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Marketing Strategies of International Pharmaceutical Companies in the Middle East and North Africa Region

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2018

Abstract

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MPM, Quebec University- 2014

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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June 2018

Abstract

The declines in oil and gas prices in 2014 by 50% or more led governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to decrease healthcare budgets correspondingly by more than 30%. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that managers of international pharmaceutical companies have successfully implemented in the MENA region to ensure profitability after the 2014 decreases in the healthcare budgets, which followed the decline in oil and gas prices. The study involved data collection through semistructured interviews of 6 middle and executive managers working in 2 international pharmaceutical companies located in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The cultural intelligence and strategic flexibility theories constituted the conceptual framework for this study and exploration of challenges associated with implementing marketing strategies for international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. Participants had a minimum of 5 years of experience in planning and implementing marketing strategies in the MENA region. The findings from the thematic data analysis led to the identification of major marketing strategies, which have helped to maintain business sustainability of pharmaceutical companies, despite difficulties with the reduction in healthcare budgets in the MENA region. The important themes emerging from this study included: (a) product launch strategy and operating model, (b) transformation of leaders by vision and guidance, (c) recognition of culture and diversity, and (d) the importance of training and learning agility. The results of the study may contribute to positive social change because pharmaceutical and healthcare knowledge benefits human health and may serve to influence positive job creation and enrichment of the economies of the region.

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Dedication

First, I would like to give all thanks to Almighty God for his guidance and mercy and for the strength he gave me to overcome all challenges that I faced during this long journey. I would like to thank my great father for his support and guidance in all my life, and because of him, I am here today. My dedication extends to my lovely wife Arwa who has continuously encouraged and supported me. I consider her as an essential reason to achieve this goal and I dedicate this study and my future research to her. I will never forget my brothers and sisters who were always supporting me.

My special dedication from my heart to my mother's soul who left us too soon. My gladness is incomplete because you are not with us today and because I know how much you were waiting this moment. I will dedicate my doctorate certificate as an honorary doctorate for you. LOVE YOU MOM.

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I want to express my sincerest appreciation to my chair, Dr. Lionel de Souza. Dr. de Souza always motivated me and provided me valuable guidance and perspective on many approaches to keeping me on track. He was always available to answer my emails or telephone call when I had any questions and provided me valuable comments.

I extend my thanks to my second committee member Dr. Scott Burrus for his valuable and timely feedback. I would also like to thank Dr. Matt Knight for serving as the University Research Reviewer. Both Dr. Burrus and Knight believed in me and provided their guidance and expertise throughout this project. I am beyond grateful to the participants in this study who took the time out of their schedules for interviews and sharing their experiences. To my family and friends who supported, encouraged, and helped me over the years, thank you.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region consist of approximately 22 countries and represents 60% of the world's oil reserves and 45% of the world's natural gas reserves. Most governmental budgets in the region are based on oil and gas revenues. The price of oil and gas affects the fiscal policies and economy for governments in the MENA region (Sommer et al., 2016). The fall in crude oil price from $120 a barrel, to below $60 since June 2014 created new challenges for governments in the MENA region (Wang & Li, 2016). The fluctuations in oil and gas prices have had a significant impact in all economic sectors in the MENA region countries, especially the healthcare industry. In this qualitative study, I explored the marketing strategies that managers of international pharmaceutical companies have successfully implemented in the MENA region to ensure profitability during the period of decreases in the healthcare budgets following the decline in oil and gas prices. Section 1 is a description of background of the problem, problem and purpose statement, and nature and significance of the study. Section 1 also includes the research and interview questions, the conceptual framework, and a review of the literature.

Background of the Problem

The aim of business organizations is to create a profitable firm and maintain stability under prevailing economic conditions (Cassidy & Wynn, 2013). One of the foundations to improve business performance is the organization’s power to implement a marketing strategy and align it with the organization’s business process management (Rosemann & Vom Brocke, 2015). Many businesses, especially in the healthcare industry, fail to achieve objectives upon implementation of a marketing strategy, which often results in financial losses, or a waste of time and resources (MacLennan, 2011).

The MENA region encompasses approximately 22 countries and accounts for 60% of the world's oil reserves and 45% of the world's natural gas reserves. The need for healthcare services in the region has surged due to population growth, lifestyle change, and improved life expectancy (Nair, Ibrahim, & Celentano, 2013). The healthcare industry in the MENA region presents various challenges to both governments and private entities. Chahine & Tohme (2016) argued that the core problem in the healthcare industry is the lack of highly skilled individuals who can meet markets' needs, especially with lowered government healthcare budgets arising from the decline in oil and gas prices in 2014 and the financial crises in 2008. Some countries in the MENA region, especially the region which comprises the Gulf Cooperation Council (G.C.C.) countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman), are the home of expatriates from all over the world, and therefore, business success in the MENA is contingent upon familiarity with language, cultural, and social challenges (Nair et al., 2013). Expatriate leaders in the MENA region should take into consideration language and cultural differences in understanding the differences between the countries. The lack of cultural and language knowledge creates difficulties for some managers in international pharmaceutical companies to be engaged in the markets and limited opportunities to succeed.

Problem Statement

Surprising as it may seem, the fortunes from oil revenues are inextricably linked to healthcare in the Gulf region (World Health Organization, 2016). Since 2014, the significant declines in oil and gas prices by about 56% led governments in the MENA region to slash healthcare budgets by more than 30% (Gengler & Lambert, 2016). The general business problem is that some international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region have struggled with lowered government healthcare budgets arising from significant declines in oil and gas prices. The specific business problem is that some managers of international pharmaceutical companies lack region-specific marketing strategies to ensure profitability with reduced government healthcare budgets after 2014, stemming from declining oil and gas prices.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that managers of international pharmaceutical companies have successfully implemented in the MENA region to ensure profitability with post 2014 decreases in healthcare budgets, which followed the decline in oil and gas prices. The targeted population comprised of two international pharmaceutical companies, located in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates who have implemented successful marketing strategies to ensure profitability during periods of declining oil and gas prices. The verification of successful marketing strategies implementation was by examining pharmaceutical financial reports from this industry, specific to the MENA region. Managers also provided useful information during the interview on marketing strategy implementation that aided in understanding the lifestyle and needs of the MENA region’s communities, to add to the knowledge gleaned from others (Fontana, Saster-Merino, & Baca, 2015). Pharmaceutical companies are directly associated with the quality of healthcare by offering therapeutic options which contributed to improving the quality of human life.

Pharmaceutical organizational leaders have played a key role in improving human health and local economies through the creation of jobs and were known contributors to social change (Li & Tan, 2013).

Nature of the Study

In evaluating research methods, the qualitative approach was appropriate for this study to explore successful marketing strategy implementation according to experienced pharmaceutical professionals. Researchers use the qualitative approach to understand the perspectives and experiences of individuals or groups and, explore phenomena relying on interviewing participants through open-ended questions, related documents, and observing behavior, while the quantitative method entails relying on numeric data generated from an instrument administered to participants to examine relationships or differences among variables (O’Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed, & Cook, 2014). Mixed methods research is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches that comprise collecting and analyzing data to create a stronger understanding of phenomena than either individual method (Yin, 2014). The quantitative and mixed research methods were not suitable for this research because the purpose of the study was to obtain deep insights from pharmaceutical marketing professionals regarding successful strategy implementation in the MENA region, consequent to governments reducing healthcare budgets stemming from declining oil and gas prices.

The common designs in qualitative research studies are ethnography, phenomenology, ground theory, and case study research. The ethnographic design is the most primary method of social research wherein researchers explore the beliefs, feelings, and relationships among people who share the same culture (Lopez-Dicastillo &

Bellintxon, 2014). Ethnography as a research design was not appropriate for this study, as the purpose was not to explore a general or cultural related phenomenon. The phenomenological paradigm is appropriate when the purpose of the research is to understand a phenomenon through participants' experiences (Bevan, 2014), while researchers use the grounded theory design to discover, develop, and verify theories for explaining phenomena. The phenomenological and grounded theory designs therefore, were not suited to this study. The case study approach relies on identifying and exploring participant experiences while focusing on commonalities and differences within a fixed framework (Yin, 2014). A descriptive qualitative multiple case study design was found suitable to gain a deeper understanding of the successful business and marketing strategies implemented by pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region to address decreases in healthcare budgets with the declines in oil and gas prices.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was: What marketing strategies do successful pharmaceutical companies use with the lowered healthcare budgets arising from the declines in oil prices?

The following interview questions served to explore the successful regional marketing strategies implemented by pharmaceutical firm managers in the MENA region to ensure profitability in the face of lower healthcare budgets arising from oil and gas price declines:

1. What are your responsibilities as a manager in marketing strategy implementation?

2. What marketing strategies have you used that resulted in ensuring your company's profitability during periods of fluctuating oil and gas prices?
3. What are the main challenges associated with marketing strategy implementation in the MENA region?
4. What approaches have facilitated the implementation of a successful marketing strategy in the MENA region?
5. What do you do to avoid marketing strategy failure in the MENA region?
6. How the political problems impact the implementation of a marketing strategy in the MENA region?
7. From your experiences in the MENA region, how, if at all, does language and culture affect the success of marketing strategy planning and implementation?
8. What additional business and marketing information would you like to share that we have not covered?

Conceptual Framework

The theories chosen to underpin the study were the cultural intelligence theory (CQ) developed by Earley and Ang (2003), and the strategic flexibility theory, enunciated by Evans (1991). The CQ theory representing the conceptual framework is based on Sternberg and Detterman's (1986) integration of the loci of intelligence residing within the person. CQ has been defined as the capability of individuals to function effectively in a variety of cultural national, ethnic, organizational, and generational contexts (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Magnusson, Westjohn, Semenov, Randrianasolo, and Zdravkovic (2013) stated that CQ had a significant effect on international marketing strategies. Many researchers have found that CQ has some similarities with various approaches to cultural competence, but it differs, in that it can serve as a theoretical reference to understand and solve problems affecting the effective adaptation beyond just understanding of different cultures (Ng, Van Dyne, Ang, & Ryan, 2012). Cultural intelligence (CQ) concepts served as a helpful reference to understand the ability of the organizations' managers to implement a successful marketing strategy and align it with internal and external cultures.

The lens of the theory of strategic flexibility served to understand the responsiveness of firms to economic and other pressures, the benefits of a proactive rather than a reactive attitude, and the ability to do something other than originally intended (Bock, Opsahl, George, & Gann, 2012). Conceptually, the developers of strategic flexibility theory have suggested, that the ability of the organization to take appropriate action in response to external changes often reflects a strategic capability and disposition of a business (Robert & Stockport, 2014). Aaker and Mascarenhas (1984) employed the strategic flexibility theory to understand how an uncertain environment creates the need for strategic adaptation while Sanchez (1995) suggested that organizations’ strategic flexibility reflects the inherent flexibility of companies to apply resources in alternative ways and measures (Robert & Stockport, 2014).

Operational Definitions

This section included definitions of the common key terms used in this research that may help readers to understand the technical jargon.

Cultural intelligence (CQ): Peterson (2004) defined CQ as the ability to engage and interact with people who are culturally different (Putranto, Gustomo, & Ghazali, 2015).

Marketing strategy: Marketing strategy can be defined as a process used by a company to focus on optimal opportunities to achieve maximum profit potential and sustain the business. Mechanisms of a successful marketing strategy includes proper planning, implementation, evaluation, and control (Ramaseshan, Ishak, & Kingshott, 2013).

Multicultural team (MT): The acronym MT refers to a group of people from different cultures working together on activities that span national borders and thus represents a complex environment and affects on team's performance (Lisak & Erez, 2015).

Pharmaceutical companies: The pharmaceutical industry is defined as companies engaged in research, development, manufacturing, and marketing of drugs for human use (Signore, 2016).

Strategic flexibility (SF): This term refers to the ability of the organization's manager to identify innovation opportunities and commit resources to change strategies by leveraging core values, culture, core competence, and brand (Sushil, 2015).

Transformational leadership: A trait and ability of leaders to take actions to try to increase their followers' awareness of what is right and important (Abbasi & Zamani-Miandashti, 2013).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts that researchers assume to be true, however, cannot be proven. Incorrect assumptions can lead to a negative impact on the integrity and honesty of the research findings (Fan, 2013). Researchers must determine potential assumptions to increase the general level of understanding and avoid misrepresentation in empirical research. In this research study, there were several assumptions. First, all participants in this study were expected to have suitable experiences in marketing strategy implementation and regional culture knowledge which enriched the research through insights and perceptions. Second, because data were collected through face-to-face interviews, the participants were able express themselves and shared views and perceptions openly. Third, ethical and unbiased responses of the participants were another assumption in this research. The final assumption was that economic difficulties and curtailments of government support during the period of study would not have a major impact on the results.

Limitations

All research studies have strengths and weaknesses; however, limitations represent the internal and external potential weaknesses that could affect the study (Connelly, 2013). In this qualitative multiple case study, the primary limitation was that participants would not be willing to answer the interview questions, or accurately share personal and company experiences. Another limitation was the lack of available and accurate data related to the pharmaceutical industry in the MENA region, and the absence of research studies on the healthcare industry. Finally, despite differences in cultures and traditions among the MENA region countries, international pharmaceutical companies with headquarters in the UAE implement similar marketing strategies in all regions, which was perceived as a limitation due to little variance in marketing strategies (Kabasakal, Dastmalchian, Karacay, & Bayraktar, 2013).

Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries of the study, denoting what is under the researcher’s control (Welch, 2014). The first delimitation of this research was the narrow focus on organizational activities related to marketing strategy implementation; therefore, the exploration of this research was limited to factors related to culture and language that influenced marketing strategy implementation. The second delimitation of this research was the geographic location, where most of the international healthcare companies in the MENA region were based in the UAE. The level of expertise and time that managers spent to work in marketing strategy implementation vary from one organization to another. The participant inclusionary criteria in this research therefore required that all participants were directly involved in marketing strategy implementation for at least 3 years in the MENA region to qualify to participate in the study.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that leaders of international healthcare manager used to ensure profitability during periods of government reduced healthcare budgets stemming from declines in oil and gas prices.

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings of this study may be of significance to managers of international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region, as the knowledge generated may contribute to overcoming obstacles to developing and implementing effective marketing strategies. Pharmaceutical organizations’ marketing and business managers may use the findings of this study to elevate current marketing strategy development and implementation knowledge and maintain organizations' sustainability. The current paucity and knowledge deficit regarding marketing strategy and role of associated cultural factors in business success in the MENA region during periods of declines in oil and gas prices potentially made this study and its results potential significant for international pharmaceutical organizations.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study contribute to positive social change through benefiting human health. Despite the positive social change due to the existence of foreign companies in the UAE, inflation of living costs has adversely affected the middle and low-income levels of society (Al Faris & Soto, 2016). The results of the study may serve to influence positive job creation, as with the success of pharmaceutical companies in the region, increased employment is a potential outcome. During 2012, there were 6,500 international active registered companies in the UAE, illustrating the role of foreign companies in job creation and enrichment of the economies of the region (Ewers, 2016).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore the marketing strategies used by leaders of international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. Despite explorations of the effects of marketing strategies on business sustainability in the MENA region, few researches reveal the factors that may help international pharmaceutical companies' leaders to implement successful marketing strategies. The literature review encompasses different scholarly insights and concepts to develop arguments for this research.

Topics discussion in this literature review includes a critical review of the professional and academic papers pertaining to the challenges and intricacies of effectively implementing marketing strategies. The authors of these articles provide background information and findings related to marketing strategies implementation and influential factors such as culture, leadership styles, organizational knowledge and flexibility, and managing multicultural teams. This literature review is divided into several subsections, which are: The role of CQ knowledge in planning and implementing marketing strategies overseas, strategic flexibility within the organization, transformational leadership style, managing a multicultural team, and marketing strategies implementation. At the end of this section, a summary and conclusion will follow these subsections.

The sources for the literature review included peer-reviewed scholarly studies from the Walden University Library, using Pro-Quest, Emerald Management Journals, and Sage Full-Text Collections. Additional resources will be obtained through searching various journal articles, published books, and other credible online publications such as Thoreau, different Dissertations and Theses, EBSCOhost database, the WHO (World Healthcare organization) website, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, Questia, Saudi FDA, and others. The key word search includes keywords or phrases related to pharmaceutical industry and marketing strategies such as: marketing strategies implementation, pharmaceutical industry in the MENA region, culture in business, strategic flexibility, leadership styles in the MENA region, strategic planning, case study, and Saudi FDA reports. This literature review consists of 153 references, with 138 (90%) of sources from peer-reviewed journals published within 5 years from the expected graduation date and Walden University Chief Academic Officer (CAO) approval.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Researchers have distinguished several types of intelligence such as emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and cognitive intelligence (IQ). Emotional intelligence can be defined as a set of emotional abilities that form a level of intelligence, while social intelligence is the ability to achieve a certain social goal. Cognitive intelligence or general intelligence is the ability to grasp and solve problems (Bücker & Korzilius, 2015). These three traditional concepts of intelligence forfeit their relevance when individuals interact with different cultures.

CQ is another type of intelligence defined as the individual's ability to adapt and perform effectively in new cultural context (Putranto et al., 2015). The CQ theory which draws from Sternberg and Detterman's (1986) integrative theoretical framework of the various loci of intelligence, developed in (2003) by Earley and Ang's, with a focus specifically on resolving cross-cultural problems, underpinned this study (Wood, & St. Peters, 2014). Keung and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2013) stressed the importance of CQ in today business where it considers as an essential factor in multicultural environments that underlying effective leadership performance. By applying CQ concepts, leaders can develop a broad framework of understanding, skills, and behaviors for employees to engage them in a multicultural environment rather than focusing on certain cultures (Presbitero, 2016).

In last decades and due to globalization in business, managers and employees need to develop CQ to fit organizational environment and culture, where individuals react and behave differently (Li, Mobley, & Kelly, 2016). CQ is a framework of knowledge and skills, related by cultural metacognition that allows people to adapt to, select and shape the cultural aspects of their environment (Bücker, Furrer, Postma, & Buynes, 2014). Koo Moon, Kwon Choi, and Shik Jung (2013) noted that by developing CQ, individuals will be able to improve competencies to adapt effectively to a different cultural environment. Guðmundsdóttir (2015) assured that in new cultural settings, the understanding of CQ concept helps to behave effectively with inter-individual differences. In multinational organizations, CQ is a type of intelligence focused on employees' capabilities to grasp and respect diversity and other cultures (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Several researchers addressed CQ in various aspects and revealed the positive influences on expatriates’ performance such as big five personality, language proficiency, role clarity, communication ability, and previous international experiences (Koo Moon et al., 2013).

To understand the interindividual differences, the application of CQ can serve to improving the ability of people to adapt effectively to new cultural settings (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015). Presbitero (2016) outlined that Earley and Ang (2003) identified the four facets of CQ: Cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ. Three of the four factors, metacognition, cognition, and motivation are considered mental abilities in internal cognitive systems, while the behavioral capabilities capture the extensive action area (Eisenberg et al., 2013).

Cognitive CQ

The concept of CQ has been related to task performance in the sense that individuals who have high levels of cognitive CQ were able to draw clear cultural schemas allowing them to be aware of any potential differences that may appear in an intercultural situation (Presbitero, 2016). Individuals who are working within a team with high level of cognitive CQ can have better task performance since they have high levels of observing, cataloging, and analyzing team member behavior (Moon, 2013). Ng, Van Dyne, Ang, and Ryan (2012) opined that in intercultural interface situations, the cognitive processes such as self-consciousness, pattern recognition, and analogical reasoning become important issues to study. Li et al. (2016) defined cognitive CQ as an individual's ability to notice and understand both similarities and differences between cultures. Moon (2013) concurred with Li et al. by identifying general knowledge structures and mental maps as required factors about different cultures.

Bücker, Furrer, and Lin (2015) suggested that cognitive CQ is a competency based on awareness of norms and practices applicable in different cultures, obtained through education, training, and personal experience. These competencies include knowledge of all aspects of cultures such as legal, economic, and social systems as well as the value system of these cultures. A cross-cultural course is considered a process that supports intercultural learning through the development of cognitive, affective, and behavioral capabilities (Koo et al., 2013). Through training and lecturing, individuals can increase their cognitive, CQ and receive knowledge about other cultures (Putranto et al., 2015). Presbitero (2016) highlighted the importance of training programs that demonstrate the differences between different cultural values and how to increase employees' cognitive CQ and affect their behaviors in diverse societies. The related training programs would assist the employees to adapt appropriately with behavioral adjustments initiates with basic cultural awareness and knowledge of the culture's values

(MacNab & Worthley, 2012). Eisenberg et al. (2016) examined the impact of cross-cultural management courses CCM on cognitive CQ and found that these types of courses, has markedly positive effects on employees CQ. Cross-cultural training typically includes two broad groups of activities. The first encloses practical information on the host country and the second consists of experiential learning activities (Bücker & Korzilius, 2015). These activities combine cognitive and behavioral techniques through cultural simulation games or cross-cultural role-plays (Bücker et al., 2015).

CCM courses have provided to expatriate employees knowledge regarding intercultural communication, relocation, and cognitive skills, which could influence positively on individuals' adjustment in other cultures (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015). Koo Moon et al. (2013) stated that the direct and indirect forms of communication among cultures aid expatriates understand the rules, norms, systems, and ways of thinking, therefore, help individuals to improve cognitive CQ. Presbitero (2016) opined that face-to-face communications between local employees and expatriates will positively affect their knowledge of cultural differences and to adjust their awareness on the cultural system, rules, and values. Managers with a high cognitive CQ were the strongest predictors of transformational leadership. Keung et al. (2013) acknowledged that individuals who have high cognitive CQ and adapted in new multicultural environments were capable of leading in a transformational style whereas leaders who were struggling in new cultural environments spent most of their times to adapt to a new culture which affects leadership performance. Wood and Peters (2014) assured that cognitive CQ has a positive relationship with cultural judgment and decision making which could reinforce leadership style in different cultural environments.

Metacognitive CQ

One of the reasons for using CQ is that it consists of an integration of cognitive and dynamic processes that incorporate the mental functioning of "metacognitive CQ" and "cognitive CQ" (Bücker& Korzillus, 2015). To organize and comprehend cultural knowledge, people use meta cognitive CQ which focuses on higher order cognitive processes (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Bücker et al. (2015) defined metacognitive CQ as individual's consciousness of cultural indications during dealing with persons from other cultural backgrounds. Magnusson, Westjohn, Semenov, Randrianasolo, and Zdravkovic (2013) stated that metacognitive CQ has a significant effect on individual's cultural judgment and decision making, further, it enhances contextualized thinking and cognitive flexibility. Bücker and Korzillus (2015) supported the idea that people with a high metacognition can take superordinate judgments about their thoughts as well as those of others.

In contrast to cognitive CQ that is related positively to the previous work experience overseas, metacognitive CQ is positively related to previous working experience with foreign nationals (Koo Moon et al., 2013). To develop metacognitive CQ, Bücker and Korzillus (2015) suggested special training to increase the ability to recognize the processes that people use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. According to Eisenberg et al. (2013), CCM courses have had powerful effects on the metacognitive facet and helped people to be better conscious of others' cultural intentions before and during intercultural interactions. Such CQ courses and training could improve the level of metacognitive and life experiences among employees, along with other attributes and skills that can improve their work performance (MacNab & Wothley, 2012). In contrast, Koo Moon et al. (2013) opined that expatriates might not be willing to develop personal meta cognitive CQ through learning or special training; however, researchers assumed that these skills will be acquired through direct work experiences and communications with foreign nationals. In this context, it was difficult to improve metacognitive CQ in a short period, since it requires a significant change of a person's mental structure or way of thinking toward other cultures (Guomundstotir, 2015).

Direct and indirect communications with foreign nationals help expatriates to develop metacognitive CQ, thus ensuring individuals understand the rules, values, system, and way of thinking in other cultures (Guomundstotir, 2015). In specific, indirect communications (virtual) to be effective need persistent check in of assumptions and high levels of metacognitive CQ. Indirect communications also necessitate the drive and high levels of energy to engage in cross-cultural interactions (Presbitero, 2016). The interaction with local employees and students in the host country will be positively related to the ability of a person to be conscious of other cultural differences and to adapt to the culture system, rules, and values (Koo Moon et al., 2013). In the business world, managers with higher metacognitive CQ skills collaborate more effectively across cultures and interact with marketing strategies implementation to enhance organizations' performance in the international market (Magnusson et al., 2013).

Managers with high metacognitive CQ have greater capacities and skills to interact with marketing strategies implementation to enhance profitability within the organization (Magnusson et al., 2013). Those people have better task performance and capabilities in terms of planning, monitoring, and revising mental models of cultural values and observing, cataloging, and analyzing team member behavior that influences on firm's performance (Presbitero, 2016). Building on this logic, expatriate managers with high metacognitive CQ determine a suitable marketing strategy to implement and if there is a marketing adaptation required by the regulatory environment (Magnusson et al., 2013). Managers in international marketing must exercise better judgment and decision making in determining best ways to implement and adopt a marketing strategy to address the observed environmental and cultural differences (Bücker et al., 2015).

Motivational CQ

Researchers affirmed that motivational CQ refers to the intellectual ability to direct attention and energy toward tasks or situations characterized by cultural differences (Ng et al., 2012). In the context of cross-cultural interactions, motivational CQ is a construct stemming from the stream of CQ research that represent the necessary drive to attend to interactions and the capabilities for problem-solving in the real world (Putranto et al., 2015; Wood & Peters, 2014). As a capability, Keung et al. (2013) reaffirmed that motivational CQ is the ability and direction of energy toward learning and functioning in different cultural situations.

Koo Moon et al. (2013) suggested that all research related to CQ enhance motivational CQ especially when persons acquire an international work experience. In contrast, Ng et al. (2012) found that international work experience and the interaction with different cultures enhance all CQ factors except motivational CQ. Maldonado and Vera (2014) found that individual motivational CQ is a natural characteristic, where an individual with high motivational CQ tends to desire participations in various international activities with people from other cultures. Magnusson et al. (2013) supported the idea and stated that individuals with higher motivational CQ have better work adjustment in a foreign country in many sectors especially in sales and marketing strategies.

Individuals with high motivational CQ tend to learn and approach new cultural knowledge and awareness, through experiential learning in management education. CCM courses improved individual's motivational CQ and helped to adjust to new cultural environments (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Magnusson et al. (2013) urged companies to provide expatriate employees CQ training where they found that motivational CQ can be learned, developed, and enhanced. Researchers disagreed concerning the impact of training courses on the improvement of motivational CQ. Some researchers stated that training courses tend to improve individual's ability to maintain and sustain functional behaviors in culturally unfamiliar or diverse situations. Others contrasted this idea and stated that cross-cultural training failed to increase any of CQ facets especially the motivational CQ (Bücker& Korzillus, 2015).

In international business, the empirical investigators of motivational CQ have concluded that a significant relationship exists between this characteristic and the two facets: international marketing strategies and employees' performance (Magnusson et al., 2013). Chen, Liu, and Portnoy (2012) supported Magnusson et al.'s (2013) findings by contended that organizations with high motivational CQ enhance employees' performance, sales, and marketing strategies. The skills and competencies of expatriate managers play an important for companies to sustain a competitive advantage; therefore, this places the expatriate managers at the center of attention in implementing a successful marketing strategy for global firms (Koo Moon et al., 2013). Chen et al. (2012) have provided considerable insights about the impact of individuals who have higher motivational CQ. Managers are often effective negotiators in cross-cultural transactions and have stronger communication skills to overcome the obstacles of negotiations. Expatriate managers furthermore, with a high level of motivational CQ appear to consistently focus on helping team members to overcome the challenges of consisting with diversity of team members (Moon, 2013). Regardless on how to improve motivational CQ, all researchers affirmed that high level of motivational CQ contributes to greater expatriate adjustment, job performance, and job completion (Magnusson et al., 2013).

Behavioral CQ

In the global business environment, international companies' leaders and employees need the proficiency to engage people from other cultures, values, and behavioral norms (Wood & Peters, 2014). The behavioral CQ dimension indicates to personal behaviors that a person engages in, and reflects the ability adapt behaviors suitable for a new culture (Guomundstotir, 2015). Presbitero (2016) stressed that people with behavioral CQ demonstrate appropriately verbal and non-verbal actions in cross-cultural situations. Ng et al. (2012) supported Presbitero idea that the ability to demonstrate appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions are complemented by mental capabilities for cultural understanding based on cultural values of particular settings. Behavioral CQ can be more enhanced in the international business when people directly engage other nationals from other cultures and reveals what a person does rather than what he or she thinks (Koo Moon et al., 2013).

Bücker et al. (2015) suggested that a significant relationship between international experiences and behavioral CQ where people knew how to use culturally appropriate words, tones, gestures, and facial expressions. In international leaders' school, behavioral, CQ was found as the best predictor of transformational leadership style, which is an inevitable factor of expatriate performance (Keung et al., 2013; Moon, 2013). Ng et al. (2012) contended that expatriate professionals with high behavioral, CQ were evaluated as the most efficient persons in meeting work performance expectations. In contrast, Koo Moon et al. (2013) outlined that behavioral CQ and previous international work experiences for expatriates were not positively related such as in metacognitive and cognitive CQ, and the authors inferred that because they found that expatriates relations in foreign nationals were based on work issues rather than learn or experience cultural differences. Keung et al. (2013) argued the importance of behavioral CQ skills in the international business to increase innovation, task performance, and multicultural team effectiveness, and to increase intercultural negotiation effectiveness for leaders. In the case of lacking appropriate CQ behavior, leaders and employees must have the tendency to acquire these skills through special courses and training (Chen & Lin, 2013).

MacNab and Worthley (2012) advocated for intensive learning courses in management education to improve all facets of CQ in particular behavioral CQ. The development of the employees' capability for effective communication to manage culturally diverse clients could be through training courses on behavioral CQ such as other languages acquisition or learning different accents (Presbitero, 2016). Training courses of behavioral CQ related with basic cultural awareness could help expatriates in an international environment to adapt appropriate behavioral adjustments in host countries (MacNab & Worthley, 2012). Bücker and Korzillus (2015) stated that cross-cultural training typically encloses information such as political, cultural, and economic information, and cultural awareness information, which focuses on understanding the host country culture. In disparity to much empirical research, Eisenberg et al. (2013) opined that cross-cultural management courses (CCM) had no significant effects on behavioral CQ. The improvement of behavioral CQ skills together with available resources that help to provide appropriate answers in a cross-cultural interaction have an influence on reducing the level of anxiety in intercultural interactions (Bücker et al., 2014). Individuals with high behavioral CQ have a flexible enough repertoire of culturally diverse behaviors and can display and change them according to the cultural demands of the situation. Despite this repertoire, there are items in behavioral CQ that do not apply to cross-cultural interactions specifically in the context of virtual communication where these items focus on face-to-face interactions and facial expressions (Presbitero, 2016).

Strategic Flexibility

The theory of strategic flexibility can serve to understand leaders' ability to precipitate and adapt to internal and external change by modifying strategies that help organizations to quickly respond in a proactive as well as reactive strategic to better mitigate risks (Sushil, 2015). The conceptual framework of strategic flexibility is enunciated by Evans (1991) through integrating the several terms that denote flexibility of actions taken prior and after any change has taken place (Fan, Wu, & Wu, 2013). Fernandez-Perez, García-Morales, and Pullés (2016) stressed the importance to customize resources quickly to response any change and to realize and act promptly stood the commitment of such resources. Companies with higher strategic flexibility are better capable of employing its resources to counteract to any marketing strategy initiated by the competitors, in contrast, firms with lower strategic flexibility often lack the resources and ability to respond to a product market strategy (Kurt & Hulland, 2013).

Recently and due to globalization, researchers stressed the importance of the holistic understanding of how to build and implement strategic flexibility within the organization at the level of planning, development, and technology to embrace changes (Fernández-Pérez, José Verdú-Jóver, & Benitez-Amado, 2013). Nurdiani, Fricker, and Börstler (2014) affirmed that there are two levels of change associated with strategic flexibility: strategic and operational changes. The researchers linked strategic changes to the organizational structure and development process within the organization, while the operational changes pertained to the resources. Implementing strategic flexibility disposition, is often associated with fostering and innovative culture that limits resistance to change and promotes an organization structure of less complexity which bodes well for the management to focus on new opportunities (Bock et al., 2012).

Kurt et al. (2013) opined that strategic flexibility could be connected to various functional areas within the organization such as management, marketing, operation, and finance. The implementation of a high level of strategic flexibility contributes to long-term sustainability and growth of any organization and build a maturity level for the ecosystem (Sushil, 2015). Bock et al. (2012) shared the view of Sushil (2015) affirming that companies with high level of strategic flexibility can respond quickly to the changing environment through the adjustment of their learning and innovation processes, which gives the organization longevity. To achieve an efficient strategic flexibility, business innovators requires a nuanced assessment of the relationship between structural changes, managerial awareness, and change control (Fan et al., 2013). Al-Zu'bi (2016) stressed the importance of building a strategic flexibility for the organization to achieve new competitive advantage to suit the realities of the environment in which it operates concerning liquidity, adaptability, and agility. In the context of the organization, leaders' style and efficient knowledge management are fundamental to strategic flexibility success (Bock et al., 2012).

Among the different concepts of strategic flexibility, the managerial perspective and leaders' responsibilities are playing an important role to react rapidly in the face of environmental change, therefore, helps managers and decision-makers to build up a productive environment with higher degrees of productivity (Ahmadi, Salamzadeh, Daraei, & Akbari, 2012). From the cognitive perspective, Fernandez-Perez et al. (2016) stressed the influence of leaders' external relationship with other actors outside their organization in strategic flexibility. Leaders seek to extend the organization activities by exploring novel opportunities and creating strategic options, therefore, enhancing strategic flexibility (Bock et al., 2012). By increasing external social networking with top managers of other companies in the same industry enable leaders to be aware of the valuable information, knowledge, available resources that can utilize to mitigate uncertainties and to make the right decisions (Fernandez-Perez et al., 2013). The operational flexibilities within an organization which are related to leaders' knowledge and their ability to acquire resources provide a base for any company to practice strategic flexibility, as it would require to re-employ resources as per the strategic change (Sushil, 2015). Kurt and Hulland (2013) shared the view of Sushil (2015) that managers who command significantly greater resources need to have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding on the impacts of implementing strategic flexibility to make appropriate decisions. Fernandez-Perez et al. (2013) stressed on the importance of leaders' personality, contributing to promote strategic flexibility efficiently, in achieving higher performance within the organization.

The marketing strategies are considered as one of the core concepts for companies to maintain sustainability. The success of such decisions related to marketing strategies hinges on the manager's sophisticated awareness of local regulations, resources, and customers preferences as well as desire to make necessary adaptations (Magnusson et al., 2013). Kurt et al. (2013) pointed out that previous studies related to strategic flexibility have not considered the impacts on organizational marketing strategies. In their research, Kurt et al. contended that strategic flexibility of rivals is the primary factor for the relationship between marketing strategy and firm's value, where companies allocate significant amounts of funds to gain competitive merit over their competitors. Al-Zu'bi (2016) stated that strategic flexibility maintains an adequate level of flexibility in marketing strategies through developing new products, entering new markets, and modifying products according to the demand of the changing market; however, the success of this strategy depends on whether the company has sufficient financial flexibility. Fan et al. (2013) shared the view of Al-Zu'bi and confirmed that the application of strategic flexibility is the key to success for the implementation of marketing strategies because it improves customers' satisfaction, creates higher customer value, and raises a company's rate in markets.

Transformational Leadership

In a globalized setting, leaders must be aware of cross-cultural differences and be willing modify their behavior regardless their cultural background (Lee, Veasna, & Wu, 2013). During the past decades, transformational leadership point-of-view considered as a key for successful operations, therefore, many research had been carried out to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' behavior and performance (Rao & Kareem Abdul, 2015). Transformational leadership can be defined as the process of consciously influencing the organization's members to make a change and achieve their goals (Al-Abrrow, 2013). The qualities of transformational leaders have affected the organization's performance through their communication and action, raise the consciousness of the employees of the organization's goals and missions, and encourage them to overcome the personal interest (Abbasi & Zamani-Miandashti, 2013). To achieve the organization's goal, the transformational leader uses four basic dimensions that may affect the self-efficacy of employees which in turn positively affect their ability to increase creativity and innovation in organizational settings (Hassan, Bashir, Abrar, Baig, & Zubair, 2015). Al-Abrrow (2013) stated that the four components of transformational leadership behavior consisted of:

- Inspirational motivation refers to the ability of leaders to emphasizes motivation between their followers and inspire them through confidence, optimism, and enthusiasm.
- Idealized influence refers by leaders' charisma, vision, values, and principles, that make them well respected by their followers.
- Intellectual stimulation refers to leaders' willingness to encourage followers to seek solutions for challenges from a new perspective.
- Individualized consideration refers to leaders’ ability to support and listen to the personal needs of their followers.

In the healthcare industry, a transformational leadership style provides a setting for active leaders to develop the competencies and improve performance (Gabel, 2013). In 2013, the American College of Healthcare Executives determined the qualities of healthcare leadership as the capability to motivate and inspire, set the organizational vision, and manage changes to fulfill a successful strategic performance. A few pieces of research of healthcare industry in developing countries had been carried out and addressed the impact of transformational leadership on the improvement of organizational performance through organizational learning (Al-Abrrow, 2013). Ebadifard Azar and Sarabi Asiabar (2015) stressed the importance of transformational leadership in the healthcare industry and its influence on organizational performance by focusing on the investment in both organizational learning and intellectual capital. Martin and Waring (2013) found that in Europe and internationally, there has been a sustained focus on the role of transformational leaders in improving health care quality and setting by seeking to empower professionals and train them. In the MENA region, the transformational leadership qualities can enhance organizational performance by satisfied both employees and patients, which confirmed the findings of prior studies (Al-Abrrow, 2013).

The findings from empirical research on leadership styles had been questioned if transformational style could be applicable outside North America where it originated and developed (Sheikh, Newman, & Al Azzeh, 2013). Rao and Kareem Abdul (2015) found that leaders in the MENA region were less transformational and more passive-avoidant than leaders in the United States and Europe and this because they are not sharing their beliefs, values, and future vision with their followers. Galanou and Farrag (2015) shared the same point of view with Rao and Kareem Abdul (2015) and affirmed that in the MENA region companies must pay more attention to the Islamic leadership style that is related to individuals' cultural heritage and religion. In contrast, Sheikh et al. (2013) opined that leadership style in the MENA region is becoming increasingly reliant on American and European style due to the growing of expatriate employees in the local companies that hastened the implementation of the Western management style. The interactions among local leaders and expatriates enforcing them to adjust leadership styles to succeed. Expatriates managers have to adapt their leadership styles in host countries to achieve their assignments in multicultural environments to have higher performance (Lee et al., 2013).

The relationship between transformational leadership and expatriates' performance is related to the level of CQ knowledge and the ability to interact with other people from cross-cultural backgrounds (Keung & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013). Transformational leadership behaviors with a high level of cultural knowledge of the host country affect innovation orientation and followers' performance (Engelen, Schmidt, Strenger, & Brettel, 2014). This point of view confirmed by Lee et al. (2013) findings, where they contended that managers who have a high level of CQ and transformational leadership behaviors were capable of accomplishing their goals in high performance in a national host culture. Muenjohn and Armstrong (2015) believed that leaders who demonstrated transformational leadership qualities were more efficient in managing people and companies than those who practiced other types of leadership behaviors, regardless of cultures, countries, and organizations. The advantage of both cultural knowledge and the transformational leadership is that expatriate managers will be able to mitigate all negative effect of group heterogeneity within the organization in the work environment (Wang, Rode, Shi, Luo, & Chen, 2013). Expatriates leaders who practice transformational leadership have a high standard of expectancy and self-confidence; therefore, they are willing to work harder to achieve challenging goals (Muenjohn and Armstrong, 2015). A primary focus of leaders' schools is the intercultural training to improve CQ knowledge and transformational leadership, therefore, organizational learning covers two facets of cultural intelligence: behavioral and cognitive (Al-Abrrow, 2013; Keung & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2013).

Earlier studies revealed that transformational leaders could be trained. Smit (2013) stated the leaders need to develop their skills through education and training courses to set in alignment with organizational objectives and to preserve sustainability. Braun, Peus, Weisweller, and Frey (2013) found that all trainings that address transformational leadership style and behaviors provide managers an additional knowledge and skills. Organizational learning is a crucial factor for a company to develop a new product process efficiently, which is strongly related to transformational leadership behaviors (Sattayaraksa & Boon-itt, 2016). Organizational learning must encompass all persons and groups to understand the organizational vision, goals, culture, design, and technology (Al-Abrrow, 2013).

Such as in many fields, education and training courses in the healthcare industry have a positive impact on the relationship between leader and followers that benefit from the application of transformational leadership (Gabel, 2013). Transformational leadership managers need to understand the diversity within the organization to shape and efficient relationships between employees and leaders, which are impact organizational outcomes (Muchiri & Ayoko, 2013). Organizations that follow an active learning and training courses in transformational leadership behaviors have the chance to improve employees' performance and to increase productivity and profitability (Lee et al., 2013). Organizational learning courses provide individuals the opportunity to share information and knowledge from their personal experience with others in the organization (Abbasi & Zamani-Miandashti, 2013). Al-Abrrow (2013) stressed the importance of selecting training courses in healthcare organizations, especially for high managerial positions as such persons are more likely to become transformational leaders. As a result, the significant impact of transformational leadership on organizational performance, productivity, and administrative reform depends on organizational learning in all departments (Moynihan, Pandey, & Wright, 2012). Abbasi and Zamani-Miandashti (2013) assured this positive effect of these two factors to improve internal and external organizational performance.

In studying the performance of teams and organizations, the perspective of organizational learning may help leaders to create a significant relationship between team's performance, organizational culture, and innovation (Long, Abdul Aziz, Kowang, & Ismail, 2015). Organizations should put in place human resource and talent management programs which actively enhance transformational leadership to mitigate possible negative effects of responsibilities' conflict on relevant organizational outcomes (Muchiri & Ayoko, 2013). The National Center for Healthcare Leadership (NCHL) defined five ground rules to improve performance and manage innovation in the healthcare industry to maintain sustainability: (a) the alignment between leadership development and organizational strategies, (b) the role of the organizational board, (c) learning skills and oriented action, (d) integration of human resource strategy and talent management, and (e) setting a measurable outcomes list. Scott-Jackson et al. (2014) highlighted interesting findings regarding training methods used in the MENA region. These researchers found that most of the companies often fail to use developmental methods to improve local talent skills. Rao and Kareem Abdul (2015) stated that the human resource department must be engaged in designing and assessment training programs need and linking training practices to all human resource practices.

Managing Multicultural Team

Globalization, development of multinational companies, and demographics changes in many nations such as in Australia and Canada have created a status that some consider a problem, while others see as an opportunity (Dumitresco, Lie, & Dobrescu, 2014). Managing multinational companies created a challenge for leaders who were leading multicultural teams (Levitt, 2015). People have different stereotypes in communication, learning, and interacting with others based on their culture; these challenges take into consideration to identify the traits and skills for multicultural team managers (Lisak & Erez, 2015). Early researchers found that multicultural individuals suffer in a multicultural environment from multiple cultural identities. In contrast, newest studies ignored the concepts stated by the earlier researchers and stated that identity patterns have an impact on team's performance and result by improving individual merits such as awareness, cognitive complexity, the ability to respond to cultural cues, and the creativity (Fitzsimmons, 2013). Levitt (2015) opined that more diverse teams suffered from increased conflict but promoted more creativity and had higher levels of satisfaction in comparison than homogeneous teams.

To discuss homogeneous teams, multicultural team members are searching for a leader (a) who provides confidence, (b) capable of communicating effectively with the entire team, and (c) create trust among team members (Lisak & Erez, 2015). In a global business environment, managing a multicultural team requires a leader with a clear strategic objective to acquire and promote knowledge and understanding of the cultures and values (Ochieng, Price, Ruan, Egbu, & Moore, 2013). The ability to accept and respect diversity is an essential trait for leaders who are managing multicultural teams (Johnson, 2015). The benefit from the accepting and understanding of diversity is the ability of the team members learning from one another. Many conflicts in a multicultural team come from misunderstanding, therefore, it is very important for multinational companies to identify the qualities for managers who will lead multicultural teams. Dumitresco et al. (2014) defined the traits of a good multicultural manager (see figure 1).

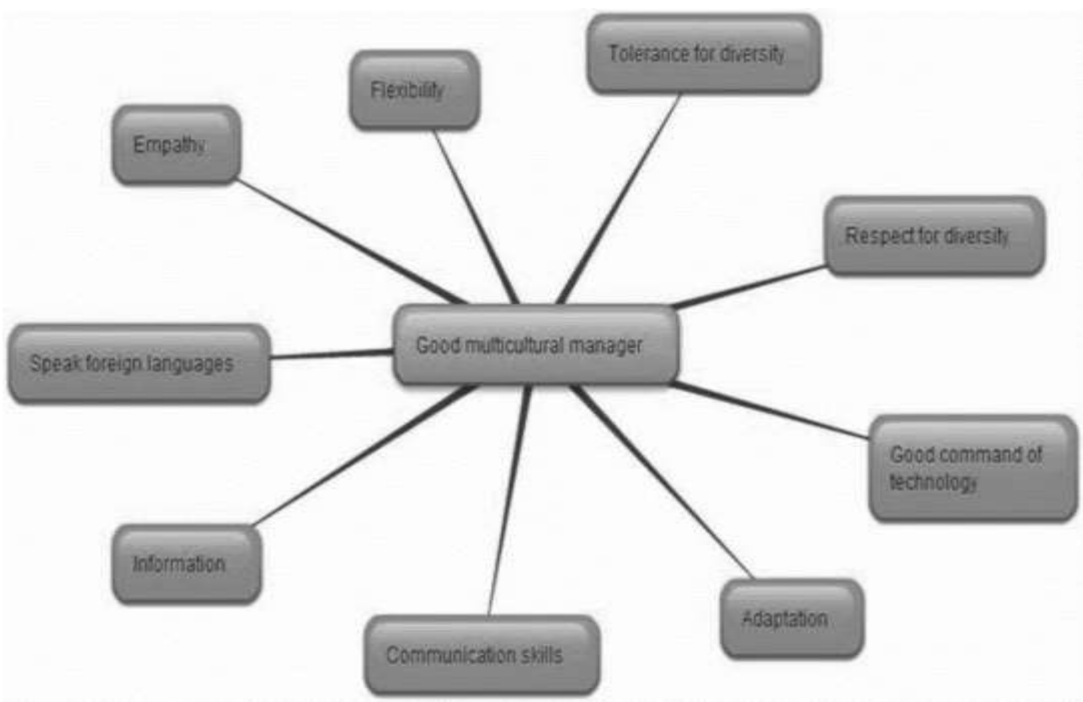

Figure 1: Profile of a good multicultural manager

Generational Diversity

Some researchers have studied multicultural teams from the cultural differences perspective, but others discussed regarding generational differences (Dumitresco et al., 2014). It is not surprising due to globalization to see people from different generations working together; therefore, this variety has created challenges for managers where each generation has its values, skills, and characteristics (Gursoy, Chi, & Karadag, 2013). Yi, Ribbens, Fu, and Cheng (2015) shared the view of Gursoy et al. (2013) and stated that managers in the new business environment had the challenge to understand the individual's need stemmed from generational differences in addition to the challenge of cultural differences. In the current international healthcare environment, generational differences represent challenges for managers to lead people who think and behave in a different way (Hendricks & Cope, 2013). The generations were classified into four categories according to the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund; however, Dumitrescu et al. (2014) in their study identified the fifth generation. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics and information for each generation.

Table 1

Characteristics of Different Generations

Generation	Born	Characteristics
Traditionalists or the veterans	Before 1945	• team players • loyal to a company all life long • respect for authority • obedient • do not discuss rules
Baby boomers	Between 1946 and 1964	• main objective: personal growth • sensitive to feedback • optimistic • personal satisfaction is very important for them
Generation X	Between 1965 and 1980	• positive attitude • they question the authority • goal oriented • not patient • able to multitask • flexible
Generation Y or	Between 1981 and 2000	• Sociable • Heroic spirit

(table continues)

millennial generation		• Do not know to deal with difficult people • Perseverant • Self-confident
Generation Z	After 2000	• More sociable • Media addicted • using high technology • quick accept difference • more tolerant

In multicultural teams, it is vital for managers to understand the structure and differences of the values underlying of each generation to create and maintain a healthy work environment that foster leadership, motivation, communication, and generational synergy (Gursoy et al., 2013). Dumitresco et al. (2014) opined that managers of multicultural teams must be able to understand that young people want quick results and appreciation for their work while middle aged employees have to believe in a task to achieve better results. The old workers, furthermore, are very faithful and avoid uncertainty. In the healthcare industry, Hendricks and Cope (2013) stated that all generations are different in the 3Cs, which means commitment, communication, and compensation, therefore, managers need to consider several strategies to manage generational diversity in the healthcare workplace. Leaders should look at generational differences not merely as idiosyncratic inter-group differences, nor as age differences, but as a fact in society and workplace that continues to develop from generation to another. Leaders therefore, must understand the differences among generations and conflicts in the workplaces to ensure success (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Managers who focus on the positive traits of each generational cohort will be able to develop an effective plan for business strategies, which promote quality and productivity and decrease tensions and conflicts among workers (Hendricks & Cope, 2013).

Geographic Diversity

Cultural and generational diversity was discussed in several studies, but due to globalization, a new concept of diversity arose by recruiting people from different geographic locations. Geographic dispersion of team members has been considered as a new form of diversity that contributes to improve work groups performance and increase productivity (Levitt, 2015). In contrast, Lisak and Erez (2015) contended that geographical dispersion challenges multicultural team leaders because of the need to create a homogeneous team that can overcome different time zones, regulations, values, and expectations. Some leaders guiding in geographically diverse teams fail to create an effective communication channel in building the shared understanding which often constrains team member ability to cooperate, coordinate and consequently decreases productivity (Lisak & Erez, 2015). These same negatives of different worldviews can also become a positive aspect for leaders if geographic diversity is managed, controlled, and utilized in a professional way that contributes to effectiveness (Dumitresco et al., 2014). Arguably, it is vital for leaders and team members to react to these differences that arise from geographic diversity and understand what traits are associated with global collaboration and dispersed environments (Levitt, 2015).

Developing and Implementing a Marketing Strategy

To develop and implement a successful marketing strategy, decision makers often follow two-step process: study and analyze potential markets to choose between them and create a marketing mix to satisfy the chosen market. A company's target market is the potential clients toward whom directs its marketing effort. To fit the needs of a chosen target market, an organization's marketing manager needs to blend the seven components of the marketing mix often denoted as the 7Ps (see figure 2).

Figure 2. From *"The 7Ps marketing mix,"* by Mishra. A, 2016. Professional Academy.

Price. Price is one of the fundamental factors in healthcare marketing mix (Ahmad, Alsarqi, & Kadi, 2013). Mohammad (2015) revealed in his research that price perceptions directly influence patient satisfaction. The price needs to be reasonable, but this doesn't mean that the organization has to be the cheapest in the market where it needs to make a profit (Samani, Hashemi, Shahbazi, & Sarhadi, 2017). Among the main aspects of the marketing mix in the healthcare industry, the price earned the top priority on patient's satisfaction (Abedi & Abedini, 2017). Ahmad et al. (2013) suggested that the pricing strategy has a significant impact on the healthcare industry in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

Product. In marketing mix, the product defined as any tangible or intangible services offered with the aim to satisfied needs and demands of customers (Mohammad, 2015). In the healthcare sector, products are the medical services that intended to influence a patient's health, through procedures carried out by individuals who are working in this industry (Ahmad et al., 2013). Samani et al. (2017) stated that it is critical for the organizations to take into consideration the performance of employees who provide the service, where customers cannot separate the service from the staff members. In the healthcare industry, the product or service is the most important factor that attracting patients to private organizations. The price attracting patients to public companies, and the product or service attracting patients in private firms (Abedi & Abedini, 2017). Ahmad et al. (2013) research showed that health service strategy has a significant impact on the healthcare industry in the MENA region in general and in the KSA in particular.

Place. Place or distribution covered all organizational activities such as the distribution channel, distribution coverage, outlet locations, inventory levels and location (Mohammad, 2015). Samani et al. (2017) pointed out that proximity to a service or to access quickly has a significant influence in the tendency to choose the product. Ahmad et al. (2013) stated that in healthcare, leaders must take into consideration three distribution decisions: (a) physical access which mean that the healthcare organization located in a shopping mall where the location is convenient for the customers, (b) time access where the company open all day and during the weekend, and (c) promotional access that is rely on the advertisements or patient's recommendation rather than physician recommendation.

Promotion. The purpose of promotion is to build brand consciousness and reputation that help companies to encourage customers to buy their products (Luo, Roach, & Jiratchot, 2016). In a broader sense, promotion is a method of communication between the organization and consumers to promote what it does and what it can offer (Samani et al., 2017). Ahmad et al. (2013) opined that communication mix involved of a blend of different tools that the company uses to achieve its marketing strategies such as advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing. On the other side, organization's leader must be careful, where sometimes promotion can ruin company's reputation if the advertisement was unreal and the information is not accurate. Ahmad et al. found that the most prominent method of promotion in healthcare organizations in the MENA region is by “word of mouth" where a patient recommends the organization’s services to other customers.

People. In service organizations, people play a crucial role in the success especially when the employees have a direct interaction with customers (Mohammad, 2015). Luo et al. (2016) shared the same point of view as Mohammad (2015) and stressed the importance of employees’ behaviors in the success of the organization in implementing marketing mix. Abedi & Abedini (2017) contended that employees reflect the company’s image; therefore, the organization must improve employees’ performance through communication, training, skills, learning, and listening to customers views to achieve the optimum value of the product and the company. Ahmad et al. (2013) revealed in his researcher that the healthcare industry in the KSA has improving employees' abilities to perform their service role and to maintain a competitive level

Process. The marketing process can be defined as a framework of customer needs, with successful planning and implementation of the service (Luo et al., 2016). Companies should build an efficient service process to maintain customers' satisfaction and attract new customers; therefore, a significant relationship has been established between service process and customer satisfaction to improve company's performance and service (Mohammad, 2015). Ahmad el al. (2013) have suggested that in the healthcare industry, patients' experience of the service process has an influence on their opinions and decisions on use or buy the products. The medical service process is the most critical activity in the healthcare system in the MENA region, where healthcare companies ensure customer's satisfaction during delivering health services for two reasons: the social responsibilities, and the major competition extent in the health care market (Ahmad et al., 2013).

Physical evidence. The physical evidence consisted of the company environment and facilities of the customer such as parking area, furnishings, color, noise level, air conditioning system (Luo et al., 2016). In the MENA region, healthcare organizations ensure to build a customer-friendly environment and easy access to the health care service (Ahmad et al., 2013). The physical surroundings of the service atmosphere can create a significant impact on patients' satisfaction and their behaviors (Mohammad, 2015). Physical evidence strategy in healthcare help patients reduces the degree of anxiety through concentrating on the environment facilities.

Ahmad et al. (2013) research offered greater insight into marketing strategy formulation and implementation in the MENA region. The researchers concluded that the seven components of marketing mix namely; health service, pricing, distribution, promotion, physical evidence, process, and personal strategies had significant impacts on healthcare industry as measured by clients' satisfaction. An organization marketing strategy plan is a vision of how and what the future will be, and then planning based on a clear objective, and the method of implementing, monitoring, and controlling the progress in strategy implementation (Sandada, Pooe, & Dhurup, 2014). Drawing from the findings of Dubihlela and Sandada (2014), strategic marketing planning has a significant effect on the performance of small and medium businesses, especially if it takes into consideration the robustness of employee participation, implementation incentives, control, and the manager’s role in execution.

From a managerial standpoint, Ramaseshan, Ishak, and Kingshott, (2013) found that it is significant for an executive manager to perceive the role of innovation culture during the planning stage of marketing strategy through the engagement of all stakeholders and in particular that of the marketing director. The researchers stressed the importance of the commitment and support of top management to the marketing manager during the planning process of marketing strategy. João Bettencourt Gomes de Carvalho Simas, Francisco Bertinetti Lengler, & José dos Santos António (2013) shared the view of Ramaseshan et al. (2013) and stated that the role of top management in the planning of a strategy raise the knowledge and understanding as being a normal function within the organization.

Good strategic planning is not enough to guarantee success; marketing managers must ensure effective implementation, evaluation, and control mechanism to implement a successful marketing strategy (Ramaseshan et al., 2013). In this context, the role of marketing and executive managers is crucial in implementing the marketing strategy and of turning a plan into action (Ahearne, Lam, & Kraus, 2014). During the implementation process of the marketing strategy plan, organization's leader must take into consideration ethics and balance, as well as the integration of internal and external factors that affect strategy implementation such as economic, social environment and organization vision (Leonardi, 2015). João Bettencourt Gomes de Carvalho Simas et al. (2013) opined that the implementation of a marketing strategy requires strong leadership to manage the relationship between the employees and the organization; therefore, any conflicts in this relationship can lead to failure in strategy implementation.

Transition and Summary

Section 1 of this study reflected details to further the understanding the marketing strategies that some managers of international pharmaceutical companies have successfully implemented in the MENA region to ensure profitability during periods of decreases in healthcare budgets from periods of declining oil and gas prices. The discussion highlighted the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, research questions, the conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and the significance of the study. Section 1 included a discussion and review of the body of professional and academic literature, under specific grouping and across two theories and three major areas. These two theories include: cultural intelligence, and strategic flexibility; and the three major areas are:

transformational leadership, managing multicultural team, and developing and implementing marketing strategies.

Section 2: The Project

In this research study, I used a qualitative method and multiple case study design to explore the marketing strategies of international pharmaceutical companies that managers have implemented to avoid failure during periods of declines in health care budgets due to dropping oil and gas prices. This section is a description of the research method applied to conduct this study, including details on the role of the researcher and the specific research design. This chapter also represents a description of the methodology used, consisting of participant selection, data collection and analysis, and ethical procedures. This section further also included the strategies used to enhance the credibility, transferability, and dependability of this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that some managers of international pharmaceutical companies used in the MENA region to succeed during periods of declines in healthcare budgets after dropping oil and gas prices. The primary target population consisted of two international pharmaceutical companies, located in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates who have implemented successful marketing strategies to ensure profitability during periods of declining oil and gas prices. The verification of successful marketing strategies implementation was done by examining pharmaceutical financial reports specific to the MENA region. Managers provided useful information on marketing strategy implementation that also aided in understanding the lifestyle and needs of the MENA region’s communities (Fontana, Saster-Merino, & Baca, 2015). Pharmaceutical companies are directly associated with the quality of healthcare by offering therapeutic options which contribute in improving the quality of human life. The role of pharmaceutical organizational managers is crucial in improving human health and domestic economies through the creation of jobs and are known contributors to social change (Li & Tan, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is responsible for developing a research report to gain a better understanding of a complex problem, take appropriate action, and making decisions based on that understanding (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Yin (2014) defined a researcher's responsibilities as: (a) setting and posing relevant questions, (b) interpreting participant answers, and (c) understanding the research problem. The success of a qualitative case study depends on the researcher practices and the ability to analyze data and draw conclusions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In a qualitative multiple case study, the researcher is the primary player to perform all tasks associated with data collection and analysis (Broadhurst, 2015). A comprehensive data collection approach entails flexibility to collect the most relevant data and multiple sources of evidence may enhance validity and reduce researcher bias (Baskarada, 2014). In a qualitative case study, researcher bias may affect the outcomes and can change the research direction (Yin, 2014). Baskarada (2014) stated the need to manage bias imposed by the researcher's personal beliefs and experiences. Avoiding personal explanation may lead to bias reduction and maintaining a chain of evidence that leads to eliminating any possibility of wrong conclusions (Baskarada, 2014). Morse and Yin (2014) suggested a frequent review process, checking data during the interview process, and considering diverse and credible external sources to triangulate the primary collected data. In this study, reducing or eliminating bias was by following Morse and Yin's recommendations, and reviewing data from the interviews in a continuous cycle while setting aside personal judgments. While conducting this study, the aim included a commitment to remain neutral, unbiased, and cautious throughout the research process. Participants were not directed with any personal insights during the interviews and use of the research question matrix served to prevent any biased questions.

In the professional sphere, with a personal background involving over 10 years experience as a project manager in different sectors, especially the pharmaceutical industry, setting aside personal opinions was critical in this research study. This experience in the healthcare industry has given the opportunity to be familiar with the healthcare system in the MENA region and the leadership structures of international pharmaceutical companies based in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. As a project manager for healthcare projects in the MENA region, I have experienced the challenges associated with this industry arising from a lack of cultural and management knowledge. The problems witnessed encouraged selection of this research topic and provided the impetus to explore and understand dilemmas that affect business sustainability in the region.

In a qualitative multiple case study, researchers must follow a basic code of conduct (Yin, 2014). The recommendations of the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978) has highlighted the ethical guidelines of research in three general principles: (a) respect for persons by explaining to participants all risks and benefits, (b) increasing benefits and minimizing risks, and (c) justice through focus on the two key questions of how to distribute the potential benefits and burdens of the research and who stands to benefit from, or bear the burden of the research (Adam & Miles, 2013). In this research, the ethical guidelines as outlined by the Belmont Report was followed and keeping all participants' information confidential in all study documents entailed specific steps and measures, as detailed herein.

The aim of this study was to explore successful marketing strategies formulated and implemented by international pharmaceutical companies to increase or maintain business profitability. The sampling strategy included recruiting six executive and middle managers working in international pharmaceutical companies in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates who were open to sharing personal experiences in implementing marketing strategies. The interview protocol is important because participants want to be comfortable in discussing personal point of views, especially if the research focus is on a sensitive topic (Yin, 2014). Marketing leaders from the pharmaceutical industry, who agreed to be part of this study, participated in face-to-face interview sessions to answer research questions. The participants with the required experience, upon request, voluntarily gave permission to record interviews, which were transcribed to facilitate accuracy, with notes taken during the interviews to supplement the process, consistent with the steps recommended by researcher (Baskarada, 2014).

Participants

The quality and credibility of a multiple case study consists of the sufficient information provided for the reader to understand the study design and participants' views and experiences (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Homogeneous purposive sampling is a strategy used in this multiple case study to explore participants' experiences. Using a homogeneous purposive sampling strategy helped reduced variation and likely facilitated focus on similarities by choosing individuals who shared the same traits and characteristics, as the aim was to engage in an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study (Griffith, 2013; Palinkas, 2015). The total sample size in this study included six executive and middle level managers from international pharmaceutical companies in Dubai entrusted with responsibilities to manage a company's marketing strategies. The inclusionary criteria to participate in this study also required a minimum of serving in this role for at least 2 years. The selection of six participants ensured an adequate level of information to achieve data saturation after the fourth interview, however, completing six interviews ensured the fulfillment of this objective. Marketing leaders were knowledgeable of the day-to-day practices, processes, and challenges of planning and implementing marketing strategies.

I have been working as projects manager for many years and have had the opportunity to professionally engage with many pharmaceutical companies in the region. During this period, good rapport has been established with the executive leaders of these organizations. In this study, leveraging these relationships helped to recruit six managers to participate in the research interviews. The methods to recruit and communicated with participants included e-mails and telephone calls. To ensure voluntary and informed participation, during the initial contact, the process entailed providing participants with a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, a brief overview, and the benefits to society that may result from the study. Baskarda (2014) stated that potential participants should be aware of the research period, purpose, their roles, and the expected outcomes. Next, a formal invitation was sent for managers to participate in the interview for final review and a signature was requested on the consent form completed the recruitment of participants. During the planning and scheduling phase of the interviews, prospective participants indicated willingness to answer questions and all pertinent information about the time and duration of the interview and the nature of the research questions.

Maintaining ethical values was crucial throughout the research process (Fiske & Hauser, 2014). In this study, it was necessary to follow the required procedures and protocols to ensure the ethical protection of participants. Researcher bias may have an influence on the behaviors of the participants, so the priority must include building a strong relationship with the study participants, which may lead to minimizing researcher bias, when using the technique of bracketing (Baskarada, 2014). For further adherence to ethical practices, the guidelines of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) followed to avoid any possible harm to participants' and to protect personal identities (Fiske & Hauser, 2014). By upholding the privacy of research participants and identities, a researcher maintains public confidence and ensures security of confidential and private information (Yin, 2014). All data related to participants, companies, and recorded interviews were safeguarded in a locked file on a personal computer and a hard copy in a private cabinet to ensure confidentiality. The study participants and the names of the companies appeared in the study in the form of codes instead of actual identities and professional designations. The soft and hard copies of the data will remain secured in a locked file on a personal computer and all hard copies, securely protected in a safe and locked cabinet for at least 5 years from the completion of the study.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The research method and design are a model that limits a research project; a researcher can select one of the following research approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Boeije, Van Wesel, & Slagt, 2014). When there is a lack of information about a phenomenon under study or when the research problem is complex, the qualitative method is best suited as an approach (Bowling, 2014). The qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study because there was a significant paucity of information related to the pharmaceutical industry in the Middle East region of the world. The absence of studies and the lack of information related to marketing and business strategies in the pharmaceutical industry in the MENA region presented the need for further research. Qualitative research is considered suitable to explore a phenomenon in-depth from the perspectives and experiences of the marketing professionals involved (Yilmaz, 2013); hence, constitutes justification as the research approach chosen and implemented in this study. Conducting qualitative research study may provide an opportunity for researchers to explore a phenomenon in-depth as experienced by participants (Yin, 2014). Researchers using a qualitative approach can focus on understanding the context of the problem more deeply, while also gaining insight into the interrelationships between a wide range of prevailing conditions (Denscombe, 2014).

In this study, the qualitative methodology used, helped to understand how executive and marketing managers formulate a strategy, who in the organization implements the strategy, and how success or failure is gauged, as advocated by influential researchers (Yin, 2014). In a qualitative study, the focus of researcher primarily includes seeking information from participants about real-world events and processes or about personal experiences (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). Researchers use the qualitative approach to understand the perspectives and experiences of individuals or groups and to explore phenomena relying on interviewing participants through open-ended questions, related documents, and observing behavior (O'Brien et al., 2014).

Quantitative and mixed-methods methodologies were not suitable for this study. The quantitative method entails relying on numeric data generated from an instrument administered to participants (O'Brien et al., 2014) and on examination and analysis of the relationship between variables (Norris, Plonsky, Ross, & Schoonen, 2015). A mixed method is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches that comprises collecting and analyzing data to create a stronger research outcome than either paradigm but can be long and complicated to conduct (Boeiji et al., 2015). The quantitative and mixed method inquiries are appropriate to examine relationships or differences among variables (Yilmaz, 2013), however, this type of examination was not the purpose of this study, where the goal was to obtain the perceptions of pharmaceutical marketing professionals on strategy implementation in the MENA in the wake of government led declines in healthcare budgets, predicated by the recent drastic fluctuations in oil prices.

Research Design

Yin (2014) identified five research designs convenient for qualitative studies: phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and narrative research. Given the nature of this study, only a multiple case study approach was suitable to use from among the other four designs, as researchers have expressed the limitations of the other designs in providing flexibility, diversity, and knowledge needed for a problem context

(Hyett et al., 2014). A multiple case study design helped to understand the marketing strategies international pharmaceutical leaders used to achieve profitability and maintain organizational sustainability as the use of this approach provides the researcher with a deep holistic view about the research dilemma and affords the opportunity to understand and properly explain the situation (Baskarada, 2014).

Experienced qualitative researchers have identified multiple case study research as a distinct qualitative design (Hyett et al., 2014). The researcher interested in exploring a phenomenon and everything related to a specific situation will typically adopt a case study design (Cronin, 2014). A case study is designed to fit the problem and research question and demonstrate broad diversity in study design (Hyett et al., 2014). The selection of a descriptive qualitative multiple case study design served to gain an understanding of the factors that affect the implementation of business and marketing strategies in the pharmaceutical industry in the MENA region. The unique language and cultural of residents and the expatriate community warranted gleaning a deeper understanding of how experienced pharmaceutical marketers overcame some of the challenges related to the region.

The other qualitative approaches were not appropriate for this research because these were not suited for the aim of the study and the available resources to better understand the situation. For instance, the phenomenological approach is a method in which the procedure involves studying the perceptions and culture of the participants based on personal experiences (Percy et al., 2015). A phenomenological design was not suitable for this study as the intent was not explore only the lived experience of international pharmaceutical companies' managers in the MENA region. In a grounded theory design, the researcher can explore the elements of participants' experiences and develop a concept or theory based on data collection and analysis (Percy et al., 2015). The aim of this research was not to develop a concept or theory; therefore, the grounded theory design was not appropriate for this study. A researcher using an ethnographic method explores the beliefs, activities, and practices of a study population to study the behaviors of a specific culture (Small, Maher, & Kerr, 2014). The ethnographic design was inappropriate for this study because the intent also as not to observe participants' behaviors in a social event over a short time. A researcher using a narrative design investigates real-life problems through the experiences of a single individual who embraces practices of the life and exploring the best practices of these experiences (Joyce, 2015). The narrative method however appeared inappropriate and not adequate to understand the challenges that face the international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region.

Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2015) noted that data saturation is a method that applies to all qualitative studies as researchers' employ interviews as the primary data collection strategy. Fusch and Ness (2015) defined data saturation as the point when a researcher has collected enough information, so the study could be replicated, the ability to find new information has been attained, and no more coding is required. For this study, a homogeneous purposeful sample of six executive and middle managers in international pharmaceutical companies helped to guarantee an acceptable pool of interview data. In a qualitative study, the interview questions should be well structured to facilitate asking all participants the same questions, as the aim is to reach data saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that a researcher's cultural and experiential background will contain biases and that during data collection, implementing specific measures, such as bracketing, can mitigate any intrusion and infringement of a personal lens on the neutrality and emotional detachment in efforts to achieve data saturation.

Population and Sampling

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that leaders of international companies in the pharmaceutical industry in the MENA region use to ensure sales and profitability. The participants for this study included managers from international pharmaceutical companies located in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. Marketing professionals who have been working for at least 2 years in formulating and implementing strategies specific to the MENA region received an invitation to participate this study. In a multiple case study, purposeful sampling procedures was more suitable in selecting individuals who was knowledgeable or experienced in relation to phenomenon intended for study (Yin, 2014). In purposeful sampling, the researcher must select study participants based on a personal assessment, using certain predefined criteria for the study (Kornhaber, Wilson, Abu-Qamar, & Mclean, 2014).

Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood, (2013) stated that in the case of limited resources, purposeful sampling is a method used by researchers for the selection and identification of information-rich. Purposeful sampling includes selecting participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study, and have ability to participate, and express willingness to share experiences and opinions (Palinkas et al., 2013). As in any design, purposeful sampling has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of purposive sampling in a multiple case study design are the low cost and that there is no need for a list of all the population elements related to the study. The disadvantages are the inability of the researcher to control or measure bias, and that the findings often cannot be generalized (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). The purposeful sample in this study consisted of six executive and middle managers from international pharmaceutical firms who met the following eligibility criteria: (a) based in the MENA region for at least 2 years, (b) involved in at least 2 years in planning and implementing marketing strategies, (c) work experience in the pharmaceutical industry for at least 5 years.

In a multiple case study, the selection of an adequate sample size is significant for ensuring the credibility of study analysis (Elo et al., 2014). If any theoretical background does not support a study, the researcher selects a large sample size to offer sufficient information, and establish the foundations for findings (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). In the literature, different viewpoints appeared on determining sample size in qualitative research with Daniel (2012) suggesting a sample of six to 10 participants based on the study nature, while Yin (2014) recommended more than 12 participants in a case study. Elo et al. (2014) reinforced that the number of participants in a case study depends on the nature of the research, purpose of the study, research questions, and richness of the data. This study, therefore, consisted of a sample size of six experienced managers from international pharmaceutical companies located in Dubai who had formulated and implemented marketing strategies specific to the MENA region for at least 2 years.

For this research, a purposeful sample of six participants ensured an adequate set of data to achieve data saturation after four interviews, however completing six interviews ensured fulfillment of this objective. Tran, Porcher, Falissard, and Ravaud (2016) defined data saturation as the point in data collection and analysis when sufficiency manifests with the existing data collection, and further does not yield new information. In a qualitative study, the validity of outcomes is measured based on data saturation; which is achieved when the results are thoroughly grounded and when any additional data does not provide new and meaningful information (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). Data collection continued in this study until achieving data saturation, evident, when no new information was forthcoming from further interviews.

Ethical Research

In a qualitative multiple case study, the relationship that arises between the researcher and participants creates with it supplementary ethical demands that not only confine data gathering, but also the process of analysis and publication (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). In the study, adherence to Walden University's ethical norms and the key concepts of the Belmont Report (1979), which consists of three general principles of (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice, helped to protect participants and minimize the risk of harm. In this study, each participant received an invitation letter for voluntary participation explaining the purpose of the study, and a brief overview (Appendix A). Prospective research subjects, upon expressing interest in participating in this study, received an email with the consent form and the interview questions. The consent form included information about the purpose of the study, procedure, and background so that the participants became familiar with the research topic during the interview. Questions or concerns raised by targeted or selected individuals, provided the opportunity to clarify the interview purpose and addressed any potential issues, at any stage of the research, including before commencement, and after completion of the study, to ensure transparency. Once the participants signed the consent form, it signalled their acceptance to take part in this study and the interview process started. Participants had the right not to ask any questions, to withdraw from the study at any time, or refuse to participate without any negative implication and connotation. Withdrawal from the study at any stage, was through an email, or telephone communication, as the form included all research contact information for participants if necessary to express a desire to discontinue participation in the study.

The consent form included details of the study that also helped the researcher to reduce bias, provided open communications, minimized misunderstanding with study participants, and assured the confidentiality of information. There was no intention to share the names of the participants or the organizations and only referred to them by alphanumeric codes to ensure the confidentiality of identities. By preserving the confidentiality of study participant, a researcher must make sure that private information will remain protected (Gibson et al., 2013). The data gathered from this study, including the codes, digital audio, and any related documents will remain in a secure place for 5 years from the completion date of the study, to comply with Walden University's requirements (Leong, Bahl, Jiayan, Siang, Lan, & 2013). All these documents saved on a personal computer in a secure file with a password, and all paper copies will continue to be in a locked cabinet, restricted to only personal access, for five years from the official completion date of the study. Thereafter, computer files will be erased through programmed deletion using specific software, and paper files shredded and incinerated, to protect the identity of participants.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, selection of the most appropriate instruments and techniques for data collection is essential in ensuring the credibility of analysis (Elo et al., 2014). A multiple case study design was suitable for a researcher to collect in-depth data from participants; and to also seek additional review of documents, in keeping with the procedures and techniques of the data collection plan, as recommended by leading research exponents (Yin, 2014). The following section includes an explanation of the data collection instruments, techniques, organization, and analysis used for this study.

Data Collection Instruments

Demonstration of the value of the data collection is the primary facet that supports a researcher's final argument concerning the feasibility of a study (Elo et al., 2014). To ensure trustworthiness throughout the data collection effort, a researcher must have a clear vision of the purpose of the study to make unbiased decisions (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Yin, 2014). The researcher in qualitative study is the primary data collection instrument, true in this study as well. After approval from Walden University’s IRB, most potential participants contacted scheduled interviews to participate in the study. Semistructured interviews conducted with leaders in international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region helped to explore marketing strategies used to overcome the economic crises that commenced in 2014, arising from the drastic decline and volatility of oil and gas prices.

Semistructured interviewing, the most common type of interviewing in qualitative research, involves the use of predetermined questions; the researcher is then free to seek further explanation of participants’ responses (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The use of semistructured interviews with open-ended questions provides participants freedom and space to answer in as much detail as possible; the researcher can encourage interviewees to share insights, vision, and knowledge gained through experience. As Elo et al. (2014) cautioned, however, researchers who choose semistructured data collection, must be careful not to steer interviewees in a pre-ordained direction to obtain information. With this type of open-ended interviewing, a researcher can reformulate questions or prompt participants for more information if something interesting or novel emerges during an interview (Baškarada, 2014). The rationale for using semistructured interviewing in this study, was that it is the accurate approach to attaining information about the challenges of marketing strategy implementation and to exploring the role of managers to reinforce existing studies in this area.

Interviewing was the primary data collection method for this study. Face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions are consistent with the multiple case study design (Ingham-Broomfield, 2015; Yin, 2014). The responses of participants during interviews can serve in gaining a deep understanding of views (Harvey, 2015). The face-to-face interviews were an opportunity to probe for more information about marketing strategies of managers involving the challenges of cultures and habits in the MENA region. By using the consent form developed for this study, the instructions therein provided the participants with a clear vision of the objectives of the study and the interviews, as well as outlined the key questions. Yin (2014) contended that the “Research Question Matrix” can ensure that all interview questions are logically related each to another and aligned with the central research question, as well as that participants provided enough data to answer the research question.

I scheduled the interviews for 1 hour each; was sometimes in this study extended based on participants' responses, as data saturation was the aim. Doody and Noonan (2013) recommended providing participants with research questions a few days before an interview helps to prepare for the required information for answers; this contact also served as a reminder of the coming interview. Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) stressed the importance of researchers taking notes, audio recording, and making personal observations during interviews. In keeping with these recommendations, the plan followed an interview protocol, taking notes, using a digital recorder to capture responses and verbal cues, and observing personal reactions during the face-to-face interviews.

An *interview protocol* (See appendix B), sometimes called an interview guide, and is a secondary instrument used by a researcher throughout interviews with all participants in a study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The use of an interview guide was appropriate in this study to ensure that all questions yielded the specific information needed to fulfill the research goals and objectives. Further, use of an interview guide serve to minimize interview time and increase the consistency of the study (Darawsheh, 2014). Developing a suitable interview guide or interview structure can help a researcher to achieve a comfortable interaction with participants (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The audio recordings served to transcribe the interviewees’ responses. Copies of the interview transcripts from the interviews conducted in this study were sent to participants for final approval, recommendations, and/or suggestions.

The process for the assessment of data collection reliability and validity involved all steps taken during the interview sessions. Yin (2014) argued that the selection of multiple data sources helps to ensure reliability and validity. Triangulation is the process of validating data findings using multiple sources of data, such as interviews, theories, reports, and other data collection techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In this study, the use of different data resources was essential to achieve triangulation, and specifically included semi structured interviews, member-checking, and analysis against WHO reports and secondary pharmaceutical and healthcare data. In qualitative research, member checking supports trustworthiness and improves the credibility of data (Nottingham, & Henning, 2014).

By voluntarily signing the informed consent form, participants indicated willingness to participate in a study as well as signal understanding of the study's purpose (Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). Yin (2014) stated that to ensure privacy and confidentiality, a researcher can use alpha-numeric coding, thereby keeping individuals' identities known only to the researcher. To comply with Walden University's requirements for the DBA program, all documents related to data gathered, such as the code sheet, digital audio, will be kept in a secure place for 5 years (Leong, Bahl, Jiayan, Siang, & Lan, 2013). All research documents will remain in a locked cabinet as well as in soft copy on a personal computer in a secure file protected by a password. Personal access to all study related files will serve as a safeguard to prevent any unauthorized access to data.

Data Collection Technique

Through multiple case study research, it is possible to obtain a deep understanding of instances of a phenomenon while exploring participants' behaviors and experiences based on personal perspectives (Baškarada, 2014). For this study, the most appropriate means of collecting data was face-to-face interview sessions. Face-to-face interviewing is one of the oldest forms of data collection and the most flexible research instrument (Ortiz et al., 2016). With the flexibility and great potential, the face-to-face interview has long been considered a superior and effective data collection technique for exploring and understanding complicated phenomena (Rohde, Lewinsohn, & Seeley, 2014). Open ended and highly complex questions can be used during face-to-face interviews, and participants can answer with all kinds of verbal responses, as well as visual stimuli such as objects, pictures, advertisement copy, and video (Vogl, 2013). In this study, the duration of each interview was about one hour in duration, during which participants answered 8 open-ended interview questions. During the interviews, seeking further detail through additional questions and open discussions served to solicit more explanation from participants, when needed.

Before the interviews, the participants received a letter of clarification about the purpose of the study and a copy of the interview questions to familiarize these individuals with the type and scope of the questions. A case study interview protocol typically includes an introduction to the study and indicates its purpose positively contributes toward the study’s reliability by standardizing the investigation (Baškarada, 2014). Doody and Noonan (2013) stated that an interview protocol serves to achieve consistency in the format, for all participants to receive an identical set of formulated questions. By sharing interview questions in advance, a researcher can also build trust with participants (Baškarada, 2014). This strategy can help participants feel comfortable with the process of data collection; additionally, it offers an opportunity to review the questions and prepare notes. Flexibility, adaptability, and a clear structure are the key strengths of face-to-face interviews (Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013). Face-to-face interviews are based on personal interaction; with this structure, a researcher can observe and note reactions from participants (Ortiz et al., 2016). There are, however, potential disadvantages of face-to-face interviews, which include participants’ bias, high cost, geographical limitations, and time pressure on respondents (Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013).

Yin (2014) stated that the key task in case study research is establishing the foundations of the study, notably, by developing a case study protocol, conducting a pilot study, and gaining any necessary approvals. Upon approval from Walden University's IRB, the first step was to conduct a pilot study, which was a critical element of research validity, and to refine the data collection instrument, technique, and analysis through the results of this pilot test (Baškarada; 2014; Merriam, 2014; Yin, 2014). A pilot test of interview questions is an opportunity for a researcher to ensure that data collected during interviews are dependable and that the interview questions are clear and easily understandable (Elo et al., 2014). A pilot study conducted, involved using a panel of three marketing professionals who worked in marketing-strategy planning and implementation in international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region; these individuals were not a part of the main study. The pilot study helped to revise the interview questions as needed to achieve the study goal and make any panel recommended improvements to the interview protocol.

In qualitative research, member checking offers a form of trustworthiness to improve the credibility of data (Nottingham & Henning, 2014). Elo et al. (2014) stated that member checking is an opportunity for participants to review transcriptions, to review interpretation, and is an important step to check the trustworthiness of the analysis. Attention to member checking aided in obtaining broad information, to ensure accuracy, enhance credibility, while also serving to achieve data saturation. Upon completion, the recorded interviews were transcribed, and copies sent to participants to recommend any edits or changes that might benefit the study, who upon request, also approved a final review, and thereby ensured that the data was accurate.

Data Organization Techniques

Upon completion of all interviews, the first step was to transcribe the audio recordings using Microsoft Word, then categorize participants by alphanumeric codes, and sending a transcript to each participant for verification and confirmation to ensure accuracy (Harvey, 2015). During the data analysis process, assigning codes served in defining themes and patterns while organizing the data (Yin, 2014). By assigning generic codes to participants, a researcher can assure confidentiality. Throughout the research, it was important to keep track of: (a) signed consent forms, (b) audio recordings, (c) transcripts and interpretations for all participants, as well as (d) maintain a personal reflective journal entry. Majid (2016) stated that reflective journals provide an annotated chronological record of experiences generated by the participants, which might be difficult to reveal through other methods. The participants' experiences were documented in a reflective journal with details of what happened and why to improve data collection organization, technique, and interpretation. Standardized strategies for data organizing can help to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of data (Baškarada, 2014).

All raw data, such as interview audio recordings, notes, transcripts, and all related documents, saved on a personal computer, aided in organization of research files, with in addition, a hard copy stored in a locked cabinet served as a back-up. Limiting access of these documents to any external entity minimizes the possibility of breach in confidentiality of participants. Leong et al. (2013) stated that 5 years after completion of a study, all raw data, including hard and soft copies should be destroyed. Destroying all data 5 years after the completion of the study will also demonstrate compliance with the requirements of Walden University.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a case study context often involves several steps, which include examining, categorizing, and testing data to draw conclusions based on evidence (Yin, 2014). Houghton et al. (2013) observed that using methodological triangulation, researchers seek two or more data sources to confer a fuller insight of the research topic and ensure more validity, which is not obtainable by using a single source. In this study, methodological triangulation was an appropriate strategy to align the information obtained during the interviews with the initial codes. Methodological triangulation was a proven research technique to enhance data credibility, with varying methods; in this case, concurrence demonstrated for data gathered through interviews and at least two other sources of data (Houghton et al., 2013). The primary source of data in this study was face-to-face interviews, conducted by following an interview protocol to ensure consistency. Additional resources for methodological triangulation that provided relevant data, included member checking and healthcare reports from the Saudi Food and Drugs Administration (Saudi FDA) that helped in the analysis and interpretation of collected data.

Qualitative data analysis is essential to identifying, coding, categorizing, explaining, and exploring collected data (Yin, 2014). Baskarada (2014) suggested analyzing case study data in parallel with data collection, and to make immediate changes as required to enhance the data collection and analysis process. Before data collection, creating a list of codes corresponding to themes from the literature review helped in the development of existing and emerging themes and patterns during the interview process. The second step involved sampling that facilitated the reduction of bias inherent in data collection. The third step was to categorize and arrange common themes in the most efficient manner (Percy et al., 2015). Assigning each participant with a random alphanumeric code, helped to preserve confidentiality. The last step was to determine the relationships between the codes and themes under study and further expand and develop new ideas, theories, and strategies.

In a qualitative analysis of unstructured data, the features of ATLAS.ti software can help researchers to manage large amounts of data collected by coding and categorizing transcripts and then examining and making connections between codes. The software features provide a visual workspace in which a researcher can explore the relationships between codes. The use of the feature of ATLAS.ti can facilitate the researcher’s ability to use hermeneutic analysis to handle complex data and documents in text format for editing. In this study, the data analysis included the use of ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analytical software. The use of ATLAS.ti features include capabilities to aid in (a) analysis of qualitative data, (b) identification of themes, and (c) reducing data management time. The features of this software made it possible to organize themes into logical groups and to assign codes to each element. Organizing all interview transcripts, questions, and quotations into groups, the software served to create an output report of the primary codes. Finally, the features of ATLAS.ti facilitated conducting content analysis and aided in exploring the relationship between codes based on topics and themes. Based on the outcomes of data analysis, the focus was on key themes related to culture, challenges, and strategies, and as identified from the literature and the conceptual framework identified for this study.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity of qualitative research are important to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Boesch, Schwaninger, & Scholz, 2013). Houghton et al. (2013) stated that to establish the validity and reliability and determine rigor in qualitative research, the researcher must use the criteria of confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability. With these principles in mind, the researcher endeavors to attain reliability and validity as much as possible in a qualitative study.

Reliability

To ensure the reliability of this qualitative multiple case study, the development of a research protocol expectedly helped to determine data collection process, ensured alignment between interview questions and research question, and the dependability of the data (Yin, 2014). Elo et al. (2014) suggested using a pilot test of the interview questions in a qualitative study to refine the questions and assure that the data collected during the interviews is dependable. The researcher conducts a pilot test to review the interview questions for minimize bias and tests for participant clarity and understanding (Harvey, 2015). In this study, a pilot test was an opportunity to improve and test the interview questions and process, using a panel of experts, which entailed using three individuals with pharmaceutical marketing experience in the MENA region, who were excluded from the research who have been working in marketing strategies planning and implementation in international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. Lincoln and Guba (2011) suggested the concept of dependability as an alternative criterion for judging the reliability and trustworthiness of qualitative research. In qualitative research, dependability is not measurable and needs other methods to enrich the trustworthiness, such as member checking (Nottingham & Henning, 2014).

The member checking process is a method used in qualitative research to ensure credibility, accuracy, and validity by allowing participants reviewing interview's transcription, and checking the trustworthiness of the analysis (Muchinsky & Raines, 2013). Using the member checking process helps to minimize the incorrect interpretation of data through participant feedback during all steps of data collection (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). In qualitative case studies research, member checking helps ensure that research is conducted in a rigorous manner to preserve research ethics and facilitate participants to control the written content and expand on points made (Houghton et al., 2013). In this study, each participant received a copy of the interpretations' summary of the personal interview data by email and had an opportunity to provide feedback, request amendments, and through iteration, could confirm mutually aggregable interpretations of the data findings and analysis. Following the IRB guidelines served to increase the reliability in this study, while also ensuring human protection and reducing the opportunities for data corruption.

Validity

In a qualitative study, validity is an essential approach to ensure accuracy of information and indicate to readers that the results are trustworthy (Merriam, 2014). Data triangulation and member checking are the two essential approaches to enhance the credibility of this study. Data triangulation helps to achieve credibility by supporting the gathered data from participants with additional information from government or healthcare reports, which help in the assessment, interpretation, and conclusion of results (Duc, Mockus, Hackbarth, & Palframan, 2014). Member checking is a process to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the interview data through the participants' review, which can assure verification and authenticity of data collected and interpretation of results (Harvey, 2015).

Merriam (2014) stated that transferability in qualitative research is an external validity equivalent indicator, denoting the degree by which the findings are generalizable or applicable in other situations. Measures to increase the transferability of the study and use in similar research also may provide readers insights to understand the challenges facing international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. Also, it is crucial to provide the reader the information to indicate how the research findings may apply to pharmaceutical marketing strategies in the MENA region. Baškarda (2014) stated that the triangulation of the data based on observations obtained by the data collection process and enhances the credibility and transferability of the research findings.

Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality of the researcher and that the results of a study are shaped through participants' responses during the interview (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Houghton et al. (2013) opined that ensuring confirmability includes creating an audit trail by registering all decisions made by participants during the research process, which serves to enhance the trustworthiness of the research. The analysis and the results of the data in this study are derived exclusively from the responses of the participants, which also helped to enhance confirmability and objectivity. Data saturation occurs and represents the stage when no new data adds to the findings or themes, after conducting interviews, and further engagement with participant does not yield new information. Reaching data saturation necessitates researcher and participants’ engagement in the analysis during data collection (Merriam, 2014). By collecting and analyzing data throughout the research process, the researcher can recognize data saturation by noticing replication of themes, patterns, and categories (Baškarada, 2014). In this study, the interviews continued until no new ideas, information, or themes appeared in the data, which rendered further interviews unnecessary and warranted cessation of an interview, and signified discerning the achievement of data saturation.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included an overview of the project by restating the purpose statement and explaining the research methodology. This section culminated with further discussion of the role of the researcher, study participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, data analysis, and reliability and validity of the study. Section 3 included reintroduce of the purpose statement, a summary of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and concluded with reflections and recommendations for action and further study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 1 of this study and manuscript includes for the reader the general and specific business problem in the problem statement. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the central research question associated with the phenomenon of marketing strategies in the UAE, with the overarching question expressed as: What marketing strategies do successful pharmaceutical companies use to ensure profitability when lowered healthcare budgets result from declines in oil and gas price? In section 1, the discussion also included the conceptual framework and the theoretical underpinning chosen for this study, with an exhaustive review of contemporary literature. Section 2 included an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the researcher, as well as the rationale for the suitability and appropriateness of the research method and design used in this study. In this section, specific details and descriptions entailed elaborating on the measures used in data collection, the interview guide and open-ended questions used, as well as safeguards and measures used to ensure ethical compliance to high quality research, and the protection of the identifies and confidentiality of participants.

Section 3, represents a detailed description of the findings of the data collected from the participants in the study, comprising of six executive and middle-level managers, serving in international pharmaceutical companies in Dubai who are entrusted with responsibilities to implement a company’s marketing strategies. To provide the reader with a summary of the research, before the actual presentation of the findings and analysis, in this section the overview of the study, presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications for positive social change, recommendations for further research, reflections on best practices, with a final summary, and conclusion also merited inclusion.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that managers of international pharmaceutical companies have successfully implemented in the MENA region. The aim as to gain insight into the strategies and tactics adopted by these marketing managers, to ensure profitability in light of the post 2014 decreases in the healthcare budgets, in the aftermath of the continued decline in in oil and gas prices. The overarching research question that guided this study was as follows: What marketing strategies do successful pharmaceutical companies use to ensure profitability when lowered healthcare budgets result from declines in oil and gas price? Conducting several in-depth interviews, to the point of saturation, of six executive and middle-level managers from international pharmaceutical companies in Dubai, with responsibilities to manage a company's marketing strategies in the region, aided in collecting data specific to the identified problem.

The recruiting process commenced by contacting participants through information available in public domains such as LinkedIn, and public directories of pharmaceutical companies. Participants who expressed interest in participating in the research study, received further communications and a request for a meeting or telephone call for a briefing on the details of the research. After the initial screening, based on pre-determined eligibility and screening criteria, participants received a copy of the consent form sent by email to confirm participation. During the interview, each participant responded to eight open-ended questions, which fell under the umbrella, of the central research question.

Presentation of the Findings

As indicated, eight open-ended questions in a semistructured interview format served to explore the marketing strategies that managers of international pharmaceutical companies have successfully implemented in the MENA region to ensure profitability with the post 2014 decreases in the healthcare budgets following the decline in oil and gas prices. The overarching research question that guided this study was: What marketing strategies do successful pharmaceutical companies use to ensure profitability when lowered healthcare budgets result from declines in oil and gas price? The process of data collection included interviews of six participants, with specific experience in planning and implementing marketing strategies in the MENA region. The analysis of the data led to the identification of important themes, imperatives and strategies that marketing leaders in these pharmaceutical companies use and need to implement successfully implement in the region. The open-ended questions format offered the leeway for participants to express and share a diversity of experiences, insights, and best practices in the realm of marketing in the UAE.

Before conducting the interviews, each participant received the invitation letter to participate in the study and the consent form. Each participant responded to this email with the phrase; I consent and confirm acceptance to participate in the research study. The approval on February 6, 2018, with the authorization number of 02-06-18-0595551 from Walden University’s IRB for the consent form and the interview questions provided the signal for the commencement of the study. Within a two-week period, conducting and recording six face-to-face recorded interviews, each of which lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, resulted in the level of depth and detail required to obtain the required insight and knowledge. Reaching data saturation at the five-individual interview mark necessitated continuing the interview of the sixth participant, to ensure robustness in the study and collected data. Fush & Ness (2015) explained that a researcher often reaches data saturation when the interview responses begin to repeat, and no new information or themes emerge, rendering further interviews meaningless, or of little value.

After the recording of interviews, transcription of each interview followed, which created the data for analysis. Each participant received a copy of the interview transcript, with a request to confirm the accuracy. After analysis, participants also received the interpretation, a measure to increase the trustworthiness and validity of the results. Coding helped to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants, by representing all names as sequential codes (e.g., CXPX) where the first letter in each code refers to the company and the second letter refers to the participant. In the study, following the code of conduct as enunciated by the by Belmont Report (Cugini, 2015), also aided in maintaining participant confidentiality. No personal information is shared with anyone, and sole access is restricted to a personal computer, with all data in hard text form stored in a in a locked cabinet. Five years from the completion of this study, per Walden University requirements, all securely stored computer files and data will be destroyed using a software program, and text files by shredding and incineration.

To facilitate analysis, the process included downloading the transcripts into Atlas.ti, where the software features helped in analysis of qualitative data, identification of themes, and reducing data management time. Based on the interview questions, and analysis of the data led to the identification of 45 codes and abstracted them into four themes. The major themes comprised of: (a) product launch strategy and operating model, (b) transformation of leaders by vision and guidance, (c) recognition of culture and diversity, and (d) the importance of training and learning agility.

Figure 1 is a thematic chart explaining the relationships between the themes which emerged from the analysis of the interviews. Theme 1 appeared to strongly align in two directions with the other three themes. Theme 2 displayed a bi-directional connection with theme 3 and 4. The alignment between theme 3 and 4 appeared seemingly weak.

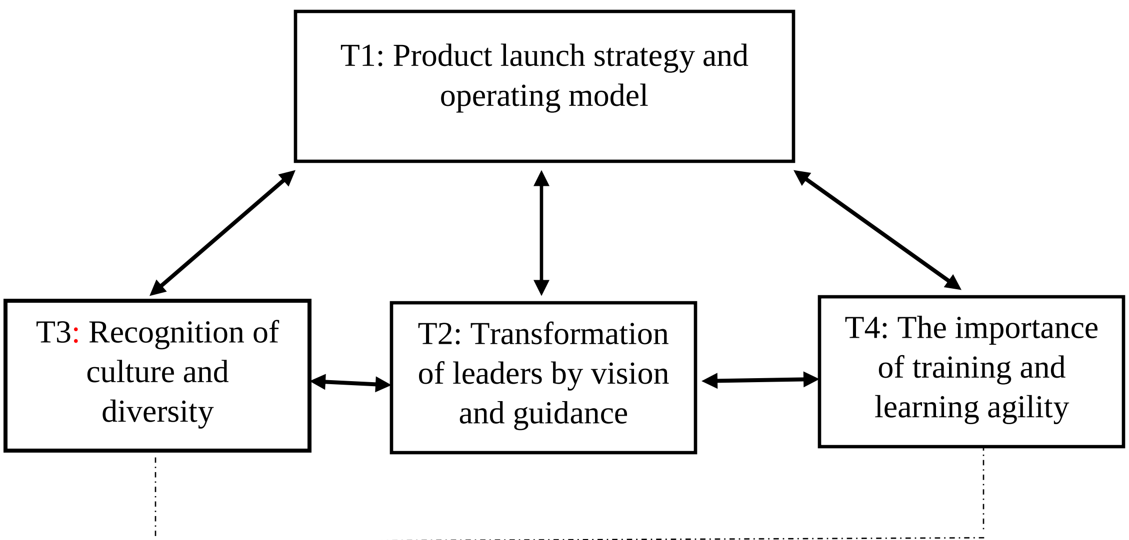

Figure 3. Representation of alignment and relationship between themes.

The consequence of exploring marketing strategies for the international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region may support local and international organization's leaders to sustain companies' development while planning and implementing marketing strategies. The four ubiquitous themes emerging from the data analysis of this study may reflect a group of traits and strategies that leaders may need to implement a marketing strategy successfully. The results of this study indicated that 100% of participants were familiar with the challenges that were faced by international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region, and provided explicit details and insights of the approaches to overcome these challenges, with the implementation of customized and specific approaches.

Theme 1: Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model

Theme 1 emerged from the analysis of participant's responses to interview questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 where the participants were asked to explain opinions about marketing strategies' planning and implementation, and the challenges faced. Three main components of participant responses were directly related to: economic situation, reimbursement, and governments' regulations. The Word cloud output from the ATLAS software, display the participant favored tactics used to implement marketing strategies successfully (See Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7).

Figure 4. Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 2.

Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 represent portrayal of the analysis of the dominant views and the consequent emerged themes on participants' strategies to launch new products.

Table 2

Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model (Interview Question 2).

Excerpts of Interview responses to Question # 2:	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
C1P3 "We established partnership and built our internal capabilities." C2P2 stated that: "start introducing concept of collaboration with authorities and open communications." C1P2 stated: "we look at the value proposition of the product that we bring in." C2P1 "… providing the right services to the patient…" C2P3 "... we adapt the global marketing strategies locally in our market." C1P1 stated: " … we try to apply in different markets….. and help to build necessary capabilities in the region."	An analysis of the responses indicated that companies used different strategies to maintain sustainability.	Collaborations, open communications, and value proposition

Figure 5. Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 3.

Table 3

Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model (Interview Question 3).

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question # 3.	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
C1P2: The main challenges in the MENA region is the reimbursement." C1P3 added: price pressure and governments… economic difficulties'' regulations." C2P3 stated: the main challenges in the region are the ethics and lack of data."	Participants viewed that governments' regulations and the reimbursement system considered as challenges for pharmaceutical industry to succeed.	Reimbursement system, regulations, and economic difficulties.

Figure 6 Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 4.

Table 4

Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model (Interview Question 4).

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question # 4.	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
Per the view of C1P1, "potential markets are the priority to focus on....." C2P1 "frequent evaluation and adjust your strategy." C2P2" dialogues and collaborations with stakeholders…"	Participant's responses revealed different approaches have facilitated the	Evaluation, communications.

	implementation of marketing strategies successfully.	

Figure 7 Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 5.

Table 5

Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model (Interview Question 5).

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question # 5.	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
C2P2 “Quality of people who are able to implement changes.” C2P1 stated: “frequent evaluation…” C2P2 “we start planning for launching new products year in advance…” C1P2 “ … we look at the patients’ journey…” C1P3: … have plan A and plan B… , … have the ability to adapt and change the strategy if they exist one doesn’t work….”	Participants’ answers showed the quality of people is important to avoid failure and a good planning.	Evaluation, training, and good planning.

Leaders for international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region appear to take into consideration these three factors when are preparing and implementing marketing strategies to launch a new product. Table 6 reflects the common thoughts which emerged from participants' responses.

Table 6

Product Launch Strategy and Operating Model

Common thoughts	No. of participants who shared views	% of participants who shared views
Governments' regulations	4	65%
Economic challenges	6	100%
Reimbursement	4	65%
Communication and collaboration with authorities	4	65%

Participant C1P1 indicated that the MENA region consists of 18 countries and have different regulatory timelines for granting approvals to launch a new product. C2P3, similarly indicated that some governments started taking actions and delayed the registration and approval of new products, which affected the organization marketing strategy. The top management in case 1 gives directors the authority to reduce the focus on the markets where the registration of a new product takes time, and to focus on other potential markets. Participant C2P1 attributed the reasons for the delay of drugs registrations to the austerity measures in place consequent to the decline in oil prices, and a lack of expertise and data. Some governments in the MENA region have introduced recently a variety of legislation regulating the healthcare industry. The premised and bedrock of this legislation includes specific laws concerning registration of the medicines. Participant C1P2 supported this view:

> The critical challenge in specific markets is the times takes to get product registration. In a country like the UAE, because they are competing and need to be the first in the world, they have the fastest market registration process to register any drug.

C2P1 divided the MENA region into three different clusters: The GCC countries, Levant, and North Africa. According to the C2P1, in the Levant cluster, the government and the private sector request high-quality products. In North Africa, the healthcare industry is entirely dominated by the government, and all decisions are centralized, which impacts the implementation of the companies' strategies. In the Gulf countries, the governments do not have a choice to provide best treatment and services, because these are rich countries and people entitled to the best healthcare services and drugs.

Five of the 6 participants discussed their organization's approach in the MENA region, and the efforts to overcome the economic situation arising from the decline in oil and gas prices, as participant C2P3 explained:

> What happened as a consequence of the drop in all and gas prices that there were a lot austerity measures implemented by the governments, including monitoring inventory and stock levels, measuring pricing, strategies and managing the balance between demand and supply chain.

Additionally, C1P1 stated that the political situation in most countries in the MENA region added an extra burden on governments' budgets. The abrupt decisions from governments to cancel orders and tenders in millions of dollars created problems and challenges for international pharmaceutical companies in launching new products. The Arab Spring and the political instability in the MENA region have a significant negative impact on the economic situation and the governments' budgets (Karam & Zaki, 2016). C2P2 shared the same point of view but from another perspective and said:

> "Since 2014, we can notice that the total budgets in some countries in the region increased, however, the problem is that some governments transfer money from the ministry of healthcare to the ministry of defense."

Participants C1P2 and C2P1 pointed to the importance of the value proposition of the product during this period where the governments put pressure on drug prices. Participant C1P2 stated that they look at the value proposition of the drug from medical, economic, and humanistic perspective. In case 2, participant P1 linked marketing strategies to "value proposition" of product and presented it to all stakeholders (payers, physicians, insurance companies) to understand why you are doing what you are doing, because the ultimate goal is to ensure that patients get best services.

The approach used by participant C2P2 to overcome the challenges of price pressure and the government constraints, included initiating greater dialog and collaboration open dialog and collaboration between government and his pharmaceutical company. The open communication with all authorities and stakeholders protects the business and creates a collaborative environment to tie marketing strategy with the new situation. Participants C2P3 and C1P2 also addressed the importance of the communication with stakeholders to generate data related to healthcare because there is a lack of data, or the existing data in the MENA region are not accurate. The two participants considered the lack of data as a challenge facing the international pharmaceutical companies to launch new products or to prepare a marketing strategy. Participant C2P3 said:

> The accurate data considered as the main factor to prepare a marketing strategy and to launch a new product. What we do as an organization, we use European or published data and validate these data with local doctors to ensure that we have enough idea about the market need.

Another need for open communication and discussion with authorities is the reimbursement per participant C1P1. The three participants, C1P1, C1P2, and C2P3, considered the reimbursement as a challenge facing the international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. The markets are fragmented in the region, and there is no unified reimbursement system in any of these countries. C1P2 explained:

> In some countries like the GCC region, 85% of the healthcare bills are paid by the governments, however, in a market like Egypt, the government doesn't provide healthcare service, and patients usually must pay for out-of-pocket for medical treatment and drugs.

In modern markets like Lebanon and the UAE per the view expressed by C1P1, as the insurance system is more advanced, medical reimbursement is often negotiated by insurance firms, drug companies, and the healthcare system. Participant C2P3 shared the same point of views as C1P2 and C1P1 and added:

In a heterogenous market such as Saudi Arabia, where there is collaboration between the private sector and the government, companies must have a good pricing strategy when launching a new and higher priced drug. Also, it is incumbent upon pharmaceutical companies to explain the price difference between the existing and the new price for payers. For new product launches, pharmaceutical companies must a) provide the justification for higher prices, b) demonstrate therapeutic superiority, and c) show improved clinical benefit over currently available drugs.

The markets in the MENA region as per participant C1P3 are unpredictable and called VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity). In these kinds of situations, pharma company leaders need to have the flexibility to adapt their strategy, and display agility in swiftly moving from plan A to plan B. In case 1, participant 2 noted that to avoid commercial failure and to prepare a strategy to launch a new product, they worked closely with the global development and commercial team to overcome the challenges in pricing for different markets and settings.

Theme 2: Transformation of Leaders by Vision and Guidance

The second theme emerging from the interviews was the transformation of leaders by vision and guidance.

Figure 8: Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 1 and 6.

Table 7

Transformation of Leaders by Vision and Guidance (Interview Questions 1 and 6)

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Questions # 1.	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
C2P2: “The role of leader is to provide employees’ clear information and properly align the internal and external communications.” C2P1 stated that: “The role of leaders is to select the best candidates and to facilitated innovation and barnstorming.” C1P3: “leader’s responsibility is to ensure that all functions are aligned with the direction that leads to the final objective of the company and that the information provided to employees is clear.” C1P3: “Leaders’ vision and charisma are the attractive characteristics of employees and could be a kind of motivation.”	All participants pointed out that leaders consider as the key of success during planning and implementing marketing strategies. Leaders should have a strong personality and knowledge to empower and motivate employees.	Leaders’ vision and charisma, strong personality, and experience to select candidates to fit the positions.

Participants shared different points of view concerning the role of leaders within the organization and with authorities (See Table 8). The healthcare leadership competency is directly associated with the ability to communicate and has been required in all healthcare sectors (Vasconcelos et al., 2017). Participant C2P2 stressed the importance of internal and external dialog to overcome challenges related to the implementation of marketing strategies. Leaders communication with external stakeholders often provides the ability to protect the business and creates an effective collaborative environment. Communications with external stakeholders also gives leaders a warning if something is moving in a different direction to what they are expecting, which facilitates taking immediate corrective and remedial actions.

Effective internal communication within the organization is an essential competency and strategy for leaders to display during the turbulent periods, as this skill may provide employees precise information about the challenges and approaches to overcome tenuous situations. Participant C1P3 further explained:

> Organizational leaders must ensure consistency in communications from the firm to internal and external stakeholders. Communications from all levels of employees in the internal and external environments, must therefore depict alignment with the stated mission and purpose of the organization.

The main responsibility of healthcare leaders is to identify competencies within the organization to realize the anticipations related with job performance and the executions of tasks (Taylor-Ford & Abell, 2015). To be successful, must obtain develop a strong leadership team and qualified people who work closely and collaborate extensively. Participant C1P1 stated that to avoid strategy failure, leaders must arrange for regular open communication meetings with all teams to discuss how they are performing against competitors and how to adapt strategies with clear performance expectations. In case 1, participant 3 explained the difficulties that they faced with the headquarter to convince them to modify the marketing strategy during the economic crisis after the 2014 decline and fluctuation in oil and gas prices and he said:

> I can tell you that I spent a lot of times to convince my boss in the headquarter that things have changed in the MENA region and that we have to change our strategy and our expectation for the coming two years.

The responsibility of leaders is to select the best candidates and expertise who can implement organizational business strategies, adapting to current and future events.

Participant C2P1 stated that leaders must understand well the market, competitors, and the organization’s position in the market. For the case 2, leaders guide the employees and subordinates, using frequent training, to ensure that successful implementation of marketing strategies. According to participant C2P2, the role of the leaders while implementing marketing strategies is to ensure that all functions are aligned with the direction that leads to meeting and surpassing the marketing and financial objectives, which necessitates that the information provided to employees is explicit and unambiguous. The vision and charisma of leader appear deemed to be the attractive characteristics in the eyes of employees and could be a kind of motivation and empowerment for employees to strive diligently meet marketing other organizational goals and objectives. Participants C1P1 stated:

> Leader's vision for the future and people ability to collaborate with managers are the essential elements to achieve success in marketing strategy changes. What I believe is that people follow leaders and not follow organizations.

Table 8

Transformation of Leaders by Vision and Guidance

Common thoughts	No. of participants who shared views	% of participants who shared views
Role of the leaders	6	100%
Employees quality	3	50%
Leaders’ vision	4	65%
Internal and external communication	4	65%

Theme 3: Recognition of Culture and Diversity

Another highly emphasized set of conversations form which the theme emerged, relates to the impact of cultures and habits on marketing strategy implementation within the multinational pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. Theme 3 was developed from an analysis of the most frequently occurring conversations and sentiments expressed by participants, in response to interview questions 7 and 8 in which participants were asked to explain the impact of culture, language, and diversity within the organization on business operation and marketing strategies implementation. Figures 9, 10 and table 9 represent a depiction of the themes that emerged from participants' responses to interview questions 7 and 8, regarding the importance of culture and diversity.

Figure 9: Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview questions 7.

Figure 10: Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview questions 8.

Table 9

Recognition of culture and diversity. (Interview Questions 7 and 8)

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Questions #7 & 8.	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
C2P2 stated that: “In most countries they speak Arabic and English, some countries like Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco also speak French”. Participant C2P1 stated that: “The MENA region is divided into three different clusters: Levant, GCC, and North Africa and these three clusters have different cultures.” C1P3: “the diversity within the company is not about nationality is more about diversities of ideas and method of thinking.” In case 2, “the cultural diversity within the organization is strengths instead of weaknesses and they are pushing for these diversities.” C2P3: “The main challenge of culture comes from outside stakeholders.”	A significant number of participants indicated that language is not a problem for the international companies in the MENA region, however, they shared different point of views regarding the impact of the culture and diversity.	Culture and diversity, Innovation, language, and conflict.

Six of six participants assured that there is little impact of language on the marketing strategies planning and implementation. Participant C1P1 said:

> Arabic is the main language in 95% of the MENA region countries; however, all people who are working in the healthcare industry speak English as a second language, which could help in the communications and to transfer ideas. Also, in some countries like Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia they speak French.

Participant C1P2 pointed out that language matters when communicating with a group of patients, and you have to translate in Arabic, but within the organizations, there is no direct impact for language on business operation.

Participant C2P1 stated that the MENA region is divided into three different clusters: Levant, GCC, and North Africa and these three clusters have different cultures. The role of managers is critical to embed a cultural quality within the organization in terms of adaptation, resources, and problems that the company faces in each cluster. In case 1, people who are coming abroad must participate in special training and to read about the region culture to be aware of the cultural differences, idiosyncrasies, and norms. Leaders in case 2 considered that the cultural diversity within the organization is strengths instead of weaknesses and they expressed leveraging these diversities to good advantage. Participant C2P2 went further and explained:

> For us diversity brings innovation, and in time where there are significant changes in the external environment, it is essential to have people who can listen to each other and accept each other to brainstorm and generate ideas.

From the results, it was evident that when there is diversity within the management team, that may mean that people can judiciously harness diverse opinions and come up with solutions optimal for the organization to implement marketing and other strategic initiatives. The role of leaders when there is diversity in the organization is to create a high performing and efficient teams, avoid conflicts and provide more space for innovation. According to participant C1P3, the diversity within the company is not about nationality, rather it is more about diversities of ideas and different ways in thinking.

The internal challenge of harnessing and recognizing diverse cultures is easy to overcome with managerial training and good leadership. According to participant C2P3, the challenge of harnessing advantageously the varied culture and diversity inside the company can be optimized with communication and promoting a synergizing a harmonious environment, which facilitates and fosters collaboration. The main challenge of culture comes from outside stakeholders, as explained by a participant:

> The challenge of cultures comes from different levels of authority because of the management issues and lack of expertise. We often have difficulties to convince them the importance of the products and ethical process and rules that we follow as a multinational company.

A participant from case 1 supported the idea of participant C2P3 and added that there is a shortage of diversity in talents, possibly reflecting limited cultural awareness in some countries, and limited representation of individuals in decision-making positions. Table 10 reflects the common thoughts that emerged from participant responses.

Table 10

Recognition of Culture and Diversity

Common thoughts	No. of participants who shared views	% of participants who shared views
Culture and diversity	6	100%
Language	6	100%
Innovation	3	50%
Conflict	4	65%

Theme 4: The Importance of Training and Learning Agility

This theme revealed the homogeneity of participant opinions on how training and agility helps in mitigating risks and possibly reduces marketing failures. Four participants among the six voiced views on the importance of training on enhancing the implementation of marketing strategies, and they described how ongoing training encompasses different topics that improve employees' performance (See Figure 11 and Table 11).

Figure 11: Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview questions

Table 11

The Importance of Training and Learning Agility

Common thoughts	No. of participants who shared views	% of participants who shared views
Training agility	4	65%
Employees' performance	2	34%
External training	1	17%

Developing and training employees is an important aspect, essential for the sustainability of company's sustainability, and entails improving employee performance and productivity in the short term, and often serves to maintain corporate reputation and standing in the long run (Law, Hills, and Hau, 2017).

According to participant C1P1, training is essential for employees to be able to adapt employees to new strategies and changes for the organization, and to understand the competitive challenges, which vary from one country to another. Participant 3 from case 1 added:

> During economic crises, we need to build our internal capabilities by starting to develop our people to understand what does health economic mean, and how we can shift the discussion from pricing into product value. To achieve this goal, we have a structural approach to do educational training sessions abroad at least twice per year to ensure that employees understood the reality.

Participant C1P2 stressed the importance of the learning agility to avoid marketing strategy failure and stated:

> Market volatility increased the need for the learning agility, and people who don't have learning agility, they are not able to adapt to any new situation emerging in the market, and they cannot survive.

In case 2, participant 1 shared the same vision as participant 2 in case 1. The primary challenge which every organization usually faces is the competence of the people who are entrusted to implementing the strategy in the wake of change. A challenge is also in the training of staff to understand and implement strategies warranted during times of crises, and to fully comprehend the objective of the responsibilities given. The reason why several international pharmaceutical companies implemented marketing strategies successfully during the economic crisis was because these companies had well-trained teams who understood the marketing strategy and believed in what they were doing. Participant C1P2 stressed the need for the training not just within the organization, but also for other stakeholders. The participant suggested several pieces of training for authorities and physicians and said:

> It is a pity that in countries like the MENA region where the highest standards in sciences in medicine were pioneered, there is lack of investment in academia and clinical research. We regularly invite physicians to contribute and participate to a great extent in clinical development programs that rely on international speakers who are coming to give training on different clinical experiences on the new products.

Tying Study Findings to Conceptual Frameworks and the Existing Literature

CQ and strategic flexibility are the two conceptual frameworks that underpinned this study. CQ is a framework of knowledge and skills, related by cultural metacognition that serves as a theoretical lens in discerning how people adapt to, select, and shape the cultural aspects of their environment, in situations and geographies, where individuals have different cultural norms, values, and behaviors (Bücker, Furrer, Postma, & Buynes, 2014). The theory of strategic flexibility can serve leaders to understand the responsiveness of organizations to internal and external change by modifying strategies and doing something other than originally intended (Bock et al., 2012). In assessing the themes which emerged from participant responses, it was evident that culture and diversity within the organizations can be harnessed positively by the organizations and their management. The diversity in an organization often fosters different mindsets to share ideas. The climate and propensity for innovation in a diverse workforce bodes well for employees to overcome significant changes in the external environment. The challenge of culture and diversity come from the authorities and external stakeholders. As with 85% of the participants, C2P2 noted that ultimately leaders need dialog and open communication with all stakeholders to reduce gaps related to cultural differences. All participants held strong opinions on how to prevent marketing strategy failure by anticipating risks, in the ability to adapt to current and emergent change, and agility to adapt and modify strategies based on evolution in the environment. Al-Zu'bi (2016) stated that the capabilities of strategic flexibility within the enterprise often endows for an adequate level of flexibility in marketing, pertinent to: (a) developing new products, (b) entering new markets, and (c) modifying products according to the demand of the changing market; however, the success of this strategy depends on whether the company has sufficient financial flexibility and wherewithal.

The major consensus in views analyzed in the existing literature in this study seemed congruent with the responses of the participants about the role of leaders and the need for training, considered vital to ensure the success of marketing strategies implemented in the MENA region. All participants stressed the importance of leadership in managing the implementation of marketing strategies by setting a clear vision, guiding and training people, selecting qualified staff, motivating employees, and providing adequate information and other resources. The role of the leaders is apparently very crucial in terms of strongly understanding the competitors, and in planning effective marketing strategies when launching new products.

Application to Professional Practice

The pharmaceutical market in the MENA region is quickly growing, and some giant international pharmaceutical companies have partnered with local companies to manufacture their products. In 2016, the total pharmaceutical sales in the United Arab Emirates represented 16.2 % of total healthcare budget and is projected to reach 18% of the healthcare spending in 2021. The total pharmaceutical sales are expected to reach $ 3.58 billion in 2020 and $3.84 billion in 2021 (American Embassy in the U.A.E., 2018).

The discoveries from this study may expand current knowledge on marketing strategies. The insights from this study could also contribute to furthering awareness of business practices and strategic imperatives, which may add to the strategic options of international pharmaceutical companies operating in the MENA region on enhancing the effectiveness in formulating and implementing marketing strategies. The aim of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the successful marketing strategies that international pharmaceutical companies' leaders have used to overcome the challenges when lowered healthcare budgets result from declines in oil and gas price in the MENA region. Elbanna and Fadol (2016) noted that in the MENA region the implementing of marketing strategies is often linked to several factors that influence organizational sustainability and success.

The political climate also has a significant, often a negative, impact on strategies implementation. The lack of communication, data, and coordination between the organizations and regulatory and other authorities is often considered essential challenge due to the conflict that may arise from the interaction between these entities. The outlining of the challenges associated with marketing strategy implementation may make the findings of this study relevant and applicable to the professional practices of international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region.

Several studies have shown that the MENA region has become an attractive market for foreign companies in all industries during the last 20 years and for the near future. Since 1998, Dubai has encouraged all international companies in the MENA region to have their headquarters in the UAE, while Qatar has attracted investors after winning the hosting of the 2022 World Cup. Recently, Saudi Arabia has garnered attention after launching the "NEON" project to build a new city on the red sea coast. The results of this study may serve to highlight and draw attention to the importance and significance of business leaders in the MENA region. The study findings indicate the significance of cultural awareness in marketing, and the role of governments in attracting investors to the MENA region, the findings of this study may be valuable to senior managers in the pharmaceutical industry in respect to the importance the role of leadership style, culture, and management stereotype.

Managers as participants in this study in the organizations studied considered professional training and cultural awareness as effective strategies to improve employee skills and overcome cultural and differences. Holland (2017) stressed the importance of professional training and cultural awareness in the healthcare sector to improve employee performance, which in turn serves to provide quality service for patients. For an international pharmaceutical company to be competitive in the MENA region and implement successful marketing strategies, it must adopt the right strategies to respond efficiently to cultural differences, diversity, and leadership styles (Abu-Rahma, & Jaleel, 2017). The findings of this study may shed light on the challenges to collaborating with internal and external stakeholders, the latter, such as insurance companies, regulatory authorities, and governments, to develop communication, cultural, negotiation, and other skills. This qualitative multiple case study involved two international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region; however, the lessons and emerging strategic imperatives for marketing arising from finding of this study may be valuable to the other international companies in the MENA region, as the factors addressed in this study may hold true for most international companies. The results of this study would also likely hold value for domestic company leaders in the MENA region.

Implications for Social Change

Regarding social change, the findings of this study may be of significance to pharmaceutical marketers and managers, and could contribute to positive social change, since pharmaceutical companies strive to provide better healthcare solutions for patients and the medical community. The value of the study in potentially advancing knowledge of marketing managers of pharmaceutical companies, which may contribute to improving business practice for international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region and to the implementation of successful marketing strategies, may have positive social change benefit, since pharmaceutical companies are in the business of human health. The purpose of any research study often fosters the collaboration of researchers and participants in pursuit of social change and to understand the phenomenon, which is considered crucial for social change (Gelech, Desjardins, Matthews, & Graumans, 2017). Using the information from these findings may serve company leaders to influence positive job creation and enrichment of the economies of the region.

Alshammari, Alshakka, and Aljadhey, (2017) noted that the pharmaceutical sector in the MENA region has undergone several changes over the past ten years and needs continuous improvements. Organizational capabilities must include the ability and disposition to implement marketing strategies and align with specific and actionable skills that enable long-term success and building a sustainable culture (De Brentani & Kleinschmidt, 2015). The findings of this study could provide some knowledge to marketing managers in the international pharmaceutical companies operating in the MENA region, and advance the ability to formulate and enact marketing strategies that could lessen the negative impact on profitability and performance from market upheavals, such as perpetuated by the economic oil crisis of 2014, and beyond. The difficulties of the region with the current decline in oil prices places the findings of this study in the healthcare domain of some potential significance, and a potential contributor to positive social change, since the study results may serve to improve human health and organizational services of businesses affiliated with delivering value and medical care to patients. The implications of social change also include the potential of reducing marketing strategy failure, and the consequent loss in employment and wages of companies. Successful marketing strategies enhance the ability of drug firms to provide medications at lower prices, thereby potentially also increasing patient satisfactions and better healthcare services. Berkowitz (2016) stressed the importance of the integration of marketing principles in the era of healthcare reform to achieve better clinical results and in capturing patient loyalty.

Recommendations for Action

The objective of this study was to explore direct and indirect factors which affect the implementation of business strategies in the pharmaceutical industry in the MENA region. The findings of this study may contribute to the formulation of best practices for international business leaders involved in planning and implementing business strategies overseas, in serving to optimally leverage opportunities, and in overcoming challenges to maintain business sustainability. Svensson et al. (2016) stated that business sustainability indicates a firm's efforts and ability to go beyond managing its profitability and may also portray and indicate the focus on environmental, societal, and corporate values, which have broader economic impact on the marketplace. The shared perceptions commonly held by participants connoted that international pharmaceutical company leaders should: (a) display motivation, (b) adapt to address current and emergent challenges arising from changes in the internal and external environments when implementing marketing strategy, and (c) realize the importance of cultural awareness and suitably customize marketing and strategic initiatives with this knowledge.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings and discoveries from this study may provide the impetus and foundation for the future research in the realm of pharmaceutical industry. The quest for knowledge will require ongoing learning and understanding of the best practices in astutely planning and implementing business and marketing strategies in the region. Future research can deepen understanding of challenges facing international pharmaceutical companies and global healthcare firms in the MENA region. The findings of this study may contribute and add knowledge in respect of the roles, strategies, and best practices implemented and executed by executive and middle level managers to mitigate risks facing pharma firms in the region. An expansion of the multiple case study, to encompass the perspectives of other leaders in the healthcare industry in addition to pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region, could serve to extend the transferability of the knowledge to other industries.

In this study, the focus included presenting insight into the factors that influence the marketing practices of business leaders in multicultural pharmaceutical companies, and the implication on business performance and sustainability. The recommendation based on extensive personal experience, and the results of this study is that, the focus and opportunity of future research in the healthcare on some elements related to culture and ethics, could include and extend to human dynamics, notably, the habits and behaviors of patients, and diversity, training, and communication of marketing and business leadership. The research findings indicated that cultural awareness, communication, and training have a positive impact on improving employees' performance and in planning and implementing successful marketing strategies. Another recommendation is to conduct a quantitative study in future research to examine the interrelationships between leaders' practices, employee empowerment, training, and communication, and how the improvement of these relationships could affect business.

This study has limitations and the recommendations to overcoming these is for further research to include using different geographical locations to conduct similar studies. One of the limitations of this study was the ability of participants to share experiences and insights freely. Political and other conditions could have impeded expatriate participants to share valid and worthy perspectives because the discourse would likely require an explanation of facts, which may be contentious and spark negative implications, condemnation, and untoward actions. Another limitation of this study was that despite differences in cultures and traditions among the MENA region countries, the international pharmaceutical companies with headquarters in the UAE implemented uniform marketing strategies in all regions, with little customization and adaptation. A recommendation is that researchers in future studies must compare the impacts of leadership styles, cultural awareness, training, and communication on marketing strategies implemented in different countries and strive to use a blend of standardized and customized marketing, to appeal to different audiences and stakeholders in the region.

Reflections

With 15 years of work experience as a consultant and trainer in the Middle East region, I am considered an expert and aware of the challenges that face the international businesses which operate in this region. I was often frustrated in the past due to the unprofessional leadership style and lack of cultural knowledge. The aim was to conduct this study and explore how managers of international pharmaceutical companies reacted due to the decline and uncertainty in-in oil and gas prices, in efforts to maintain the organizations' sustainability. Completing the doctoral dissertation and the Doctorate in Business Administration program was an opportunity to improve and develop personal learning experience and provided the skills and knowledge that may be transferable and relevant to personal and professional spheres.

During the research study process, the close attention to researcher bias necessitated setting personal experiences aside in exploring the lived experiences of study participants. I was just focused throughout the research on the business purpose and details. This strategy has translated directly into the work environment where all participants answered the interview questions freely and shared personal experiences and insights. The six participants answered the eight interview questions and the additional questions used to elicit deep and meaningful insight and knowledge. Participant responses offered new insights and a substantial amount of information, which contributed to fulfilling the objectives of the overarching research question and the aims of this study.

This study findings and discoveries may have confirmed a personal line of thinking that in the MENA region most businesses suffer from the lack of skilled workers and professional leaders. The shortage especially in upper management levels, often makes an organization susceptible to failure during periods of economic downturn, or during other crises. The knowledge, recommendations, and findings from this study may be valuable to international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region, and possibly also in other geographies. The challenges faced in conducting this study in the MENA region provide the desire to conduct further research focusing on studies, which may advance understanding of marketing strategic imperatives that may serve the quest for organizational sustainability in the region.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the marketing strategies that managers of international pharmaceutical companies have successfully implemented in the MENA region to ensure profitability with post 2014 decreases in the healthcare budgets following the oil and gas price volatility and declines. Researchers in the healthcare industry have a deep interest in implementing marketing strategies to improve the healthcare system and provide patients better services, which also leads to greater business and financial success. The data and knowledge generated from this study led to lead to a deeper understanding of into how pharmaceutical company leaders and authorities achieve business success and sustainability, in an uncertain climate and amidst the upheaval of a changing world of energy. Six executive and senior managers from two international pharmaceutical companies participated in this study and shared personal experiences related to implementing marketing strategies successfully in the MENA region. The primary method to collect data entailed using face-to-face semistructured recorded interviews followed by transcribing and analyzing the data using the qualitative analytical software Atlas.ti. The analysis of the data yielded four patterns: (a) product launch strategy and operating model, (b) transformation of leaders by vision and guidance, (c) recognition of culture and diversity, and (d) the importance of training and learning agility.

The findings revealed that participants recognized the importance of leadership competencies and cultural knowledge in managing international companies in the MENA region. The findings showed that international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region face several challenges while implementing marketing strategies due to lack of data and possibly the awareness of best practices in the region to overcome challenges and maintain sustainability. The findings showed different strategies used by marketing leaders within the MENA region, arising from the differences in government regulations and the different cultures in the region. Researchers may furthermore repeat the study in different permutations of methods and designs and apply the findings to other international companies. The results from this study may contribute in highlighting the challenges international pharmaceutical companies face to improve the healthcare industry performance and provide best drugs and optimal services that serve the needs of patients.

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Appendix A: Letter of Invitation

Name:

Company:

Location:

Address:

Dear _____________

My Name is Ali Abou Abbas and I am a candidate for the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), at Walden University. I am contacting you to invite your participation in my dissertation research study, which explores the "Marketing Strategies of International Pharmaceutical Companies in the MENA Region." Study participants will include directors, managers, and leaders working in marketing strategy planning and implementation, and you were selected to participate based on your role and responsibilities. Since your participation is voluntary you only need to respond to this invitation to participate.

The study allows me to fulfill the requirement of the DBA program adding value through identification of strategies leaders may apply to implement successful marketing strategies for international pharmaceutical companies in the MENA region. The study findings may contribute to positive social change and improved business practice by providing tools and skills needed by business leaders through benefiting human health. I am conducting the study under the guidance of Dr. Lionel De Souza, a Walden faculty member and chair of my dissertation committee.

I will contact you to arrange an opportunity to provide an overview to the study and arrange for a short face to face interview scheduled at a time suitable to you. The interview includes eight questions and is anticipated to take no longer than one hour. Participation in voluntary and the research process ensures full confidentiality of your responses and company identification.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please feel free to contact me at: Mobile: or by E-Mail at (….). Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate.

Regards

Ali Abou Abbas- DBA candidate

Walden University/ College of Management & Technology.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Questions

Time/ Date:
Site:
Company Name:

Interview Protocol	
What you will do	**What you will say—script**
Introduce the interview and set the stage.	Hello, I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. For the last few years, I have worked on a Doctorate in Business Administration. In this study, I will explore the marketing strategies that managers of international pharmaceutical companies have successfully implemented in the MENA region to ensure profitability with post 2014 decreases in the healthcare budgets following the decline in oil and gas prices. I would like to give you some background on myself. I have a master's degree in project management from Quebec university in Canada, and a bachelor degree in statistics from CNAM in France. In preparation for this interview, you signed an Informed Consent form. Do you have any questions that you would like to ask me before we start? I will ask you 8 questions and will record your responses. This conversation is confidential and your identity and that of your company will be protected using a code developed for this study. Identifying characteristics will not be included in the study report. If at any time you feel you cannot answer a question, please let me know and we will move on to the next question.
Questions	1. What are your responsibilities as a manager in marketing strategy implementation?
	2. What marketing strategies have you used that resulted in ensuring your company's profitability during periods of fluctuating oil and gas prices?
	3. What are the main challenges associated with marketing strategy implementation in the MENA region?
	4. What approaches have facilitated the implementation of a successful marketing strategy in the MENA region?
	5. What do you do to avoid marketing strategy failure in the MENA region?

	6. How the political problems impact the implementation of a marketing strategy in the MENA region?
	7. From your experiences in the MENA region, how, if at all, does language and culture affect the success of marketing strategy planning and implementation?
	8. What additional business and marketing information would you like to share that we have not covered?
Wrap up interview thanking participant	Thank you for participating in my research study. I appreciate the time you have taken to help me complete my studies to achieve a Doctor of Business degree. I will follow up with you in a week and will send my interpretation of the three most prominent concepts from your interview via email.
Participants will be requested to confirm the data analysis of the researcher either by email or phone after the completion of the interviews	I would like follow-up with you as part of the research process. In this email, you will see my data analysis from your interview. All participants will be requested to confirm the accuracy of their interview transcription (transcript review) of their interviews after I have completed all transcription
Participants will be requested to confirm interpretations of the researcher either by email or phone after the completion of the interviews	I would like follow-up with you as part of the research process. In this email, you will see my interpretation of the most prominent concepts from your interview. I would like to solicit your feedback either during a phone conversation or email conversation to assure that you feel my interpretation is correct.