Abstract
The trend of globalization has impacted international business activities in more significant ways than ever before. The challenge of serving several cultures and meeting their local preferences even while operating on a global scale indeed requires some great tact. Companies pursuing growth and international recognition are also faced with the task of adjusting their promotional strategies in order to adequately meet the needs of local markets. Despite the increasing pace of globalization, cultural issues have inadvertently established the grounds that determine to a large extent, the success story of firms targeting to satisfy multiple countries at the same time. Multinational companies are required to critically evaluate and understand components of differing local cultures, thereby identifying seeming similarities and differences within and across the groups; and then aligning promotional strategies to appeal to each target group. This does not in any way undermine standardization. Rather, it emphasizes the relevance of geocentrism as an indispensable philosophy for success in international promotions. It is therefore evident that even in a firm’s quest for international growth, there is still need not to relegate socio-cultural factors to the background.

Keywords: Culture, socio-cultural factors, globalisation, promotion, multinational firms

Introduction
The pace of globalization in the modern economy has almost reached its peak, posing more complex challenges to the business environment than ever before. The need for survival of business firms has spurred up the drive to plunge into foreign countries, operating beyond immediate boundaries in a quest for expansion and growth. The benefits of increasing scale of economies with technological advancement are making more firms consider the objective of expansion more seriously than before. The saturation of the local market for certain products also brings up the need for firms to launch into other foreign markets in order to increase customer base and market share. Most firms are no longer interested in starting small and remaining small since International Marketing promises higher returns.

The global marketplace is simultaneously becoming inter-dependent economically, culturally and technically through the consistent thrust in technological innovation...these focus have meant that all companies need to develop a marketing orientation which is international and have managers who are able to analyse, plan and implement strategies across the globe (Doole and Lowe, 1999). It is clear to any observer that consumers in different countries think, speak, and behave differently in many ways. The salient product beliefs, attitudes, and social norms vary considerably between markets. The extent to which quality concerns are important, the attitudes toward foreign products, and the degree to which individuals comply with social norms all affect consumers’ decision making differently across countries (Johansson, 2000). Growth and expansion which is an offshoot of traversing certain environmental barriers appears to be one of the topmost priorities of firms in this modern business era. Despite all these, it is pertinent to state that the pursuit for international and multinational expansion is fraught with several bottlenecks, one of which is socio-cultural variances.

Statement of the problem
History is replete with records of some multinational firms who had hit the rock in times past, not because they did not design the right product for target markets, but because they did not design strategies flexible enough to appeal to varying cultures. The accelerating pace of technology and the no – restriction impact of
globalization has provided firms the opportunity to explore various market options and plunge into any market attractive and profitable enough to them. It is needless to mention that firms who neglect these recent developments in the modern business environment are not likely to remain in existence for a long time. Gone are those days when firms could be satisfied by just producing and serving a local market. These days, there is virtually almost nothing of economic significance produced by indigenous firms that are not being produced by their foreign counterparts. Sadly enough, these international firms even manufacture products of better quality at lower costs due to their adoption of advanced technologies and mass customization.

Improvements in technology and standard of living have exposed the average man to diversities in cultures and ways of life. The breakthrough and developments in ICT has brought some of these diversities to the very doorstep of every household through the use of internet, telephones, television, computers, e.t.c. No longer is the present generation completely shut out from general happenings in the larger society. Less restrictions, removal of barriers, and efforts at encouraging tourism all bring to the fore the fact that countries are having to integrate more with people from diverse cultures. All these trends have made international trade much easier by successfully breaking cultural barriers and encouraged cross-cultural relationships. Nevertheless, a paradox exists where though the world has been reduced to a ‘global village’, yet this ‘village’ has very inherent diversities that if ignored, could wreak a business venture.

Onkvisit and Shaw (2004) pointed out that a worldwide business success requires a respect for local customs. International marketers need to recognize and appreciate varying cultures. Culture plays a significant role in influencing consumer perception, which in turn influences preference and purchase. A good marketing plan can easily go away when it clashes with tradition. A marketing mix can be effective as long as it is relevant to a given culture. One should expect that a product may have to be modified, that a new distribution may have to be found, or that a new promotional strategy may have to be considered. The fact that these differences exists and that they influence to a large extent the promotional strategies of firms is what has given rise to this study. Therefore, this study focuses on describing how socio-cultural factors influence the promotional strategies of multinational firms as they target groups of people across diverse cultures.

Conceptual framework
Throughout this study, Geocentrism is delineated as an effective philosophical approach to designing promotional strategies across cultures. The summary of findings and conclusions all emphasise this concept of geocentrism as very applicable to designing promotional strategies across diverse socio-cultural lines. Barlett et.al (2008), views Geocentrism as an ideology that must be accepted by any corporation operating globally in order for any sort of success and long term stability to be attained. It offers the benefits of an integrated global outlook, better quality of products and services, worldwide utilisation of best resources, improves local country management, greater commitment to global objectives and higher global profits.

Geocentrism is a philosophy where the basic disposition of a firm is to develop products that are standard along certain geographic lines but adapt where necessary. It is a combination strategy of both polycentrism and ethnocentrism. On the one hand, ethnocentrism is an approach by which domestic firms see international markets as an extension of its domestic market. They do not recognize any obvious differences existing between these markets, but simply extend the same promotional mix strategies into foreign markets. On the other hand, polycentrism acknowledges the differences inherent among cultures and develops suitable strategies to satisfy each market. However, geocentrism is a strategy that utilizes the combined elements of ethnocentrism and polycentrism in order to effectively serve local markets while operating from the global front.

Literature review
An overview of the international marketing environment
The term ‘across cultures’ is synonymous with going beyond international boundaries. So, designing promotional strategies across cultures simply relates to applying similar promotional
strategies used in the international marketing context. Generally, International Marketing refers to the performance of business and marketing activities across international borders. Johansson (2000) describe International Marketing as a term encompassing foreign trade analysis, environmental differences, and all marketing efforts in foreign countries. At its simplest level, international marketing involves the firm in making one or more marketing decisions across national boundaries. The key problem faced by the international marketing manager is that of coming to terms with the details and complexities of the international environment.

In examining the international marketing environment, Doole and Lowe (1999), adopted the SLEPT (Socio-cultural, Legal, Economic, Political and Technological) approach as illustrated in the diagram below.

![SLEPT Diagram](image)

**Socio-cultural factors influencing promotions across cultures**

Generally, culture is described as the total way of life of a group of people. Onkvisit and Shaw (2004) explicitly explained culture as a set of traditional beliefs and values that are transmitted and shared in a given society, and also highlighted some basic characteristics of culture which includes:

- **Culture is learned** – Culture is not inherited genetically, but must be learned and acquired. This explains the reason why it is possible for people to absorb new cultural trends.
- **Culture is socially shared** – It cannot exist by itself but must be based on social interaction, and creation. It must be shared by members of the society.
- **Culture is subjective** – People in different cultures often have different ideas about the same object. Culture is both unique and arbitrary. As a result, the same phenomenon appearing in different cultures may be interpreted in different ways.
- **Culture is enduring** – Because culture is shared and passed down from generation to generation, it is relatively stable and somewhat permanent.
Culture is cumulative – It is based on several years of accumulated circumstances, as a result, each generation adds something of its own to the culture before passing the heritage on to the next generation.

Culture is dynamic – It passes from generation to generation, therefore, is subject to change as it adapts itself to new situations and new sources of knowledge.

Doole and Lowe (1999) emphasize that social and cultural influences on international marketing are immense. Differences in social conditions, religion and material culture all affect consumers’ perceptions and patterns of buying behavior. It is this area that determines the extent to which consumers across the globe are either similar or different and so determines the potential for global branding and standardization. Cultural differences and especially language differences have a significant impact on the way a product may be used in a market, its brand name and the advertising campaign. In addition to that, they noted that social and cultural factors influence all aspects of consumer and buyer behavior. The differences between these factors in different parts of the world can be a central consideration in developing and implementing international marketing strategies. Social and cultural forces are linked together. Whilst meaningful distractions between social and cultural factors can be made, in many ways the two interact and the distinction between the various factors is not clear-cut. Differences in language can alter the intended meaning of a promotional campaign and differences in the way a culture organizes itself socially may affect the way a product is positioned in the market and the benefits a consumer may seek from the product.

According to Guang and Trotter (2012), cultural factors have long been known to influence the communication and success potential of competition. Cultural awareness shapes how business firms behave in cross-culturally reflected international markets. It is broadly recognized that cultural factors act as invisible barriers in international business communications. Understanding cultural differences is one of the most significant skills for firms to develop in order to have a competitive advantage in international business. Terpstra and Sarathy (2000) have established a framework which influences the international marketer’s strategies to a large extent, as promotion is targeted across cultures.


Selfridge and Sokolik (1975) explicitly explained how these dimensions of culture, visible or
invisible, implied or expressed must be fully understood by marketers and fully integrated into their strategies as they present promotional messages across cultures thus:

“Culture is more complex and composed of a “visible and visible part of the culture”. Indeed, culture can be described like an iceberg. The part of the iceberg that you see above the water is only a small fraction of what is there. What you cannot see are the values and assumptions that can sink your ship if you mistakenly run into them. Daily behavior is influenced by values and social morals which work closer to the surface than the basic cultural assumptions. The iceberg model of culture implies that the visible parts of culture are just expressions of its invisible parts. It also highlights the difficulty of understanding people from different cultural backgrounds because although we may see the visible parts or their “iceberg” we cannot immediately realize what the foundations are”.

Lillis & Tian (2010) explained that managers in companies working internationally sometimes neglect the significance of the invisible barriers cultural differences create in business communication. Cultural factors play an important role functioning as invisible barriers. Even as the world is becoming globalized, many nations have increasingly voiced their claim to “a right to culture” in international businesses. It is predicted that national culture will be a critical factor affecting economic development, demographic behavior, and general business policies around the world. The FAO Corporate Document Repository (2014) documented that social and cultural aspects of a society form its very nature. It highlighted and explained the major elements of socio-culture thus: material culture, language, aesthetics, education, religion, attitudes and values, and social organization.

- **Material culture** refers to tools, artifacts and technology. Before marketing in foreign culture, it is important to assess the material culture like transportation, power, communications and so on. Material culture introductions into a country may bring about cultural changes which may or may not be desirable.
- **Language** reflects the nature and values of society. There may be many sub-cultural languages like dialects which may have to be accounted for.
- **Aesthetics** refer to the ideas in a culture concerning beauty and good taste as expressed in the arts – music, art, drama and dancing and the particular appreciation of colour and form. African music is different in form to Western music. Aesthetic differences affect design, colours, packaging, brand names and media messages.
- **Education** refers to the transmission of skills, ideas and attitudes as well as training in particular disciplines. Education can transmit cultural ideas or be used for change.
- **Religion** provides the best insight into a society’s behavior and helps answer the question why people behave rather than how they behave.
- **Values** often have a religious foundation, and attitudes relate to economic activities. It is essential to ascertain attitudes towards marketing activities which lead to wealth or material gain.
- **Social organizations** refer to the way people relate to each other, for example, extended families, units, kinship. All of these dimensions have to be taken into account when marketing internationally.

**Promotional strategies for marketing across cultures**

The promotion mix is the most culture – bound element of the marketing mix and, promotion in the local market has to adapt for language and cultural reasons. Cultural relevance in promotion ensures that messages are sent to target customers effectively (Usunier, 2000; Risager, 2006). Of much relevance to designing promotional strategies across cultures are the global communication strategies established by Kotler and Keller (2012) Vis: Communication adaptation and Dual adaptation.
Communications adaptation - This involves changing marketing communications for each local market.

Dual adaptation - This involves adapting both the product and the communications features to suit local preferences.

Kotler and Keller (2012) specifically identified some approaches that may be useful for designing promotions in foreign markets. The first is to use one message everywhere, varying only the language, name, and perhaps colours to avoid taboos in some countries. The second approach is to use the same message and creative theme globally but adapt the execution. The third approach is developing a global pool of ads from which each country selects the most appropriate. Finally, country managers can create country-specific ads within specific guidelines.

Keegan and Green (1999) explained further that the essence of global marketing is finding the balance between a standardized (extension) approach to the marketing mix and a localized (adaptation) approach that is responsive to country or regional differences. When a firm decides to standardize an advertising message, they can minimize their cost but they do not have to forget that customers are different in all countries. Promotion can be affected by language, religions, law, economic differences and media availability. All these factors create a need for adaptation of advertising messages (Theodosiou & Leonidous, 2002). Communication among people from the same culture is often difficult. Therefore, communication between people from different cultures from the point of view of language, values, customers and ways of thinking, will be far more difficult, a degree of miscommunication being almost inevitable (Ferraro, 2002). Kotler and Keller (2012) further noted that companies that adapt their communications wrestle with a number of challenges among which are: the need to ensure that their communications are legally and culturally acceptable; checking their creative strategies for appropriateness and varying the message appeal.

Summary of findings
Subcultures, which are a sub-constituent of the larger culture plays a very noticeable role in designing communications/promotional strategies for different cultures. Advertisers should thus adjust their advertising messages according to the ethnic groups and product types; thus, putting a local face in an advertisement is useful to getting customers’ attention (Kim and Kang, 2001; Mumert, 2007).

An important point to note is the universality of some cultures. Some cultures are universal and general among countries. For example, music as a component of culture is universal. People in every part of the world love music. Onkvisit and Shaw (2004) explained this further by stating that when a marketing campaign is exported, careful translation is needed. It is crucial to keep in mind that the thought, not the words, must be translated. Because differences in languages go beyond differences in words, it is ineffective to have a word-for-word translation. As a result, advertising copy may have to be interpreted rather than translated. Also, because of the universality of basic desires, some products can be marketed overseas with little modification. Shared values do not necessarily mean shared or identical behavior, rather, the manner of expressing culturally universal traits still varies across countries. As was earlier noted, music as a cultural universal does not mean that the same kind of music is acceptable everywhere. Therefore, because musical tastes are not internationally uniform, the type of music must be varied to appeal to a particular country.

The influence of socio-cultural factors on the success of a firm’s operation across cultures is so significant that international marketers cannot afford to ignore them. Following are highlights of some cases describing the extent to which these socio-cultural influences can determine a firm’s success.

“Coca’ and its ‘Bite the Wax Tadpole’” campaign
When first entering China, coca-cola was rumoured to have blundered by translating its name into Chinese characters that literally mean, ‘Bite the wax tadpole’. This was actually the fault of independent shopkeepers who imported the product before the beverage company’s official entry and created unofficial signs to advertise it. Coca-cola was much more cautious and carefully chose characters for
its name that mean, ‘Happiness in the mouth,’ – a much better fit for the company’s brand image.

- **Electrolux Advertised Vacuums in the United States with the Slogan ‘Nothing Sucks like an Electrolux’**
  Electrolux ran a long campaign with the slogan ‘Nothing sucks like an Electrolux,’ but that was in the United Kingdom and other English speaking countries, not in the United States. In reality, this high end vacuum manufacturer showed great wisdom in resisting the urge to tell the U.S. market how much its product sucks.

- **American airlines that invited Spanish Speakers to ‘Fly Naked’**
  Dozens of newspapers articles from 1987 indicate an airline did appear to invite Spanish speakers in Florida to ‘fly naked’ when intending to say, ‘Fly in leather.’ However, it was reported that the real culprit was Braniff airlines, not American airlines.

- **Tiz Razor Brand and the Passing Wind**
  In the 1980s, the Iranian government encouraged a razor manufacturer to begin exporting after it attained considerable domestic success using the brand name ‘Tiz’ which conveniently means ‘sharp’ in the local Farsi language. With the help of a local importer, the manufacturer first targeted the wealthy Arabic – speaking country of Qatar. However, success in Iran did not instantly translate into success in Qatar. Soon after the product launch in Qatar, the distributor realized the Persian brand name ‘Tiz’ was creating some serious problems with customers. It was discovered that the brand name’s connotation in Arabic stand referred to ‘Passing Wind.’ Following numerous frantic telephone calls between the manufacturer and the distributor, all razors with the ‘Tiz’ brand name were recalled and reshipped to Iran. The company then chose a different brand name, ‘Muqdam,’ meaning ‘hero’ in Arabia. This new brand received a much more favourable reception in Qatar.


- **Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow**
  The Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow is a luxury car that was produced in Great Britain in various forms from 1965 to 1980. Initially, the model was planned to be called ‘Silver Mist’, a natural progression from its predecessor Silver Cloud. The name was changed to ‘Silver shadow’ after realizing that ‘Mist’ is the German word for manure, rubbish, or dirt.
  
  **Source:** Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia (2014)

**Conclusions**
People from different backgrounds think differently about a firm’s products, even when the product has a universal use. Understanding these differences is necessary to knowing more about them, which helps in designing promotional messages along their own frame of reference. This study examines such socio-cultural influences and points out how international marketers can understand the effects on consumers, thus, emphasizing the need for designing promotional themes to reflect inherent variances.

- **Language**
  The language commonly spoken in a community is a point of consideration on product labels as a form of promotion. Multinational companies serving Anglophone and Francophone countries label their products using these languages, English and French respectively. Product information on ‘Ingredients’, ‘Directions for use’, are stated in the different languages spoken within these regions. Nigeria as a country consists of several ethnic groups and subcultures with diverse languages. That is why companies like United African Company (UAC) for example, uses the major ethnic languages in persuading locals to consume their brands. Examining the UAC gala brand, reveals the use of the major ethnic languages in its promotions.

- **Values and Attitudes**
  As a result of the varying nature of attitudes between nations and across cultures, it becomes necessary for marketers to have a good understanding of the locality before designing
promotional strategies. This may not necessarily mean changing the entire message but might involve some slight alterations of the promotional material or cautiously rebranding the message. Understanding the values of whichever country a marketer wishes to operate in is as important as the successful conduction of the promotional campaign. In an online post by Friesner (2014), it was recorded that in 2004, China banned a Nike television commercial showing U.S. basketball star Lebron James in a battle with animated cartoon Kung Fu masters and two dragons, because it was argued that the advert insulted Chinese national dignity.

- **Education**

The level of education varies across cultures and nations. In designing promotional strategies along the line of education, the international marketer has to apply the principle of “Think Globally, Act Locally.” It is important to think from the wider perspective, but also reasonable to streamline promotional messages to fall within the frame of reference of the locals. At this point, it becomes very necessary to understand the nature of the educational system, and aligning promotional messages to correlate with the level most prevalent in that country. During the recent outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in Nigeria, health messages were being communicated across and within the states in different local languages. Though English language is widely spoken in Nigeria, the government and other health agencies ensured that these messages were passed across using local dialects so that everyone would understand clearly. Of course, the effectiveness of the campaign was evident in the way a very high percentage of Nigerians woke up a particular morning spreading the news about the need to prevent oneself from the virus by drinking and bathing in salty water.

- **Age**

In advertising the ‘Indomie’ brand of noodles in Nigeria, observe that the music features are mainly appealing to children. Research reveals that children consume noodles much more than adults. So, such campaigns can only be very effective when directed to children since it primarily appeals to them more. Similarly, retirement plans are more directed towards mature adults so, would feature majorly in adult programmes; thus, reflecting how age significantly influences the focus of promotional messages.

- **Social organizations**

The classification of societies as regards to some structures helps to determine the main constituents of promotional messages and how these messages are delivered. More specifically, knowing the dominant gender in a society helps the marketer determine exactly which group would constitute the focus of the promotional messages. Some countries attach femininity to certain products. For example, countries where the choice of car brands is majorly left to be determined by female, would necessitate designing promotional strategies that appeal to the female folk. Such a message would be devoid of words, colours, and appearances that tend to portray masculinity.

Nigeria operates a gender sensitive social system where the role of women is seen to revolve around keeping the home front. Taking general care of the home and children is considered a woman’s primary responsibility. A simple example is Unilever’s advert of the OMO brand of detergent featuring a child who had soiled his clothes during sports leaving off the mother to demonstrate the efficacy of OMO detergent in getting rid of the dirt. Of course, it would be out of place to direct such messages to the men folk because it definitely would yield no positive results in a social setting where there is gender disparity.

**Recommendation**

Effective promotions across cultures are significantly dependent on the marketer’s ability to understand the differences inherent in social groups. Since globalization has come to stay even with inherent divergences in socio-cultural dimensions, an effective marketing strategy would be to adopt geocentrism as a philosophy guiding the design and implementation of international promotions. Thus, the ‘Glocal’ strategy of thinking globally and acting locally is a recommended approach to handling socio-cultural influences affecting promotions across cultures. This is because while some products may have global and/or cross-cultural uses, recognizing subtle inherent variances remains an imperative. Therefore, international marketers should still recognize differences, howbeit unpronounced in
some situations, and align promotional strategies to adapt to local conditions.

References
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