A MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTERNATIONAL MARKETING RESEARCH

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Abstract

Marketing research is the primary mechanism through which companies understand their current, as well as potential, customers. As companies contemplate the global marketplace, they must consider how domestic market research differs when conducted in international markets. Designing a specific research methodology is the way to achieve this aim. This article discuss the context for international market research and provide a framework for conducting international market research projects. Additionally, there will be presented several factors that should be considered by marketers who engage in global market research studies. Particular attention is paid to the nuances related to primary data collection, measurement issues and questionnaire construction.

Keywords: research, international marketing, methodology, challenges
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1. INTRODUCTION

International marketing occurs when an opportunity to make profit by meeting the needs of the users or potential users of the product in other countries of the world is identified.Today, the opportunities in the international markets are larger and more diverse than ever in world history. As the increasing share of the international activities of the firm, understanding the specific marketing in different cultures becomes growing important. International marketing is more complex than domestic marketing and this is caused by two factors: global competition and international environment. Therefore, international environment has a greater political, economical, legal and cultural variety [Kumar, 2000, 89-102]. As a result of this complexity, the task of the international marketing researcher is more difficult than that of domestic marketing one. Marketing researcher must analyze how marketing research from one country differs from that of the abroad. In this article, the particularities of approaching international marketing are presented, highlighting the specific stages of the international marketing research, as well as the problems that may face the international marketing researcher.

2. THE PROCESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARKETING RESEARCH

Although research in international marketing is more complex, the research process includes the same steps as in that of domestic marketing. The main stages of the process of the international marketing researches are: defining the problem and setting the goals of the research; research design and methodology; identifying data sources; collecting the data; performing data analysis, research report preparation.

2.1. Defining the problem and setting the goals of the research

In international marketing may exist differences between perceptions of the problem in the environmental context of the country of origin of the firm so it takes a series of adjustments primarily in terms of cultural factors. In defining the research problem should be considered two important elements**:** product concept and market structure [Jain, 1988, 143-176].

Product concept. A product may be viewed differently in variate cultures. Thus, even before defining the marketing research problem may be required for the exploratory research to understand the product concept. In this way, defining problem will be appropriate with the existing product concept in a particular country. For example, the dairy products from England are consumed for their relaxing properties, soothing and bringing sleep, while in Thailand, they are consumed while going to work and often away from home, being considered refreshing, energizing and stimulating. Therefore, in England, the yogurt is considered a product that enhances the health, used with priority by the retirees, while in Thailand, it is considered an element of energy used in the morning [Jain, 1998, 178-180].

Market structure is closely related to the product concept. An example of defining problem is the one Coca Cola was faced at the entering on the Indian market. In India, a low share of the population consumes soft drinks, mainly on special occasions or to receive visits and not during the meals, as in other countries. This leads to the conclusion that the soft drinks are perceived rather different in India, so the research problem can be redefined as being the finding out how it could be increased the percentage of consumers of these products (Coca Cola implicitly) and the reorienting to the personal consumption, as it is in other countries.

The research objective aims at the synthetic defining of the information to be obtained through research. If in the domestic research the information is necessary for taking the decisions at all levels of management (strategic, tactical, operational), in the foreign affiliates have more tactical character [Craig, 2005, 231-232]. If the objective is not clearly stated, it is possible that the undertaken research not to provide usable information [Young, 2007, 113-122].

2.2. Research design and methodology

Research methodology has a direct impact on the validity and the generalization of the research results [McGrath, 1983, 115-124]. Before designing the applied research methodology, it is necessary to take into account the main goal of the research, as well as the way of approaching the research or the appropriate paradigm of the study.

The main purpose of the social research fits in one of these categories: exploration, description or explanation [Newman, 2003, 252-276]. The exploratory research is used in general when it is known very little things about a certain field. The descriptive research tries to elaborate a detailed description that brings the understanding of a specific phenomenon, allowing the classification and the categorization. The explanatory research tends to base on the exploitative researches as well as descriptive researches and looks for explanations. The exploratory research is looking for the cause or the happening reason of the phephenomenon and thus going beyond description.

Having established the fundamental goal of the research, it must tackle the problem of choosing the appropriate research paradigm. The paradigm was described as being an accepted model or the orienting of base of the theory and the research [Kuhn, 1979, 142-153]. The paradigm allows the researcher to establish what problems must explore and which methods are appropriate for this demarche [Bryman, 1988, 178-212]. The two main approaches relevant in the social sciences are positivism and interpretivism [Newman, 2003, 280-289]. In an attempt to describe the positivism, it must be noted that there is a great diversity of opinions in what it represents [Bryman, 1988, 215-218], [Punch, 1998, 142-162]. There are, also, more forms of positivism, as logical empiricism, post-positivism, naturalism and behaviorism [Newman, 2003, 296-302].

The preferred methodologies are the quantitative ones, including the surveys, the experiments and the statistics. It must be mentioned that the positivism seeks to verify the hypotheses, while the most recent prospects of the post-positivism seeks to falsify the hypotheses [Guba, 1998, 68-87]. The main disadvantage of this positivist approach is that they can prevent the development of an original theory because it excludes the element discovery. Conversely, the interpretive approach focuses on the understanding human behavior and observation. There is a great variety of forms of interpretivism, as the hermeneutics, the constructivism, the ethnomethodology, the idealism, the cognitivism, the phenomenological subjectivism and the qualitative sociology [Newman, 2003, 305-320]. The interpretivist researchers generally prefer qualitative methods, as the observation and the field research. The differences between the two approaches have been summarized in table no. 1

Table no. 1 Differences between positivism and interpretivism

Positivism	**Interpretivism**
Motif research	
Description and explanation Discovery of the natural laws that people should predict and control the events Searching of the events, social phenomena without subjective interpretation	Understanding and description of the significance of the social action Concern for understanding the human behavior from individual point of view
Nature of the social reality	
Stable models or existing rules that can be discovered World is external and objective	Fluid defining of the situation created by the human interaction Multiple realities
Methodology	
Quantitative methods are preferred Possible to use experiments, surveys and statistics Facilitate objective research Focusing on measurement and verification of hypotheses Testing of the deductive theory Detachment of the researcher	Qualitative methods are preferred Observation of the participants or the field research Using of both verbal and nonverbal communication Implication of the inductive theory Implication of the researcher

Source: [Newman, 2003, 37], [Carson, 2001, 57]

2.3. Identifying data sources

As more organizations pursue international business strategies, they will require and demand international sources of market information. These organizations will need specialized, targeted information about buyers in dispersed international markets. The researcher can rely in its work on the primary data or/and on secondary data. Because the costs tend to be higher for the research based on the primary data, the researchers explore, usually, first the secondary data.

Secondary data. The main data sources that are investigated in the international marketing research are the secondary data. The main data types that can be obtained from these sources are those that aim, by country, the population, the macroeconomic indicators, the country risk, the cultural environment and the market characteristics of certain products. In a project of international research, often these are the only sources used in obtaining the necessary information for taking decisions on the foreign markets. In international marketing researches using the secondary data sources is essential because they have the greatest degree of accessibility, they provide a more complete picture on the international phenomena, they permit the targeting of some future research activities, they are starting points in the foundation of some decisions at an international level.

Primary data are especially obtained for the research in progress, being characterized by a high degree of relevance but also by significant costs. Before deciding the effectuation of a field research (which is based on primary information) can go through several stages that require the investigation of more secondary data sources, for obtaining of some information focused on identifying the defining characteristics of some countries or markets.

2.4. Collecting the data

This stage involves the carrying out of several activities such as: the formation of the land forces, the preparation of the land forces, the data collection, the control of the activity of the land forces. In this way, it is necessary the identification of some specialized firms in land services, the selection of those operators that may have the best communication skills with certain categories of subjects, the training of the operators in relation to the requirement of the study. Checking of the operators can be a source of tension, since this is considered an insult in some countries. The chosen data collection method influences the degree of trust, the data validity [Pedhazur, 1991, 212-243], but also the response rate [Shettle, 1999, 64-76].

2.5. Performing data analysis

Data processing implies their preparation for this stage of analysis, accomplishing in this way the verification and the correction of the data collected, their codification and their centralization at the level of some tables and matrices. The analysis aims the application of some quantitative and qualitative methods, meant primarily, to test some assumptions, to quantify the intensity of some phenomena, to explain them, to predict their evolution. The interpretation assigns a meaning of the data resulted from the analysis, allowing the formulation of some conclusions. To cope with the increasing difficulties in international marketing, the marketing researcher must have three qualities [Cateora, 1996, 215-216]. First, the researcher must have a high degree of cultural understanding of the market in which the research will be done. Secondly, the creativity is needed to adapt the obtained information, if it is necessary. Thirdly, it is necessary a skeptical attitude from both the primary data and the secondary ones. It can be necessary a data control that appear ai different periods, to draw fair conclusions.

2.6. Research report preparation

The research report is the written document through which are communicated the research results, the conclusions and the recommendations necessary to substantiate the decisions. It is necessary that the report to be translated in the language of the recipient and to include information that to summarize the entire process of the research, grouped into major components. The research report must be: well structured, objective (to mention the limits of the research), accessible, complete, clear and presented in an attractive style. A special attention should be given to the following aspects ragarding the elaboration of the research report [Jain, 2007, 4-18]: identification of data sources, because they ensure the degree of confidence of the obtained information, explanation of the projection data, identification of all those interviewed as well as their titles and qualifications (not for the consumers); labeling as such of the action alternatives resulted from the analysis and the interpretation, leaving the leader the responsibility of choosing the most appropriate variant.

3. PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH CONDUCTING INTERNATIONAL MARKETING RESEARCH

Because of the complexities of managing international research projects and of the multiple factors involved in this process can occur a series of problems that, if they are not solved properly, they can affect the overall results of the research. The most important problems associated with conducting international marketing research are: cultural problems, sampling issues, measurement issues, research infrastructure issues, data collection challenges, and legal issues.

3.1. Cultural issues

The physical access of the consumers at the product, the purchase behavior, the consumption characteristics and how the consumers can have a product depend largely on the culture of every country. To perceive all these aspects, the international traders must understand the culture of each country that involves in international business. The culture reflects the human side of the marketing. It is a total amount of the behavioral characteristics related and learned that are shared by the society members. The most representative elements of the culture can create problems to the researcher of the international marketing are: language, translation, syntax, perception of time, proximity, concept of manners and holidays abroad.

1. Language. Language is an important component of the culture of a people as the most part of the culture is found in the spoken language. It reflects the nature and the cultural values. The knowledge of the language of a society contributes as a determinant to the understanding of this culture. In some countries where are spoken several languages it is used a related language. It may be the situation when a language is spoken in several countries. In this way, we mention "the spoken language", as a cultural distinction (French in Belgium, Spanish in Latin America). The spoken language changes faster and reflects more

directly the culture. Even in the case when it is spoken the same language, the meanings may differ. For example, English speakers in Great Britain and USA have long complained that they are separately by o common language. The international business language is English, but the meaning of words differs at the speaking countries of English. Even a fluent speaker of English can be amazed by the multitude of idioms and slang used. Also, even the spoken Portuguese in Brazil is not the same with that of Portugal, just as the French from France is different of the Canadian.

2. Translation. The difficulty in translating from one language to another has made possible the emergence of many blunders in international marketing. Even the use of the same language raises the same issues [Sasu, 2005, 66-67]. The translation of the questionnaire is a very important issue in international marketing. Thus, there are countries (China, India) where are spoken many dialects, which leads to the accomodation of the questionnaire to each of them. The avoiding of many translation errors in the questionnaires, it may be conducted by using back translation – the translation of the foreign language version again in the host language by another translator than the one who made the translation initially [Zigmund, 2000, 154-167]. The back translator is often a person whose native language is the language that will be used for the final questionnaire.

3. Syntax is the part of the grammar that deals with combining the words into sentences, combining the sentences into phrases and syntactic reports between sentences (the coordination, the subordination and the different types of subordinate sentences). Specifically, sintax refers to word phrasing and sentence construction (Young, 2007, 119]. It is closely related to language. Here is a significant example of syntax error in a notice from Tokyo bar: "Special cocktails for the ladies with nuts" instead of “Special nuts cocktails for ladies".

4. Cultural norms. Cultural norms are expectations of the different behavior of the people in different situations. Every culture has different methods (sanctions) to impose the norms. An example of social norm is the one regarding the role of the women in the society. In Japan, for example, the women are not expected to work after the age of 30 years than at most part time. Sweden has the most liberal system of the child care from the western world; the one year paid leave for the child care can be taken by even a man. In the Islamic world, the women can not give interviews to the foreigners. The restrictions on women have influence both on the accession of women in leading positions and on the models of purchasing. Besides food, to all the other products the man has the final decision to purchase. And the foods consumed are influenced by the cultural norms. Fir instance, pork is prohibited in the Middle East, beef is very hard to find in India; there are plenty of veal in Europe; rice is ubiquitous in Hong Kong. In Far East tea is the national drink while in Europe a glass of wine at lunch is a habit. The alcohol is forbidden in the Buddhist countries, Muslim and Hindu. The cheese is used as a dessert in France, to a sandwich in Denmark or as appetizer in Germany. In China and Hong Kong it is prohibited [Sasu, 2005, 103-104].

5. Time perception. In the modern societies time became a commodity. The cultural values influence, for instance, the way in which the people view the punctuality. In Germany, the punctuality is a norm, while in Latin America and in the Buddhist countries to wait an hour is a normal thing and not a lack of respect. It can be concluded that there are time dependent culture (Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, UK, SUA) in which life is governed by clocks, schedules, deadlines, agendas, deadlines, the human relationships being entirely dependent on time, etc. and the independent companies time (Spain, Greece, Portugal, Southern France and Italy) in which the time has no intrinsic value, people not doing a big deal of its passage and in which the human relationships have always priority [Sasu, 2009, 35-37]. Even

the time of the day matters in countries like Japan, where a business interview is difficult to conduct during business hours. Japanese employees devote time to their immediate work while in the office and hesitate to devote time to other activities [Young, 2007, 119].

6**.** Proximity. Proximity represents the way of using the space for communication. The "converasational" distance is an example of proximity. This can range from 50 cm to 2 meters. In countries where people like to touch (Latin America, Middle East) the distance can be disturbing for a German or an American. However, the removal can be considered a lack of commitment. In Japan and in other Asian countries, the distance is greater and any attempt to appropriate is considered a useless attempt of intimacy. Another example of proximity is represented by the office size. In the U.S., for example, as the manager has an important function, even the higher is the office, the secretary verifying often the visitors that the manager does not wish to see. In Japan most managers does not have large offices and they spend most of the time with the employees. So, the Japanese have no trouble communicating with the superiors. In Europe, in most cases, there is not a dividing wall between managers and subordinates. They all work in the same room, that being disconcertant for the Americans.

7. Notion of manners. In some countries, such as U.S., Canada and Australia, the addressing mode is completely informal, not being influenced by the differences in age or by the social class. In other countries, this addressing mode can be considered a lack of respect and an attempt to intimacy. Untill the informal addressing it can pass five minutes in Australiaand Venezuela, a year in Germany, Argentina and France, three years in Switzerland And ten years in Japan. The formal addressing by the first name (Senor Pedro, Mr. Ahmed, Mrs. Indira, Dona Christina) prevails in Latin America, the Arab world and Asia. In Europe the formal addressing is made by the name Herr Schmith şi nu Herr Johan, Monsieur Chirac şi nu Monsieur Pierre, Madame Jospin and not Madam Jeanne). In Germany, the accent falls on the title, the people expecting to be approached as Herr or Frau or with the title conferred by their occupation Frau Professor or Herr Doctor, to those with two PhDs they are told Herr Doctor Doctor. In England, the politeness rules are the same for everyone. Therefore, when two lords meet or either two workers, they will address in the same way, using Sir or Madam. In some countries it is particularly important to use titles. In Italy, Argentina and Mexic must be used the titles of "doctor" or engineer. Only the people without education can be contacted without title. The title of "doctor" does not necessarily mean that the person has obtained a PhD degree. It is uses by lawyers, graduated in economics, teachers, liberal arts graduates. The title of "engineer" is more accurate, assuming the graduation of a technical university. In Mexico are used more commonly the titles "Licenciado" and "Licenciada" for the graduates of higher education. Apart from Latin America and some European countries are not matters of titles. Even in Sweden which had a strictly social code until recently, the addressing is now made by profession (Engineer Peterson, Professor Bergstrom, Sister Bergman, Accountant Andersen) [Sasu, 2009, 56-59].

8. Holiday abroad. In every country there are certain public holidays. Also, in many countries there are many holidays and festivals during which no one works. In August the Europeans go on vacation, some firms even closing the entire month of August.

3.2. Sampling issues

In international marketing research the definition of variables is very important, because there may be major differences from one country to another. Thus, the definition of the urban areas differs a lot between the countries. In Albany, these represent the areas with more than 400 inhabitants, in Argentina with over 2,000 inhabitants and in Switzerland with over 10,000 inhabitats. It is necessary a definition of the community under spatial aspect (the territory whose circumscribes) and structural (the characteristics of the unities of which is made). An appropriate research should be based on the representative samples. Unfortunately, in many countries is difficult to obtain representative information on the socio-economic characteristics of the population since this information is missing or, at best, it is inadequate.

1. At the level of the international marketing research, through the sampling issues, it is registered the lack of availability of some information regarding the characteristics of the recorded population (size, address, telephone number). For instance, in many cities from South America and Asia are not available maps with the component streets, may exist cases where both the streets and the houses do not present an identifier element (name, number). In Saudi Arabia, the random sampling issues are acute, as to the use of non random methods represent a necessary evil. Here among the difficulties are: the absence of the official censuses, incomplete phone books or outdated, the lack of a map of population distribution, the unlawful interviewes at home.

2. Another problem is represented by the low rate of response in some countries due to the cultural barriers. Thus, in Japan there are reluctant in the participation to a research, considering that the the personal data are not guaranteed. In many countries from Latin America, the refusal to participate in the research is based on feelings of shame of talking about the preferences to certain products of the hygiene or food, considering this subject as being too personal to be discussed with anyone outside.

3. Using operators. To facilitate the communication process so complex, it is necessary to use local questionnaire operators. In this way it realizes a form of quality control and more, it is a matter of courtesy as the local respondents to speak in their language. In some countries, like France, the respondents feel offended if they do not speak in their language. However, in countries like India and China, where the literacy degree is low, the use of the local operators can be problematic.

4. Length of the questionnaire. Although the tendency to respond to the international operators is increasing, the rate of the refusal in responding is still very high. One of the reasons for refusal is the length of the questionnaire. The problem is compounded in international marketing because the different language can short or long the scroll during of the questionnaire. The questionnaire in the Romanian language requires 19 minutes for completion. The translation in French lasts 22 minutes. The time difference is attributed to the nuances of the two languages [Lee, 1996, 18-19]. In international marketing research is needed attention in the questionnaire development, because there may be differences in understanding the questions, from country to country. For example, the marital status may differ, since in some countries the polygamy is allowed and in other divorced couplesor those living in consensual union are fairly common. Also, the variable educational level can know customizations, because the school years number related to the average and the higher training differ. The type of questions used may differ from country to country. Thus, if in U.S. the respondents are more likely to respond to open questions, in countries from Asia, as China, there are reluctant to give complete and truthful answers.

5. Incentives. The problem of the incentives accorded to those that complete the questionnaire was much discussed. It is considered that through the payment of the respondents is no longer ensured the objectivity. On the international arena the problem is complicating

because in certain cultures are requested incentives procure participant cooperation, and to complete the questionnaires. For instance, the Brazilian respondents are expecting that after completing the questionnaire to be invited to socialize to a drink. However, in other cultures offering the incentives is considered an insult.

3.3. Measurement issues

One of the most significant issues that must dealt with in international marketing research are the measurement issues. Measurement is the process through which is determined the degree to which an object possesses a particular property. In marketing research in the "object" class are included products, brands, promotional messages, consumers or any other construction that can enter in the interest field of a decider in the field of marketing. The properties that are evaluated through the measurement process can be objective, which are directly observable (age, income, number of units of purchased product, types of stores in which thera are made acquisitions) or subjective that can not be directly observable, being mental constructions (the satisfaction, the opinion, the attitude, the intention). The instrument through which is realized the measurement is called scale and the process of the scales building is called scaling. In international marketing research is necessary to achieve equivalence between the scales used in the studies on several countries, to ensure a uniform way of measuring the same phenomena [Han, 1994, 151-162]. It is important to ensure the equivalence of the construction, or awarding the same significations to the different marketing constructions (scales, variables) in all countries in which the research is conducted. The estimate equivalence of the construction involves the ensurance of several types of equivalences, as follows:

Functional equivalence establishes if a certain construction meets the same function or functions in different cultures. For example, cycling has a main role in the U.S. that of ensuring a way of recreation, while in China is a means of transport used for current travel. In function of these perceptions, the habits research of using the bike will operate with the variables relatively different on the two countries.

Conceptual equivalence examines the extent to which a concept or a construct have similar meanings from one country to another. For example, the variable of temporary reduction price in U.S. is considered a marketing tactic designed to ensure consumers a temporary advantage, while in other countries is considered a mean of forced stimulation of the sales with low quality product. Also, the variable that aims the affection of the parents towards the children is defined in the Oriental countries in terms of discipline, involvement in work and aspirations towards a higher education, while in the West it is focused more on providing a certain level of welfare.

Instrumental equivalence establishes the degree in which the components (items) of the scales or of the answers categories are indentically interpreted in different countries. In U.S., for example, that who decides/does shopping for a certain category of product may be (in general) the husband or the wife, while in other countries such action belongs to the servant (the person that makes housekeeping). Also, at the level of the variable of marital status can be found additional categories, in some countries, such as "separate couple" (married people who no longer live in the same household).

Equivalence with a standard ensures the convergence of metrics measures used in different countries. Thus in defining the weight, if in the applied questionnaire in a country this variable is expressed in pounds and another in kilograms; it must ensure a correct conversion of the two measurement units.

Linguistic equivalence ensures a proper translation of the questionnaires or scales from one language to another, so these have the same meaning for the subjects in different countries.

Scalar equivalence examines whether the scores obtained after the application of some scales to the subjects from different countries have the same meaning. This means that when two people from different countries have the same opinion towards an attribute of a brand, on a scale through which it is evaluated the attitude will have to obtain the same score. The levels of the scales can differ from one country to another; so, if in U.S. can use sucessfuly the scales with 5 or 7 levels, in other countries are needed scales with multiple levels. In applying the previous scale, through the European countries it was noticed that in Germany exists the the lowest probability of overvaluation of the intentions, while the Spanish and Italians are most likely to do so. Countries like Switzerland, Belgium and Great Britain are found between the two extremes. To ensure a unitary evaluation at the level of the international researches, the scores obtained will be corrected by a conversion rate that varies from country to country. In building of the scales is important the educational level of the population from a given country. From some researches resulted that the semantic differential is more adapted to the different levels of training, so it can be considered as being a universal scale. Likert' scale requires certain adaptations, so in Japan instead of gradations: total agreement/agreement/indifferent/disagree/total disagree it was considered more appropriate the building: all true/somewhat true/not true, not false/ somewhat false/totally untrue. Then when it evaluates a certain stimulus, the extreme levels of the scales can be interpreted differently, so, the numerical value numerical value "1" is interpreted in some cutures "the best" and in the other "the worst". Also, in some countries it manifests more "lenient" in the assessment of some attributes, which determines the respondents to choose more favorable values at the level of the assessment scales, leading to the direct non-comparability of the obtained data from studies on two different countries. Also, in the country from Latin America there is the tendency that the subjects to declare higher income than those obtained in reality, being needed a correction that the data be comparable at international level.

3.4. Research infrastructure

The inadequate infrastructure is maybe the most serious problem in marketing research. Besides the lack of adequate telephone and postal services, the lack of the marketing researches organizations creates serious problems in obtaining primary data. In many countries, the telephone surveys are almost impossible, because only the rich people have phones. Sometimes, the ineffectiveness of the various methods of communication (post, telephone, personal interviews) hinders the researches. The postal services of poor quality from some countries create serious problems to those who wish to make inquiries using the post [Malhotra, 2004, 167-169]. The media availability, the internet penetration and the general infrastructure of research have a significant impact on the researches results of the international marketing [Dodd, 1998, 60-66]. The lack of media communication makes these not to be found in the research. Printed materials, mass-media, the various databases are advantages of Western Europe. Internet, due to its lowest penetration, can not be considered in many countries a viable instrument for the primary data collection.

3.5. Data collection challenges

Data collection must be planned and realized with attention. The researcher must determine the degree of availability of the necessary information. If the data are available, if they have been collected, the researcher must consult these secondary data sources. If they are not available the necessary data or the secondary data sources are not sufficient or appropriate, it is necessary to collect primary data. In data collection can appear certain problems.

1. Issues regarding secondary data collection problems. The efficiency of using of these data depends on their availability, confidence and comparability. Some countries do not publish data regarding the census and ceratain published data may not have the necessary level of confidence to take some believable decisions [Kumar, 2000, 211-215]. To correctly appreciate the degree of confidence of the data, it must be analyzed the following aspects: the author of the collection data, if there are motifs for distorting the reality, the purpose for which the data are collected, the collection methodology, the consistency and data logic in terms of the known data sources. Even there, where the data are available and reliable, they may nor be comparable. A particular article may be defined differently from country to country. In the case of the television market, for instance, Germany reported the television as "articles of recreation and entertainment", while U.S. reported them in the category "furniture and household furniture". In this category, three categories of data may not be comparable: the TV market, the recreation and entertainment market and the market of the furniture and household equipment. Another aspect of data comparability is the lack of comparability over time. Data that are otherwise good and reliable can be obtained in different periods of time and therefore do not have the same common basis of calculation.

2. Issues regarding primary data collection. Even where there can be obtained feasible information, researcher faces some difficulties regarding the lack of goodwill in responding, the samples, the language, the illiteracy , the education, the inadequate infrastructure. In many countries, personal information is inviolable and can not be discussed with foreigners. In certain societies is below the dignity of men to discuss the personal hygiene habits and how to dress. Some companies do not respond correctly to the questions, because they want to keep the secret of the business. Another issue is that of the time required for the response, especially when the investigation is conducted abroad. Besides the long duration of response, it grows the shipping costs of the materials investigation. In underdeveloped countries, the rural areas are almost inaccessible, so the samplings are based especially on the information collected from urban areas. Using Internet for data collection is a vaiable alternative especially in the developed countries that have access, in which the population is largely connected to Internet. The overall barrier that appeared in obtaining the primary data is the language. The variety of dialects and the accurate translation difficulty creates problems in obtaining the desired information and the interpretation of the responses. Another barrier is the level of literacy and the education. Where the illiteracy prevails, the written questionnaires are useless. Even where there is a reasonable level of literacy, if it is accompanied by an overall lower educational level will be communication problems.

3.6. Legal issues

Every country developed different laws regarding the control of the foreign affairs from its economy. Sometimes the laws are discriminatory regarding the goods and the foreign affairs, other times is given certain reciprocity between countries. There are situations in which the laws are extremely favorable to the foreign affairs. Generally, the legal environment of a country regarding the external trade depends on the country's economic objectives and the obligations and its positions towards the world trade. In certain instances, however, the law can also have political purposes. The international researcher will have to study carefully the content of these laws, to know in advance the rule to which the research will be subjected in a particular country. Also, it will have to know very well the trade law in his country, to make the needed comparisons and to establish the accordance and the non-compatible elements between the laws of the two countries.

4. CONCLUSIONS

For identifying the most viable opportunities on the international market the firms must realize relevant international marketing research, which can turn into real competitive advantages. As companies continue to seek competitive advantages across national boundaries, being cognizant of the variety of international marketing research challenges mentioned above provides an important factor to the company succes. This paper had two objectives. The first objective was highlighting the features of the international marketing research process, emphasizing the specific of the stages of the international marketing research. The second objective was to present the problems that the international marketing researcher can meet. The presentation of the features of the international marketing research has been realized in the context of the six steps of the marketing research process. If for many internal managers these steps are familiar, in international marketing there are many features which can create serious problems. To fully capitalize on emerging the opportunities in the international markets, the managers must be careful to the properly definition of the research problem in function of the concept of product, what in the internal marketing is implied. Also, the data sources are more varied and complex. In what concerns the data collection, the numerous problems that can occur significantly increase the research costs. It can be reached even that the value of the obtained information to be inferior to the implied costs. Therefore, the research managers must think globally and act locally by developing some research projects which to involve the rational global expansion, the identification of the most appropriate entry options for providing a framework for implementing an effective marketing mix strategies. Paying a certain attention to the numerous problems that can appear in the international marketing research, they will develop international marketing research more relevant and with a higher impact on the company performances.

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