

LEVEL 6 ASSESSMENT SPECIFICATION 1

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Academic honesty / referencing:	Academic honesty is required. In the main body of your submission you must give credit to authors on whose research and ideas your work is based. Append to your submission a reference list that indicates the books, articles, etc. that you have used, cited or quoted in order to complete this assessment.		

Module Learning Outcomes (from module syllabus)

- Demonstrate a systematic understanding, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge of intercultural communication theories
- Evaluate and interpret divergent international cultures within business

A Study on the Expansion Strategies of British Retail Enterprises in Asia Based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

Abstract

The globalization process is speeding up, and British retail companies are experiencing new cultural difficulties when they expand in the Asia region. The research employs Hofstede cultural dimensions theory to analyze fully the culture differences encountered by British retail business when it enters into an Asian market and their impact on business strategy. By analyzing expansion cases of big British retail like Tesco and Marks & Spencer in Asian countries of China and Japan, this paper tries to know which cultural dimensions like power distance, individualism and collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and long term orientation change market entering ways, working methods and communication ways of retail companies. Study found that enterprise need to keep core competitive advantage, deepening adapt into local culture. to gain success in market expanding. This paper sets up an adaptive strategy framework from cultural dimension differences, and provides theoretical guidance and practical advice for British retail enterprise's strategic formulation in expanding Asian markets.

Key words: Hofstede cultural dimensions, British retail enterprises, Asian market expansion, cross-cultural management

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1. Introduction

The formation of the globalized economic environment has led to the fact that internationalization of retail has become an irreversible trend. In recent years, due to Asian's rapid economic growth, the retail markets have been showing great growth potential. Consumers within nations like China, Japan, and South Korea have experienced rising purchasing power and their desire for higher quality products and services has grown rapidly (Ryu et al., 2024). On the other hand, the growth of digital transformation and e-commerce has brought new chances and problems for the retail industry. Under such circumstances, in Britain's retail businesses, Asian expansion needs to be revisited from scratch, and culture should be included in the essential considerations of retail business strategy planning.

But with cross-border operations bringing opportunities, they create problems due to clash of cultures and management issues at the same time. When retail companies go global, there will always be a very different culture where companies do business other than their own. And this kind of cultural gap largely determines whether an enterprise can succeed or fail on its way to internationalize (Shenkar et al., 2021). British retail is famous for its long history and mature running. It has been highly successful in Western markets. And when entering the Asian market, it faced big setbacks. For instance, Marks & Spencer, the largest multinational retail group in the UK, withdrew from the Chinese mainland market in 2017 due to a lack of in-depth understanding of local culture and consumption habits. Similarly, the British supermarket giant, Tesco, also has to withdraw strategically from many Asian countries due to "unfitness to the environment". These difficulties mainly come from cultural differences, making the business model that is successful on the UK market difficult to completely copy in the Asian context. Only relying on capital strength and brand strength will not ensure success in the Asian market, and adapting to the culture is the key for a business to survive and develop in the Asian market.

Understanding and resolving these cultural differences is of vital importance for British retail enterprises to successfully expand in Asia. British retail enterprises urgently need to formulate market entry strategies based on cultural understanding. This study is based on this background and, from the perspective of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, deeply analyzes the cultural challenges faced by British retail enterprises in the Asian market and proposes corresponding strategic solutions.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory used six dimensions to quantify the differences in culture of different countries and regions – power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation/short term orientation, indulgence/ restraint (Nickerson, 2022). it's framework enables us to know in what ways the rational and calm store design of UK fails to appeal to Chinese customers and the stimulating promotional atmosphere preferred by Chinese people doesn't sit well with the "calm" atmosphere Western shoppers are after. From the research, it is shown that countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea scored high on dimensions like power distance and collectivism, and long term orientation, while Western counties such as the UK performed on the individualism dimension (Sorares et al., 2007). Comprehension of the implications and meanings of such dimensions is needed for the design of retail strategy fit for different surrounding cultures.

2.2 Research on Cross-Cultural Expansion of International Retail Enterprises

It started research on the cross - cultural expansion of international retail enterprises in the 1990s and has continued to develop further with the acceleration of globalization. The earlier studies concentrate on the reasons for retail enterprises go international, the strategies for internationalization expansion. They stressed the importance of economic and market conditions, Alexander and Myers (2000) believed that the international expansion of retail enterprises is related to push and pull factors, where cultural distance plays a moderating role. As the research advanced, cultural aspects started to be considered by scholars with respect to the internationalization of retail firms. Burt's (2011)research shows that the greatest difficulty in the development process of retail enterprises in international market is how to achieve a balance between standardization and localization. In recent years digital transformation has added more layers to cross cultural expansion of the retail industry. There are studies showing that the development of e-commerce and social media is changing traditional cultural boundaries and creating new channels for cross-cultural communication.

2.3 The Practice of British Retail Enterprises in the Asian Market

British retail enterprises' expansion process in the Asian market has experienced both gains and losses. The world's biggest retailer Tesco entered China in 2004 and it set up big supermarkets by joint ventures with local ones. But due to its unawareness on understanding Chinese people's way of shopping and preference, Tesco suffered several lost in China, it decided to sell all its rest of shares as an exit of this project for 275 million pounds in February 2020(Woohyoung and Hwang, 2020). The main

reasons for Tesco's failure included insufficient understanding of the collectivist culture of the Chinese market, neglect of the importance of the relationship network, and failure to adapt to the preferences of Chinese consumers for fresh food (Abalkhail, 2019).

In contrast, some British retail enterprises have succeeded in the Asian market via deep localization methods. For example, British luxury retailer Burberry revised its marketing tactics and product line to reflect the preference for brand narratives and cultural associations that the Asian customer places heavy emphasis on. The Chinese and Japanese markets enjoyed notable success as a result (Abalkhail, 2019). This means that what matters is understanding and respecting the local culture as opposed to just copying Western models.

2.4 Application of Cultural Dimension Theory in Retail Industry

Hofstede Cultural Dimension Theory is commonly used as part of studies in the retail industry. Power distance directly influences the structure of retail enterprise and its management methods. In Asian countries with a high power distance, a hierarchy system is more present and decision making is more centralized (Khelif, 2016). In collectivist cultures, teamwork and group identity are much more important, so it is important that employees are motivated based on the performance of the team rather than just individuals. Marketing-wise the social recognition provided by the product matters more over how unique it might feel. Degree of uncertainty avoidance will affect the acceptance of consumers to purchase new products and new retail forms. And long-term orientation will impact the way enterprises create relationship with their suppliers, employees and customers. In societies with long-term orientation culture, forming long-term cooperative relationships is more important than obtaining short-term benefits.

3. Analysis of Challenges in British Retail Enterprises' Expansion into Asia Based on Cultural Dimensions

The rise of British retailers in Asia is essentially a clash between two different sets of business cultures. Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is an exact lens for breaking this crash to parts. This chapter will completely analyze the distinction of cultural key dimensions that exist in the UK compared to all the major markets in Asia. In particular, it will look at how the differences would create real problems for British retailers in terms of strategy, operation, and marketing practice.

3.1 Power Distance Difference and Its Impact

The gap on power distance is the first invisible barrier for British managers. Being a low power distance country, British companies hold views on equality, negotiation,

decentralized decision making within their company and store managers have a significant amount of freedom to react to the market (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). But in high power distance Asian societies like China and Malaysia, the strict hierarchy has been considered as the foundation of efficiency and stability (Dawson and Mukoyama, 2013). creating a double-bind: internal management, British managers like to delegate decision-making power and encourage grassroots staff to participate in decision-making and innovation. But local staff in Asian branches may just get used to receiving clear instructions and a top-down kind of management. They might believe the “Authorization” from a British manager means they don’t have authority or leadership qualities and so have low management efficacy. like asking a Chinese store manager to plan a huge sales event, maybe it wouldn't feel right if he didn't talk to the person controlling the region first. The area boss may consider that a threat to his position also. In terms of external marketing where the friendly, funny and even at times slightly mocking brand’s story style from UK could weaken the perception of authority and high-end brand image by Asian consumers. Furthermore, suppliers in high power distance cultures need strong dominance-subordination relationship, which contrasts the partnership model preferred by UK retailers (Dawson and Mukoyama, 2013).

3.2 Conflict between Individualism and Collectivism

The British society places such a strong emphasis on individualism, which contrasts sharply with the collectivist traits of Asia. This poses challenges for marketing and human resource management (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). British retailers’ emphasis on individual expression and personal choice is unsynchronized to the value of Asian consumers who stress group harmony and social recognition at the time of purchasing. Tesco encountered some problems in South Korea because it failed to properly comprehend the significance of group-oriented shopping habits and oral recommendation (Wood et al., 2016). The employee management system developed for individualist cultures is ineffective for a collectivist culture, and in which team harmony matters more than individual achievement. The British performance evaluation system focused on individuals clash with the Asian preference for groups assessment and collective responsibility (Gamble, 2010). Marketing campaigns which celebrate being different in the UK usually don’ t manage to resonate with Asian consumers who value staying the same and fitting in socially. This cultural dissonance has led to several British fashion retailer's failure to build brand loyalty among Asian customers, where much of the decision to buy is done in consultation with family and friends (Wrigley and Currah, 2003).

3.3 Difference in Uncertainty Avoidance Degree

Significant differences in uncertainty avoidance levels have resulted in a high standard for the quality control standards, service processes, and innovation risks of retail businesses (Wrigley and Lowe, 2010). Being a low uncertainty avoidance

country, the British market can bear more for new products and new business models, and enterprises have greater leeway in operation. Conversely, in Asian markets with high uncertainty avoidance such as China and Japan, consumers have very high expectations for product quality, service consistency, and perfect details (Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). The initial failure of Marks & Spencer in the Japanese market was due to its global unified supply chain and quality control system, which failed to meet the Japanese consumers' extremely high requirements for the accuracy of clothing sizes, the stability of fabric quality, and the ultimate preservation of food freshness. Any minor flaws or service fluctuations would be magnified into unacceptable "risks", quickly destroying brand reputation. This forced British retail enterprises to invest far more than the local market, establishing extraordinary quality monitoring and standardized service systems, in order to obtain a basic market entry ticket.

3.4 Difference in Long-Term Orientation and Short-Term Orientation

The characteristic of Asian countries focusing on long-term development contrasts sharply with the relatively mild strategy of the UK, which has an impact on strategic planning and relationship building (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Compared to the short-term orientation of the UK, the East Asian cultural circle places great emphasis on the accumulation of long-term strategic value, including brand reputation, customer loyalty, and channel relationships. The British retailers often pursue rapid market entry and quick returns, which conflicts with the expectations of Asians for gradual relationship development and long-term commitment. The UK headquarters management is constrained by the pressure of quarterly financial reports of listed companies, often expecting the Asian business to achieve profitability within 2-3 years. This short-term financial orientation forces the local team to adopt quick-acting market strategies, such as excessive promotion to secure sales, but this damages the brand image and long-term pricing power. Tesco "strategic withdrawal" on several Asian markets, so-called "unfitness to the local environment", the main cause is its "can not or unwilling to bear the strategic losses over a long period in order to secure a foothold in the market" (Palmer and Quinn, 2007) This timing mismatch leads numerous UK retailers to leave the Asian market quickly after gaining a short-term competitive advantage over their rivals. Burberry have shown that they have a genuine and long-term commitment to the Asian marketplace by continually investing in telling stories about their brands and creating a bond with local consumers that eventually results in rich rewards. The emphasis on quarterly performance in the British retail sphere is at odds with Asian cultural values that focus more on sustainable growth than short-term gains.

4. Adaptive Strategies for British Retail Enterprises' Expansion into Asia

Confronted with significant cultural disparities within the Asian market, British retail corporations must give up facile copies and opt for a comprehensive and profoundly culturally adapted adaptive plan if they wish to achieve success and set down a footing. This is all about getting things just right, mixing those core brand beliefs with a big helping of localization. Then on the organization's structure and management model, companies have to consider strategically reshaping the structure and management model which was originally shaped by the low power distance in the UK. This means establishing regional headquarters with high autonomy or strengthening the decision-making authority of local management teams to meet the expectations of a high power distance culture for clear authority and rapid decision-making. British expatriate managers also need to adjust their leadership styles, maintaining open communication while demonstrating more explicit hierarchical authority, and establishing structured reporting and meeting mechanisms to respect local hierarchical concepts while ensuring management efficiency. Secondly, the thorough localization of human resource management is crucial for integrating into a collectivist society. Enterprises need to shift the focus of recruitment and incentives from individual performance to teamwork and organizational sense of belonging, strengthening the cohesion of the "enterprise family" through the establishment of team bonuses, organizing collective building activities, etc. At the same time, they must deeply understand and actively build a trust network based on "relationships", through informal interactions and care, to establish long-term loyalty with employees, partners, and key customers, which is crucial for maintaining a stable talent pool and business ecosystem in the Asian market.

On the marketing side facing customers, cultural adaptation of the marketing strategies is even more urgent. Marketing information has to change from catering to "personal expression" to fostering "social recognition", advertising narration needs to revolve around family warmth, friendship bond, social recognition instead of individual singularity. For those that like to avoid uncertainty, we may need to build a lot of credibility and certainty for marketing activities, providing ultra-transparent product information and introducing authoritative evaluations, as well as offering worry-free after-sales service. Furthermore, the active use of highly developed social media and KOLs in Asia for word-of-mouth marketing is also a means to reduce consumer cognitive risks and quickly build consumer trust. As is complemented by the former is good risk managing. The British headquarters should know that creating brand assets, channel networks, and customer loyalty in the Asian market would take a lot of patience and constant investment, which could be much longer than the profit cycle for the British market. Therefore, more realistic long-term financial goals should be set, providing sufficient resources and time for the local team so that they can deeply explore the market, build relationships. Focus the investment on brand narrative, local research and development, and community building, thereby truly achieving the transformation from a "market entrant" to a "local contributor", and securing a sustainable space for survival and development.

5.Conclusion and Recommendations

This study confirms that cultural differences have a profound impact on the expansion of British retail enterprises in the Asian market. Hofstede's cultural dimension theory provides a systematic framework for identifying and interpreting these differences. Challenges mainly stem from differences in power distance, individualism and collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. These factors affect many aspects of the retail business, including organisational structure, marketing communication, human resources management and strategic planning. Enterprises that neglect cultural adaptation often encounter operational obstacles and consumer resistance. On the contrary, enterprises that actively adjust their strategies according to cultural characteristics have achieved higher market acceptance and sustainable development.

Based on the research results, this paper puts forward the following suggestions. British retailers should establish a localised organisational structure that meets the expectations of high power distance. Marketing strategies should emphasise social and collective values rather than individualistic appeals. The human resources system needs to be integrated into the team incentive and relationship building mechanism. In addition, the headquarters should adopt a long-term perspective on Asian business and leave enough time for brand building and market penetration. Continuous cultural training and local talent training are also very important. Through the above measures, British retail enterprises can improve their competitiveness in diversified Asian markets and achieve long-term success.

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