

EVALUATING CULTURAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ASPECTS FOR INTERNATIONAL PROFIT ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

This study aims to assess the cultural and social responsibility of international companies through an examination of an international profit organization's actions in the Middle East region as a case study. A descriptive qualitative case study method was used. The research finds that international organization adherence to local culture and minimizing negative effects on the community contributes to its success in the region.

Keywords: *International Profit Organization, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), cultural responsibility, Middle East.*

INTRODUCTION

International profit organizations face significant challenges when expanding into new markets, as they need to carefully consider the unique characteristics and cultural differences of each market. The failure to do so can result in inefficiency, loss of revenue, or market share. Understanding the ethical dimensions and social responsibility of international profit organizations, as well as the compatibility of their cultural and ethical standards with the values and customs of diverse societies, is essential for business success (**Siltaloppi, Rajala, & Hietala, 2021**).

International organizations expansion into the Middle East and other global markets is not easy, due to the need to carefully consider the cultural differences and unique characteristics of each market. It is important for businesses expanding internationally to be aware of intercultural risks and to take these into account in their global plans, as failure to do so can result in inefficiency, loss of revenue, or market share. Cultural differences have been a significant factor in international business for the past 40 years or so, and there are many examples of businesses that have struggled to adapt to the cultural realities of a particular market (**Vahlne & Jonsson 2017**).

One of the international profit organizations has faced criticism for removing images of women from its catalogs in its effort to align with the culture, customs, and traditions of the Middle

East. However, this decision conflicted with the organization's values of diversity and gender equality. In order to maintain its presence in the Middle East market and address the criticism, it have taken the drastic step of completely removing women from its standard catalog (Křenková, 2020).

Multinational companies with a universalistic philosophy, may take an undifferentiated approach to marketing its products to the global market. While these companies strive to respect regional customs and cultures, this can sometimes create conflicts in today's interconnected global society where adherence to local cultural norms may contradict universalistic principles held by others (Löfgren, 2015). Therefore, conducting a case study in the Arab world to examine cultural considerations of an international profit organization expansion into the region, specifically examining the values, ethics, and social responsibilities of this organization Internationally and evaluating their alignment with the values and ethics of Arab societies, could provide insight into potential challenges or successes that an international profit organization may face in this region.

1.1 Study problem

International profit organizations often face difficulties when entering new markets due to the need to navigate cultural differences and unique market characteristics. Understanding the ethical dimensions and social responsibility of an international profit organization, as well as the compatibility of its cultural and ethical standards with the values and customs of Middle Eastern societies, could be beneficial for companies looking to enter new markets. Conducting research on consumer cultural differences can help companies gain a competitive edge and provide customers with value that is tailored to their behaviors and expectations. This is particularly relevant in the Middle East, where the culture is distinct from that of the organization's largest markets which could provide valuable insights into the cultural challenges and opportunities that international profit organization may encounter in this particular market.

1.2 Study objectives

1. To examine an international profit organization cultural values and practices related to social responsibility.
2. To assess the compatibility of an international profit organization's cultural and ethical standards with the morals, customs, and culture of eastern societies.
3. To understand the challenges that the international profit organization faced during the expansion process into the Middle East, and how it has adapted to the local culture in Arab countries.

1.3 Study questions

1. How have the international profit organization 's ethical values and practices related to social responsibility been impacted by its expansion into the Middle East?
2. Did the international profit organization consider and address cultural differences between its country of origin and the Middle East when making the decision to open stores in the region?

3. To what extent are the international profit organization's cultural and ethical standards compatible with the morals, customs, and culture of eastern societies?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization and internationalization have increased the frequency of cross-cultural interactions between businesses, leading to both the potential for misunderstandings and opportunities for benefits. Companies expanding abroad must have a thorough understanding of the industry they are entering and consider the long-term process of understanding, and integrating into the local culture, which is crucial for successful expansion (**Panibratov & Klishevich, 2020**). Culture can impact international business on two levels: national culture, which is the external context in which the company operates, and organizational culture, or corporate culture, which is the internal culture of the company (**Beugelsdijk et al., 2018**). Globalization has a significant impact on company culture, and organizations may need to adapt to local customs in order to maximize profits or fulfill requirements. Effective management of international enterprises requires an understanding of culture (**Ji-Hyun HONG, 2021**).

Therefore, when the international profit organization began to expand and turn towards the Arab countries in the Middle East, the key to its entry was to understand the Arabic language and culture, and to understand the Islamic society and the customs and traditions of the Arab peoples (**Khamis, 2016**).

Because of the international profit organization's policy in the Middle East and its observance of the culture of the Arab peoples, it was able to open its first store in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1983. The challenge it has faced at that time was that it was an unknown company, but it was able through its policy and understanding of social and cultural responsibility to achieve great success and opened the second store and the third is in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other stores in various Arab countries. (**Benmamoun et al., 2016**).

International profit organization that incorporates the cultural values of its home origin into its business principles and processes, needs to bridging the cultural gaps carefully, evaluates its strategy and market trends when entering new markets to reduce cultural conflicts between clients and staff. This help the values that are unique to specific culture appear to be grounded in fundamental human nature (**Hahn, & Kim, 2016**).

The organization's that represent important values which are relevant in the globalized world, its principles would be more receptive to cross-cultural fusion and adaptation to local cultures. Understanding of social and cultural responsibility has contributed to the success of some retailers and has allowed them to avoid the mistakes made by companies like Walmart and Tesco in their international expansion efforts (**Al Shuwaler et al., 2020**).

A study by (**Hahn, 2015**) titled "IKEA and Corporate Social Responsibility: A Case Study" analyzed IKEA's corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies and code of conduct to determine if there are specific reasons why IKEA has been more successful than other large multinational corporations in implementing its CSR initiatives. The study found that IKEA stands out as a multinational corporation whose CSR practices are integrated into the overall operations of the company, rather than being used as a marketing tactic. IKEA actively works with its suppliers and national governments to address social issues it faces in the global

business environment, beyond just maximizing profits. This suggests that IKEA's commitment to CSR is genuine and not just for public image.

Another study conducted by **Hahn and Kim (2016)** to evaluate the success of two multinational corporations, Starbucks and IKEA, in balancing their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives with profit maximization. The study used an analytical method to compare the CSR practices of the two companies and examined their organizational culture, practices, management, and leadership to identify any contributing factors to their success in CSR. The results showed that both IKEA and Starbucks gave significant attention to CSR and adopted a long-term, comprehensive strategy to address the root causes of environmental and social issues in their supply chain. The study concluded that the company culture and CSR are shaped by the ethical leadership of top management and that companies like IKEA and Starbucks demonstrate that it is possible to succeed while treating employees and supply chain partners with respect and dignity and making a positive impact on the world.

A study by **Al Shuwaler et al. (2020)** discussed IKEA's corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the importance of CSR as a corporate strategy that helps a company fulfill its social responsibility. The study noted that IKEA, a well-known furniture retailer founded in 1943, has incorporated CSR into its global supply chain in order to maintain a sustainable business. CSR is essential for improving environmental, social, and economic performance. On the other hand, according to **Morgan (2020)**, IKEA made mistakes when it first expanded into the Middle East due to a lack of understanding of local cultural norms. In its attempt to balance global ideals and brand philosophy with the strict cultural requirements of Saudi Arabia, IKEA faced criticism for painting pictures of women in its catalog. However, the company learned from this mistake and adapted by issuing a catalog that was more in line with the customs and traditions of the Middle East and featuring images of women in clothing appropriate to Saudi culture. Morgan emphasizes the importance of companies adapting to local culture and having a thorough understanding of local society in order to succeed in international markets.

The study by **Taher (2019)** examined gender representation in Saudi Arabia through the lens of Critical Discourse Studies and Multimodal Social Semiotics. The study analyzed both the 2013 IKEA catalogue and press coverage of the catalogue's removal of female images from the Saudi version. The research found a discrepancy between the textual and visual portrayal of women in the catalogue, with linguistic sexism present in the Saudi edition despite the visual exclusion of women. The study also found that press coverage of women's rights in Saudi Arabia was often accompanied by stereotypes of Saudi women as "oppressed" and "invisible," which were tied to negative themes associated with Saudi Arabia such as "backwardness" and "the oppression of women's rights." These portrayals were seen as related to broader critiques of orientalism and negative portrayals of Islam in dominant Western discourses on Saudi Arabia.

Another study by **Singh & Misra (2022)** discussed the CSR activities were undertaken by Amazon in the Middle East region to align with local cultural and social norms. One of the primary CSR activities that Amazon has undertaken in the region is philanthropy. Amazon has launched various philanthropic initiatives, including the Amazon Smile program, which donates a portion of the purchase price of eligible products to charities chosen by customers. Moreover, Amazon has demonstrated a commitment to environmental responsibility by launching initiatives to reduce its carbon footprint, such as the Shipment Zero program, which

aims to make all Amazon shipments net-zero carbon. Amazon's CSR activities in the Middle East have had a positive impact on its performance, with the company experiencing significant growth in the region since its launch in 2017.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This research employs a descriptive, qualitative case study approach utilizing an analytical lens to examine and evaluate an international profit organization's cultural and social responsibilities in the Middle East and assess the organization's ethical conduct in the region.

3.2 Data Collection Method

Data was gathered through a comprehensive review of primary and secondary sources; primary data sources for this research included websites and web pages of international profit organization, catalogs, annual economic reports, and statistics, as well as interviews with three sales and marketing Jordanian employees of international profit organization in addition to interviewing nine Jordanian customers of international profit organization. While the secondary data sources included literature and previous studies on the social and cultural responsibility of international profit organization, especially in the Middle East, and articles published about international profit organization and its social and cultural responsibility. Primary and secondary data were utilized to triangulate the data and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

Before conducting the interviews, a verbal approval from international profit organization employees was obtained. The interviews lasted approximately 10 minutes each, and they were asked open-ended questions regarding international profit organization's norms and cultural sensitivity practices.

The interviews also included international profit organization Jordanian customers in order to gather information about their cultural and ethical concerns regarding international profit organization products and services. The participants were informed about the purpose and process of the research and were asked open-ended questions during the 10-minute interviews. To ensure diversity, a variety of customers from different ages and genders were selected for the study. The data collected was transcribed promptly to maintain its integrity and handwritten records of the interviews were kept to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. The use of open-ended questions was employed to elicit detailed and rich information, allowing participants to express their own views and experiences in their own words.

4. STUDY FINDINGS

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the practice of businesses considering the social and environmental impacts of their operations. Some organizations adopt a substantive plan in response to pressure and demand for CSR, while others adopt a symbolic strategy. CSR communication is important for managers in both situations (**Shabana & Ravlin, 2016**). Research suggests that CSR can have a positive impact on business reputation and customer loyalty, but there are still questions about how it affects stakeholders' views and attitudes

(Iglesias, Markovic, Bagherzadeh & Singh, 2020). Companies with strong CSR practices may receive more criticism. To succeed in different cultures, it is important to study the customs and traditions, evaluate how the commercials' shape and content might be adapted, and take into account cultural values as a foundation of a civilization. An international profit organization has compromised between the organization's principles and image and the local restrictions in an effort to adapt to Saudi Arabia's cultural and political elements. It's important to find a balance between global vs. local dimension when resolving cultural dilemmas.

By reviewing the literature, previous studies, and various websites of international profit organization, and the its country of origin catalogs and printed catalogs in the Middle East, we came to the most important measures related to the social and cultural responsibilities that it carries out in the Middle East, which are as follows:

This international profit organization initially made a mistake by blurring pictures of women in its catalogs in the Middle East, which led to criticism. However, it quickly corrected this mistake by printing new catalogs that take into account the different cultures, customs, and traditions of the Eastern society, by not displaying pictures of women or displaying them in the appropriate dress for Arab women. Additionally, it displayed pictures of women in hijabs on its Middle East website. For instance, the business has employed Saudi female models and used them in displays similar to those found in the conventional, international catalogue.

Moreover, it took into account social and cultural responsibility and produced entirely new magazines for each market with unique photographs, layouts, and formats when it decided to go completely local. In order to meet local standards of Arab countries, it chose to make a compromise by removing women from some images. Cross-cultural marketing can often require finding a compromise instead of fully resolving issues, which can be challenging and may not satisfy all parties.

In its catalog for Middle Eastern countries, it has avoided displaying tools or accessories related to drinking alcohol, out of respect for the Islamic religion, which forbids drinking alcohol.

Also it was keen to portray people with the shape and color of the oriental society, in addition to displaying products of Arab oriental nature, which are characterized by handwork, such as Arabic rugs.

The cultural differences between this organization's "the International" and "the Middle East" were ranged from being very well adapted to being only minimally adapted, but they had no negative effects on the organization's reputation and, in fact, were well received by the local clients.

It has demonstrated understanding and commitment to inclusivity by incorporating regional cuisine and customs into its marketing plan, this for example have been recognized by Saudi Arabian regulatory authorities. This approach would have allowed this international profit organization to accurately represent local Saudi women in terms of appearance, while also providing them with the necessary tools and resources to go about their daily routine with the help of its products.

This organization has set itself apart from many other multinational companies by consistently integrating its corporate social responsibility goals into its management practices and business operations. While it has faced criticism for certain violations, it did not take a superficial

approach in resolving issues, instead it actively and deliberately worked to address problems by investing significant time, resources and funds in finding effective solutions.

It has maintained a consistent corporate culture while making adjustments to meet the local way of life in the Middle East. This demonstrates the importance for international businesses to carefully research local cultures before developing successful business strategies. The company's culture has a significant impact on its reputation. Multinational corporations must conduct thorough market research, paying close attention to every aspect of the local culture, in order to gain a clear understanding of the industry and customers.

After analyzing the observations on the opinions of customers and employees of the international profit organization and conducting interviews with three of its sales and marketing Jordanian employees and nine Jordanian customers, the results were as follows:

According to employees, this organization has implemented a range of employee training programs and in-store communication efforts in order to effectively connect with and understand the cultural perspectives of its customers.

" I feel that organization's values align with my personal beliefs and that makes me proud to work here " (International profit organization sales & marketing staff 1, 2023)

This organization has invested in high-quality training for its staff to enable them to sensitively interact with customers and provide them with necessary information when requested. Additionally, even when customers do not specifically request assistance, its employees are proactive in offering their help. For example, if an employee notices that a customer appears unsure about a purchase, they will approach the customer and offer assistance.

"Through the cultural sensitivity training offered by my organization, I am able to better understand and respect the cultural diversity of our customers and work more effectively with my colleagues from various backgrounds". (international profit organization sales & marketing staff 2, 2023)

The organization has made the decision to start with the customers and gradually educate them about its shopping method. This has been a significant challenge for them. Store employees have been explaining to customers why "self-service" shopping is advantageous, including how it leads to lower prices. It has been successful in convincing customers that its products are less expensive than comparable ones offered by other retailers.

In order to help new customers, understand and engage with the shopping experience, the company provided a DVD with Arabic audio and subtitles that is played on screens at the store's entrance for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. This tool helps to effectively communicate with and involve this group of consumers in the company's shopping experience.

Although the actors on the DVD are Europeans and Americans, they are costumed according to local custom. The materials being played are full of explanations of how to shop at a store and provide information on how to pay, order, and serve yourself.

However, the self-service shopping culture may be somewhat unfamiliar to Arab consumers, leading to complaints from customers about the difficulty of carrying heavy items such as sofas and wardrobes on their own. Some customers have also questioned why the company has staff if they are not responsible for delivering furniture to customers' homes. Additionally, some customers have expressed frustration with the store's delivery service, security barriers, and escalators.

With regard to customer satisfaction with the designs and prices, this organization is known for designing products that are appealing and affordable to a wide range of customers. In contrast, other furniture stores may only offer products that the store owner deems desirable, rather than considering the preferences of a diverse customer base. This approach may contribute to higher customer satisfaction with this company's designs and prices.

Moreover, this organization does not use the word "don't". It strives to make customers' shopping experiences at its stores as pleasant as possible. In its store, it is uncommon to see a sign with the words "don't do" written on it. Everything in it is different from what people are used to see in other stores or even different from the local culture. For instance, let kids run around the store freely as long as they are not damaging anything. You can hear their screams and smiles throughout the store. Customers are also free to use their four senses (Sight, Hearing, Smell, and Touch) to interact with products as long as they are not damaging anything. It never says "don't" do anything, even "don't" touch or "don't" smoke. Giving the customer complete flexibility inside the store allows them to have a positive shopping experience.

"The organization's approach to customer service is all about creating a positive and enjoyable shopping experience. We don't use negative language or signs that tell customers what not to do. Instead, we guide customers with positive language and actions, like allowing children to run around the store freely as long as they're not damaging anything" (international profit organization sales & marketing staff 3, 2023)

As for the customers' opinion on the organization's marketing ads on the Middle East websites, as well as the catalogs directed to the Middle East, and their opinion on respecting their customs and traditions and deleting pictures of women as in the case of Saudi Arabia, there was consensus and agreement on what the company did in respecting the customs and traditions of the eastern society and deleting pictures of women or showing women in veils and modest dress.

But among the negatives that came out within their social and cultural responsibilities, which may destroy the entity of this company in the Arab world, and were noticed on its sites that it supports homosexuality, so it produced and displayed a series of colorful sofas inspired by different flags of pride, including those that represent transgender and non-binary communities, and asexual. It did not take into account or respect the Islamic religion and the culture of the Arab society, in which homosexual acts are prohibited and criminalized.

"I do not agree with the support for the LGBT+ community and this makes me less likely to shop at their store." (international profit organization Customer 1, 2023)

"I don't think it's appropriate for this organization to take a stance on such a controversial issue, it should just stick to selling products." (international profit organization Customer 2, 2023)

When searching the organization's behavior in supporting homosexuality, no indication was found for producing and publishing such products on their sites, and no indication found for its position on the issue of homosexuals, and it is clear that this concept is in their belief and that they call for freedom and homosexuality.

By observing the opinions of customers in the organization's support for homosexuality, nine out of nine interviewed customers expressed their dissatisfaction with these products, and the organization put itself on the list of organizations that support homosexuality, and Arab societies could boycott it.

"This organization's support for the LGBT+ community does not align with my personal beliefs and values, so I will choose to shop elsewhere." (IKEA Customer 3, 2023)

5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

International profit organizations operate in diverse cultural contexts that require them to adapt their business practices to the local culture and adhere to their corporate cultural and ethical standards (**Khojastehpour & Jamali, 2021**). This research study aims to evaluate the cultural and social responsibility aspects of international profit organizations through a descriptive qualitative case study method.

With the management strategy and open-mindedness, the international profit organization of study was able to spread in the Middle East and open its first stores in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is one of the Arab countries that have strict customs, traditions and rules that are difficult to violate and enter its society easily. However, it was able, through its understanding of social and cultural responsibility, to integrate into Saudi society and become one of the well-known brands in the sale of high-end furniture.

It took into account all aspects of social and cultural responsibility, so it respected the Arab language, religion and culture, in addition to respecting the customs and traditions of Arab societies, which are known to be conservative societies that do not allow women to appear, nor to drink alcohol and other things that are considered normal for other societies.

It's social and cultural responsibility was evident in the Middle East through its website and catalog and the way its employees deal with Arab customers. It issued a catalog for the Middle East that did not contain pictures of women, and took into account the appearance of pictures of women on its website wearing the hijab, and prohibited any items or accessories related to drinking alcohol and is interested in products that bear the oriental Arab character, including handmade carpets and others. Therefore, it is a successful model for international companies that want to spread and expand in countries whose culture differs from the company's culture. This multinational corporation with billions of dollars in revenue, demonstrates how a company can prioritize corporate social responsibility (CSR) in its operations. Instead of just reacting to negative consequences of its actions, such as suicides in its supply chain due to poor working conditions, it proactively invests in efforts to address social and environmental issues and strives to "do good while doing business." This sets it apart from other multi-billion dollar corporations that may not prioritize CSR in the same way.

It has embraced its CSR goals and incorporated them into the management and operations of the business itself because it understands that it "has an impact on people and the earth, in particular people's working conditions, as well as the environment, both locally and globally". But at the present time, this organization's Empire in the Middle East may be at risk of collapsing and its name disappearing forever; after it gave a revival that it supports homosexuality by producing and displaying sofas bearing the colors of the homosexuality flag. The Arab society is one of the societies that do not allow its customs and traditions to be broken, and this behavior is contrary to the teachings of the Islamic religion, which forbids homosexuality, and the commission of homosexuality in the eastern society is a punishable crime. So did this organization think through its social and cultural responsibility policies about

the consequences of its support for homosexuality, especially in the Middle East? Will it back down from this socially and culturally irresponsible behavior?

From our perspective, we believe that this behavior in supporting homosexuality can have serious consequences for the organization. It goes against the social and cultural responsibility policies that it has previously upheld. If it does not stop producing products that support homosexuality and removes these products and logos from its website, there would likely be negative reactions from customers, and it may face boycotts, leading to a loss of reputation and business in the Middle East.

5.2 Limitations

There are several limitations to consider when conducting research on international profit organization's cultural and social responsibility in the Middle East. One major limitation is the scarcity of available studies on this topic. This lack of research makes it difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of international profit organization's efforts to prioritize social responsibility in the Middle East. Additionally, the lack of studies on international profit organization's experience in different countries makes it difficult to compare and contrast its approach to social responsibility across different regions. This limits the generalizability of any findings and makes it difficult to draw broader conclusions about the effectiveness of international profit organization's social responsibility efforts.

Due to time limitations, I was not able to conduct a full structured survey with representative sample of international profit organization's customers and employees in Jordan, however, to enhance the current study, future research could incorporate a comprehensive survey with a representative sample of international profit organization's customers and employees in Jordan to supplement the qualitative analysis with quantitative data. This would result in a more robust and informative study that addresses the research questions in a more thorough manner.

5.3 Future Research

There are several directions for future research on the topic of international profit organization's social and cultural responsibility in the Middle East. One possibility would be to conduct studies in different Arab countries, such as Kuwait, the Emirates, Egypt, Qatar, Oman, and Jordan, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of international profit organization's efforts in this region. Additionally, using other research methodologies, such as conducting interviews with stakeholders, employees, customers, or members of the local community, could provide additional insights and perspectives on international profit organization's efforts in the Middle East. Other avenues for research could include exploring other aspects of international profit organization's social responsibility, such as its environmental sustainability efforts, or examining any negative aspects of the company, including the controversy surrounding its support for homosexuality.

5.4 Conclusion

This research aimed to examine the cultural and social responsibilities of international profit organization and to present a case study of them in the Middle East. The study utilized a

descriptive qualitative approach. The research found that cultural responsibility refers to the organization's understanding and sensitivity to the cultures of the countries in which it operates. This includes committing to socially and ethically responsible practices, such as environmental sustainability and fair labor practices.

International profit organization demonstrated its cultural and social responsibility by respecting the local customs, traditions, and values of the Arab community and being mindful of the potential impact of its operations on the local community. This has enabled the company's successful expansion in the Middle East.

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