surrounding what the business landscape will look like after the Brexit deal has been completed (Kottasová, 2018), thus demonstrating the overall levels of distrust and the nervousness of institutions in the UK (British Chamber of Commerce, 2018).

The best way to implement these immense political circumstances into a company's marketing strategy to enter the UK is to create a three-pronged approach of contingency that involves procedures for a no deal Brexit, a bad deal Brexit, or a good deal Brexit. The stability of companies after Brexit, whether they are UK-based or attempting to enter the UK, will be dependent upon the deals the UK government is able to strike with EU leaders. Due to the unforeseen nature of these deals, companies must put in place procedures before Brexit occurs so that they can weather the different possible outcomes post-Brexit.

Others implications involve whether non-British companies will be able to conduct trade with British companies in the same way they did pre-Brexit, the UK's export of goods (Kee & Nicita, 2017), and whether there will be reduced benefits for companies wanting to enter the British market. Each of these implications must be addressed in the aforementioned three-pronged approach of contingency which, as an example of a major bank, HSBC is developing as it has to look at the international challenges (Thorpe, 2018; White, 2018; Withers, 2018) of a post-Brexit business environment.

The notion that by leaving the EU, the United Kingdom will have unprecedented opportunities to forge new ties and boost trade with non-EU countries, primarily the US, is pro-Brexit argument upheld by the North American Trade Commissioner, Antony Phillipson. Phillipson (2018) also highlights the opportunities for the UK's cybersecurity sector which interlinks with the technological aspects of the SLEPTS algorithm for a company entering the United Kingdom to consider.

To conclude, an astute understanding of the consequences involved with conducting business in these two countries must be undertaken, especially in industries of particularly sensitivity, such as the toiletries industry in Iran. Concluding with our marketing theory, due to the religious conservatism dominating Iran, product differentiation is advised. Oppositely, in the UK, product standardisation is advised due to the liberal orientation and creative freedoms granted, but also due to the political uncertainty clouding the country.

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Appendix

SLEPTS algorithm:

Social elements:

- The suppression of the rights of women has caused many women to turn to activism and public protest (Hoodfar, 2018; VOA News, 2018) in order to have their voices heard which has only added to the wider political and social unrest in the country.
- The company must consider its reputation with entering Iran and cooperating with a government that continues to conduct human rights atrocities (Mills, 2018) which could hurt its ability to enter other countries and interact with organisations that oppose the actions of the Iranian government.

Legal elements:

- The jurisdictional structure of the government is based on Sharia law which impacts upon all aspects of life for Iranian citizens in addition to the opposition that the government holds against Western countries which only further isolates the country from the global marketplace (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2018).
- Many Western music and films remain illegal to distribute in Iran (Kubo, 2014) which makes it illegal for distribution companies to sell music, films, and other forms of Western media to Iranian consumers, but leaving out this massive consumer population of eighty-two million people (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017) is too good of an opportunity to miss.

Economic elements:

- Companies may have to avoid the mass employment of women in order to stay within the Iranian social, cultural, and religious norms, despite the fact that Iranian women are a severely underused labour resource (Karakurum-Ozdemir & Kazemi, 2017, p19).
- In comparison to the UK, women make up a large segment of the workforce and due to the liberal political orientation of the UK, the employment of women on mass scales is universally accepted and practised by most UK companies as women are increasingly reaching high levels of status within large corporations (Office of National Statistics, 2018).

Political elements:

- The last forty years of Iranian history has been characterised by tensions with the US and other western countries which still holds an immense amount of influence over the ways in which Iran interacts internationally today (BBC News, 2018).
- Protests have been taking place across Iranian towns and cities since the beginning of the year against the economic situation in the country (NowThis World, 2018; Dehghan, 2018).
- There are designated terrorist organisations identified by the US and EU that work directly with the Iranian government, Hezbollah being the primary example (U.S. Department of State, 2018), thus risking the company's reputation as it cooperates with the Iranian government, especially due to the government's involvement human rights violations and corruption.

- In addition to this, financial crime such as money-laundering, bribery and fraud remain common which causes further concern for companies entering the country as they seek to avoid becoming entangled with illegal activities (The Department for International Trade, 2018).

Technological elements:

- A major global concern has risen in recent years and takes the form of cybersecurity (Gambrell, 2018) in the face of several cyberattacks perpetrated by both terrorist organisations and governments alike.
- The primary cause of Iran's recent economic sanctions has been its proliferation of nuclear weapons (Dehghan, 2018) which has ignited political tensions with several influential countries which have, in retaliation, have worked towards the isolation of Iran from the political and economic mainstream.

Sustainability elements:

- Many parts of Iran are experiencing increasing levels of desertification which may be an issue for companies entering the country that are connected to the availability of land (United Nations Development Programme, 2017).
- Furthermore, as a direct result of the higher levels of desertification is Iran's growing issue with soil erosion (Sadeghi & Cerdà, 2015, p. 1), a construction company entering the country would need to conduct thorough research into which areas of Iran are not suitable, and will soon not be suitable for building on.
- Particularly in the capital city of Tehran, the air pollution is drier at times, thus making Tehran one of the worst cities in the world for air pollution levels which have been primarily caused by refinery operations, vehicle emissions, and industrial effluents (Miles, 2016).
- Companies entering Iran must take into consideration these rising levels of air pollution as part of the corporate social responsibility aspects of the company's operations as contributing to the air pollution levels further adds to the debilitating effects of bad air quality on Iranian citizens (Lila, 2016; Phys.org, 2018).
- In the UK, the controversial practice of fracking has emerged as one of the main sources of public criticism, protest, and environmental contention (Perraudin & Pidd, 2018; Hussein, 2018; BBC News, 2018). Consumers are more environmentally aware than ever before and so many do take into consideration the politics that companies support, the company's environmental policies, and the sustainability mission statement of the company before they purchase their products.
- Levels of air pollution continue to rise, yet the UK governmental authorities continue to be distrusted with little hope of imminent change (Taylor, 2018). Companies entering the UK will need to enact strict environmental policies internally if they are going to gain market share as the environmental sustainability of products becomes a major deciding factor in what products people purchase.

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