

Cultural Implications for Cross-border E-commerce: The Case of China's Belt and Road

Liu Hongfei

China-Europe Association for the Technical and Economic Cooperation

Liu Yu

Shantou University

Robert Tian

(Corresponding Author)

Huaihua University

China's Belt and Road Initiative seeks to develop an international distribution system connected to the internet that provides the nation and its economy with a strategic advantage by more effectively marketing goods and services at a global level. To accomplish this goal, China must deal with significant differences in political, economic, technical, and cultural systems. Currently, researchers have paid inadequate attention to cultural issues; this paper is a step towards correcting this imbalance by pointing to various questions and problems that qualitative research methods can address. At this phase of research, qualitative methods and tools developed from the social sciences are best able to frame research agendas that, in the future, can be considered by formal and quantitative and scientific investigations.

Keywords: the belt and road, cross-border e-commerce, cultural issues, internet, marketing

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary marketing typically involves (1) choosing a target market and (2) controlling or manipulating the organization's controllable variables to please it. Ever since E. Jerome McCarthy published his classic textbook (1960), these controllable variables have usually been envisioned as Product, Price, Promotion, and Place (i.e., distribution). This formulation of marketing strategy continues to dominate today even though alternatives such as macro marketing seek to expand the discipline in broader directions. Strategies differ, however, regarding the role and significance of specific controllable variables.

Today, the importance of distribution is being transformed by the internet. In 2017, the trading volume of the global online retail market amounted to \$2,304,000,000,000. Some scholars predict that the growth rate of cross-border e-commerce will exceed that of domestic e-commerce in the next few years. By 2022, the sales volume of the global cross-border e-commerce market will reach \$627,000,000,000

(Institute of China International Electronic Commerce Center, 2017). In the United States, for example, Amazon, a leading e-retailer, has found success by developing an electronic portal for purchasing coupled with a convenient, rapid, and relatively cheap distribution network that delivers products to people's homes. In the process, Amazon (and other organizations with similar distribution strategies) has taken sales away from conventional "brick and mortar" stores that, in turn, have been forced to respond with innovative distribution methods of their own.

This sort of e-commerce initiative is not merely the province of private companies. China, for example, is currently seeking to develop a competitive edge by investing in distribution methods that better serve e-commerce customers. As some scholars indicate that China has emerged as the fastest-growing economy in the world, and internationalization of Chinese firms have captured worldwide attention (Paul, 2016; Alon et al., 2018; Paul & Benito, 2017). In the future, cross-border e-commerce is bound to be a new engine to promote China's economic development and prosperity, and a new driving force to promote China's industrial upgrading and structural transformation. The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, which was first proposed by the Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, has brought unprecedented opportunities for the development of cross-border e-commerce.

This Belt and Road initiative provides an electronic infrastructure that potentially gives China and Chinese companies a competitive edge in the international marketplace. As the Belt and Road grow, furthermore, it is influencing political and economic structures throughout the world by serving central Asia, ASEAN, South Asia, Central, and Eastern Europe, West Asia, and North Africa (among other countries and regions). If effectively and properly managed, it potentially brings unprecedented opportunities by more fully developing cross-border e-commerce. This paper deals with cultural challenges and its implications by examining relevant cultural factors that accompany and influence the technological advances that are involved with its growth. In the final analysis, technological breakthrough and economic intercourse take place within a cultural milieu. This paper begins to initially flesh out these human factors using qualitative social scientific perspectives that can suggest research agendas for more formal researchers in the future.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

The sixty-five countries along the Belt and Road vary in their cultures and customs. If these differences are not appropriately addressed (and, where necessary, mitigated), it is clear that the Belt and Road will probably not reach its full potential. Cultures, of course, provide the social and psychological milieu in which people exist. Individuals, furthermore, are often not aware of the impact that this heritage exerts upon how they think and act. Ingrained responses, reflective of the culture, often have a direct relationship to both social and economic intercourse. Unfortunately, they are not quickly addressed using formal methods of research.

Geert Hofstede (1984) considers culture to be "the refinement of ideas," including education, art, and literature and is also a generalization of social members' thinking, behavior patterns, and emotions. Its worldwide research on people's living habits, life attitudes, personal values, ways of treating nature, and interpersonal communication patterns in society. It is found that due to different historical cultures, each person's cognitive structure and knowledge structure are different, thus forming different consciousness structures and national ideology. He termed it "common psychological procedure" differences with each other, and it can be divided into five dimensions: long-term and short-term orientation, right distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/ femininity, and collective/individualism. Although the research findings of the five dimensions have their special historical status and practical significance, it can help people better understand the cultural differences between different countries. Anyway, as some scholars indicate, there are many limitations in Hofstede's cultural model (Li, 2009).

For this study, the authors adopt the anthropological approach toward culture. Ruth Benedict provides a classic way of anthropologically envisioning culture in her *Patterns of Culture* (1934), where she observes, "A culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action."

Although Benedict wrote many years ago and her ideas have been supplemented with new conceptions of culture, her description provides an intuitive view of what culture is and what it does.

As discussed in Edwards T. Hall's "The Silent Language in International Business" (1959), cultural differences impact people in subtle but compelling ways. These differences might cause people to feel uneasy or uncomfortable (Hu, 2010: 223). Besides, many people possess ethnocentric attitudes of superiority that taint relationships. The resulting resistance to an alien culture can undercut economic strategies, such as those underlying the Belt and Road. These are genuine issues that are often best addressed using humanistic and qualitative perspectives and analytic techniques.

A specific example might demonstrate how cultural differences can impact the willingness of people to engage in economic activities such as e-commerce. Different peoples often handle issues of personal privacy in different ways and give them different priorities. This reality needs to be recognized by those involved in activities, such as e-commerce. Chinese people tend to be less preoccupied with personal privacy than those from Western countries. Westerners are more interested in protecting their privacy and often hesitate to share individual experiences, family, and living conditions with someone else. These differences can impact e-commerce. In the process of making a transaction, for example, the Chinese often ask personal questions about the family or work, but many foreigners feel that doing so infringes on their privacy. Some potential customers might become so upset that a transaction will be canceled (Jia, 1997: 67). Those who market products on the internet and elsewhere need to be aware of these differences and their implications.

This is an area that needs to be researched more rigorously. One of the values of qualitative research is that it can be used to pose questions that, at a later date, can be more wholly examined using scientific and quantitative methodologies. Without such "soft examinations," formal researchers will not be as focused as they could have been. This paper provides several observations that can help researchers choose viable and appropriate research questions.

Therefore, adhering to cultural norms is an essential component of successful cross-border e-commerce strategies. As the Belt and Road gains importance, understanding the psychological and behavioral characteristics of target cultures is increasingly vital. The existing quantitative and formal research stream regarding the Belt and Road, however, tends to emphasize political organization, economic systems, engineering, and technology even though cultural issues tend to be best illuminated by more humanistic styles of investigation (such as business anthropology). This paper provides a better grounding in these humanistic perspectives in order to address the gap in understanding that otherwise would exist.

FROM STRATEGIC TO OPERATIONAL PLANNING

At present, the construction of China's Belt and Road initiative is shifting from Strategic Planning involving the top leadership to "long term" and "operational planning" that deals with details and solutions to specific ad hoc issues (Task group of China International Economic Exchange Center, 2017). The current goals include (1) developing a deeper understanding of the strategic significance of the Belt and Road Initiative, (2) establishing a global awareness, and (3) strengthening strategic thinking through proper design, risk reduction, and so forth.

Effectively dealing with cultural issues is a critical component of success. Transnational transactions are one of the most prominent features of e-commerce. Developing culturally sensitive ways of dealing with them is essential. Scholars who have studied cross-border e-commerce, however, seldom focus upon the significance of cultural differences and influences (Wu et al., 2017). Only a few studies have done so (Giovannini and Rosansky, 1990). Jin, Mason, and Yim (1998), aware of the cultural differences between the United States and China, however, offer no solution regarding how to overcome these problems, nor how to deal with the cultural issues affecting cross-border marketing on the Internet.

As decision-makers formulate Belt and Road strategies, ad hoc operational plans, cross-cultural/cross-border regarding e-commerce issues will require increased attention. Business anthropologists tend to

focus on cultural boundaries and their impacts (Hamilton, 1987). As a result, they can provide culturally relevant insights regarding the creation of practical, workable, and culturally sensitive platforms.

International trade in the global arena is growing at a rapid rate. As a result, the relevance of cultural issues is growing. A key characteristic of cross-border e-commerce is that the information transmitted is not constrained by time and space, although it is subject to technology, culture, and language. Thus, consumers with various cultural heritages tend to exhibit different consumer behaviors and characteristics that reflect their values, code of conduct, perception, social institutions, and so forth (Zhou and Yang, 2011). Qualitative and humanistic methods are dealing with such realities, especially at the pioneering stages of investigation.

Ever since Theodore Levitt published “The Globalization of Markets” (1983), marketers have debated the pros and cons of universal vs. culturally distinct marketing strategies. This issue is relevant to e-commerce. Although many practitioners intuitively sense the emerging power of e-commerce on a global scale, fewer writers emphasize the standardization and adaptability of e-commerce networks. Most researchers, furthermore, focus upon the enterprises in the United States. Sinkovics, Yamin, and Hossinger (2007), for example, investigated 100 Western companies and then analyzed their cultural values. Their findings indicate that a degree of cultural alienation has arisen.

Some scholars have suggested that companies need to build more websites with strong cultural adaptability. Benefits can arise from paying attention to the subtleties of language, including idiomatic expressions (Ott and Michailova, 2017). When addressing these issues, cultural perspectives are invaluable.

Sometimes, for example, a figure of speech might cause misunderstandings resulting in sales resistance; China’s White Elephant Battery Company, for example, did not realize that an idiom of American English designates the term “white elephant” to mean something of no value. That trademark, of course, did not boost sales in the American market (Wu and Zheng, 2012). Neglecting the subtleties of language can create problems that are avoidable if decision-makers are adequately informed. Although such anecdotal information cannot be quantified, it is a fact of life with significant consequences.

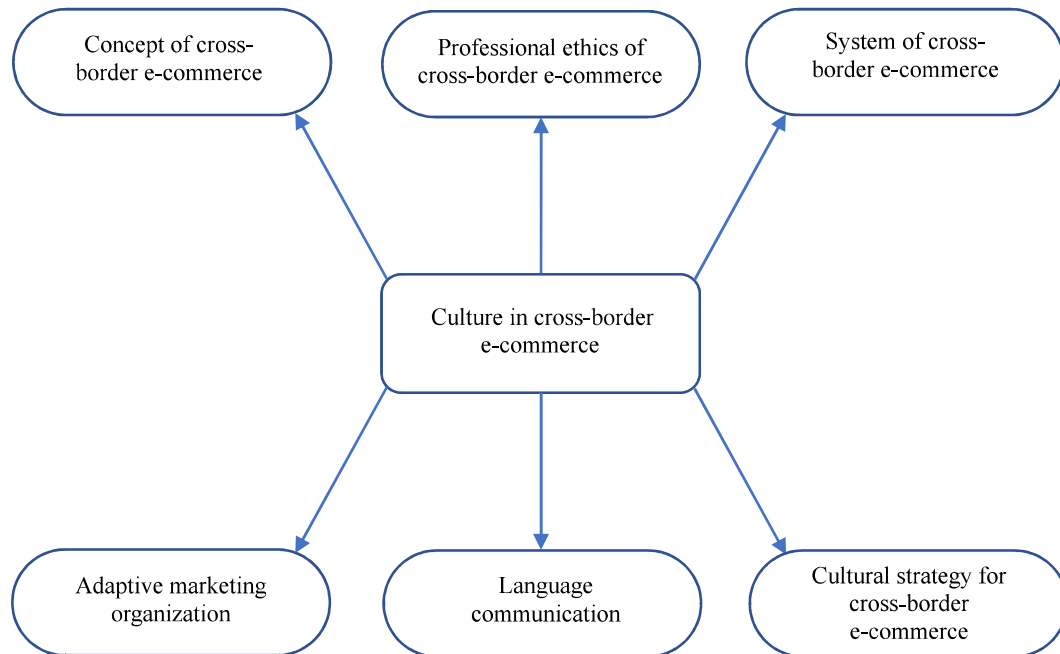
Thus, as operational plans are developed regarding international business, in general, and the Belt and Road, in specific, the cultural characteristics of all impacted stakeholders need to be recognized and addressed. By doing so, the potential for success grows. As Kraus et al. (2016) argue, although adapting to foreign markets with different cultures is often a good strategy, when cultures are similar, a higher degree of standardization becomes possible.

DISCUSSIONS: CULTURAL IMPACTS ON CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE

Culture is composed of a set of shared symbols, codes, values, attitudes, beliefs, and so forth that influence and guide behaviors. Business scholars and practitioners often employ cultural analysis when studying organizational behavior and consumer response, even if they sometimes neglect their depth and full implications (Harris and Moran, 1987).

Although, at first glance E-commerce transaction appears to be weakly associated with culture, it is immersed within it. People are social animals with keen cultural awareness and characteristics; these characteristics impact e-commerce in various ways. A variety of relationships involving cross-border commerce can be depicted graphically as:

FIGURE 1
CULTURAL COMBINATIONS OF CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE



Inevitably, issues related to belief and ideology creep into e-commerce. As figure 1 illustrates, they include, but are not limited to, (1) the concept of exchange, (2) professional ethics, (3) the system of cross-border e-commerce, (4) cultural strategies, (5) the specifics of the marketing organization and so forth. The interconnections between these variables, furthermore, are complex and, at least initially, best examined using qualitative and humanistic methods even though details may be further addressed by scientific and quantitative analysis.

Differing from traditional marketing cross-border e-commerce possesses certain advantages. First, cross-border e-commerce can simplify and standardize promotional efforts (Levitt, 1983). Second, the development of the Internet has broadened the sphere of marketing, which, in turn, can enhance competition. As a result, those in e-commerce pay increased attention to satisfying consumer demand (Ouyang and Zhou, 2006).

The rapid growth in internet use in China is creating a window of opportunity for those who use it effectively. According to a survey, there have been up to 751 million Internet users in China, and the figure has grown at a rate of more than 3 million new Internet users per month. The global e-commerce market has proliferated over the past decade and is continuing. At present, the number of Internet users around the world has amounted to 4.157 billion, and the Internet penetration rate has reached 54.4%. Seven countries have had over 100 million Internet users and China is ranked as number 1.

Currently, regions with the fastest growth rate in e-commerce in the next few years will be the Middle East and Africa. They are key areas covered by The Belt and Road. In 2018, 1.6 billion people will shop on the Internet at least once, accounting for more than 50% of all Internet users. Among them, the online shoppers in the Asia-Pacific region will account for half of the total online shoppers worldwide. In 2017, the trading volume of the global online retail market reached \$2.304 trillion, at an increase of 24.8% over the same period the previous year, and its share in the total volume of global retail sales rose from 8.6% in 2016 to 10.2% (Institute of China International Electronic Commerce Center, 2018).

Thousands of new traders are becoming involved with e-commerce, and they are culturally diverse. The categories of products cover almost the full range of products and services throughout the world. Precise marketing not only dramatically improves the accuracy and hit rate of advertising, but it also

reduces advertising costs and improves the service level of e-commerce platforms, reduces transaction costs, and enhances transaction efficiency in ways that strengthen the value delivered to the customer (Li and Jiang, 2013). To precisely cater to specific targets, cultural understanding can usefully supplement more formal methods of investigation.

Cognitive Behavior and Cultural Differences

As Theodore Levitt observed (1983), traditional multi-national marketing methods focus on geographical/cultural markets and develop unique marketing mixes for specific markets. Moreover, as Levitt predicted, strategies such as cross-border e-commerce has broken through this strategy in ways that can give rise to increased efficiency due to economies of scale and increased efficiency due to standardization and technological advances. As a result, the same marketing mix can serve more than one market. Thus, global cross-border e-commerce can serve a variety of people no matter where they live or their cultural background. This strategy can provide a competitive advantage.

Marketers, however, should not ignore differences between markets. As multilingual workplaces are becoming common, understanding the impact of language upon knowledge has grown in importance (Ahmad and Widén, 2018). As such, e-commerce websites should be available in different languages in order to serve all targeted segments. Different distribution strategies may also be required. This is true even when new technologies and methods, such as the internet, are changing consumer attitudes and attracting new customers (Cao and Xue, 2006).

Decision-makers need to (1) understand that the Internet is transforming the marketing process, (2) identify differences between cross-border e-commerce and traditional marketing, and (3) develop more appropriate ways to use the Internet within the context of global marketing. A primary task of traditional marketing is defining the target market. The target markets sought by cross-border e-commerce, in contrast to traditional targets, are consistent in terms of the content of marketing services while being geographically distinct. As Olga pointed out, to succeed in cross-border e-commerce, marketing initiatives need to identify and email potential customers. Instead of waiting for customers to visit e-commerce websites, potential customers need to be identified and contacted (Olga, 2016).

Cross border E-commerce relies on the ability to acquire, transmit, process, and use information. Doing so requires tools that are networked and intelligent, so the information network itself becomes a productive tool (Wu, 2000). The Belt and Road has opened a broad market for Chinese enterprises, offering opportunities for development while posing significant challenges. A more complex and extensive market will result in enterprises serving consumers and customers with various cultural backgrounds; this variation in the target market will require greater cultural awareness and sensitivity. Where significant cultural differences exist, the possibility of miscommunication and misunderstanding can arise. To respect and respond to the consumers' heritage cultural understanding is vital

The strategic vision of The Belt and Road initiative envisions cooperation and trade between China and diverse countries along the Belt and Road. These relationships will be based in part upon the existing bilateral and multilateral mechanisms with the relevant countries along with the help of effective regional cooperation platforms. The goal is a win-win situation for all. In the context of such a significant marketing transformation, the implementation of The Belt and Road provides support for adequate and equitable cross-border e-commerce. At the same time, the implementation of The Belt and Road also needs to offer foreign consumers the advantages needed to win their support (Zhu, 2015).

In the context of the Belt and Road, cross-border e-commerce has developed rapidly, which has led to occasional cross-cultural conflicts. Cross-border e-commerce tends to accelerate cultural understanding and incorporate a broader range of cultural elements. While this might be true, cultural differences can also trigger conflicts. To resolve such issues, potential cross-cultural conflicts need to be anticipated and mitigated or avoided (Gao, 2018).

Target markets from a cross-border e-commerce perspective include those in different countries with similar desires, tastes, and goals. Therefore, some limitations may exist, such as the uncertain reliability of some online marketers, lack of adequate distribution channels, and the difficulty of meshing existing business-to-business methods to e-commerce applications.

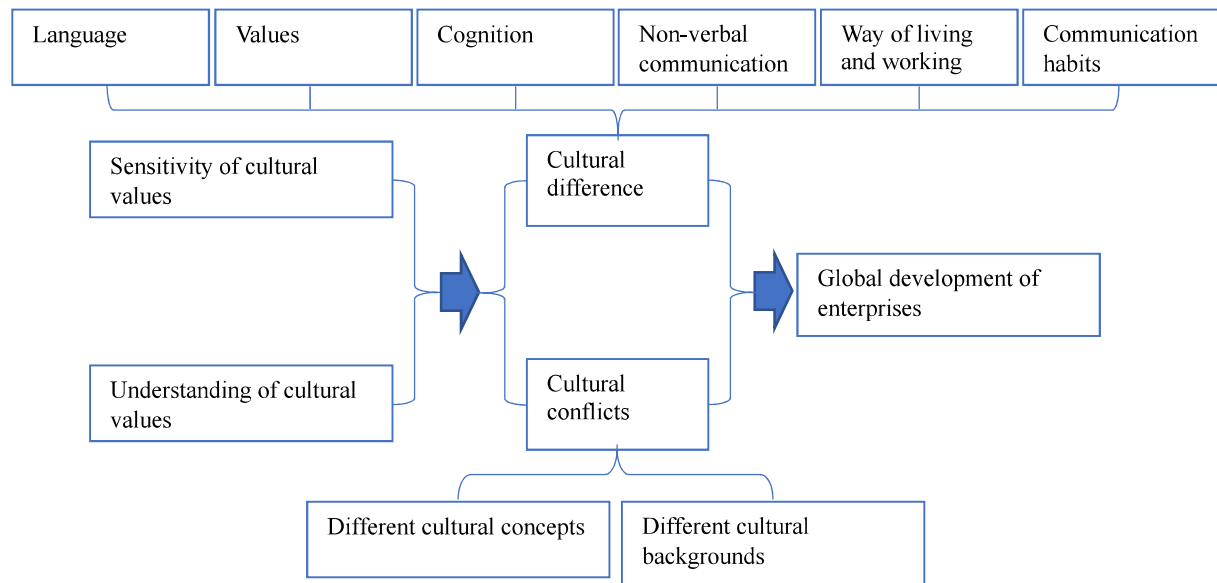
Currently, the demographic characteristics of online consumers might be similar to those of “innovators” and / “or early adopters” in the diffusion of innovations model (Rogers 2003) who tend to be young, equally educated, and have higher incomes. In another typology, Wu et al. (2017) classify internet users as “surfers” and “shoppers.” They believe that surfers use the Internet for entertainment, and they visit the websites for the web pages one after another like explorers, but they seldom repeat the same webpage, unless they are tempted to do so. Shoppers, in contrast, typically use the Internet for specific purposes, such as getting information, making purchase decisions, or online shopping.

In a nutshell, how people think and process information constitutes cognitive behavior. Primarily influenced by culture and tradition, it has a substantial impact on how people act and the decisions they make. Business strategies involving e-commerce need to keep this reality in mind.

Cross-cultural Path of Cross-border E-commerce Combination

The marketing concept emphasizes the importance of satisfying consumers; Cross-border e-commerce adheres to that goal. Still in a state of evolution, however, its rules and methods are not clearly defined. In this regard, those involved in operational planning need to possess a profound understanding of the cultural environment in order to adapt to consumer preferences, purchasing behavior, habits of product use, and so forth. The goal should not be merely to focus upon cultural differences; enterprises need to identify similarities between cultures in order to identify opportunities. A key consideration involves dealing with cultural similarities and differences in a skillful way within the context of the global market.

FIGURE 2
CULTURAL PATH OF GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT OF ENTERPRISES



In the past 40 years, many Chinese enterprises have gone abroad. Most enterprises, however, stay home; many of them, however, compete globally by participating in e-commerce. As shown in Figure 2, culture plays a vital role in the development of strategies; as a result, understanding cultural differences and adequately dealing with cultural conflicts is vital. Doing so includes adapting linguistically, being aware of values and styles of cognition, as well as paying attention to other habits and other factors. An array of issues that typically require attention is presented in Figure 2.

By dealing with these considerations and how they can interact with each other, organizations in the international sphere can be more productive. Those involved with the Belt and Road need to be aware of them.

Traditions of Cross-cultural Marketing

Although E-commerce is innovative, it is similar in many ways to what came before it. As discussed earlier, the prevailing paradigm of marketing emphasizes the four controllable variables of price, product, promotion, and place (distribution). This strategic/tactical structure can also be applied to cross-cultural e-commerce.

Consumer products can be classified into commodities, shopping products, and convenience goods. Customers tend to view commodities as “generic,” even if they possess a degree of brand loyalty (Nickels and Wood, 2000).

Convenience goods are often purchased in a manner designed to save time and effort. At present, there are few opportunities for these goods to be marketed online. Customers buy some convenience goods on impulse, which undercuts rational buying strategies. Nevertheless, the internet provides a convenient way to make spontaneous purchases,

For example, bicycles, one of the most popular means of transportation in China, can also be regarded as store-bought goods, but they must be regarded as featured commodities in the United States. Besides, products that do not belong to other categories in the traditional classification may belong to sensitive or personal goods. The Internet, for example, is an excellent place to locate items that are hard to find, such as unique items, out-of-print books, or specialty items.

Customers who buy goods online might protect their privacy if they fail to provide personal contact information. These products might be a source of embarrassment, such as sex-related products or services, encouraging internet purchasing. Some of these products, however, are less popular and even banned in some Eastern European countries and the Muslim-dominated markets Middle East (Tian and Wanyhr, 2014).

In cross-cultural communication, a key concern is how to avoid cultural conflicts that occur when tensions arise because cultures possess incompatible elements. Problems might arise from different cultural concepts between enterprises, host countries, and customers that are caused by cultural differences. Because cross-cultural business communication is mainly carried out among people with different cultural backgrounds, it is easy for misunderstanding to occur.

The Price of products provides an apparent basis for comparison shopping on the internet and elsewhere. Consumers who buy goods on the Internet can easily compare prices. However, many Internet has two price schedules: one for the internet and another for “brick and mortar” outlets. Another price advantage that Internet shoppers can enjoy is that buyers often avoid paying sales tax. This can result in a significant price reduction.

In general, the controllable variables of marketing tend to impact different people in different ways. The heritage and culture of the consumer significantly impact their responses. As a result, qualitative and humanistic investigations have a significant role in researching such differences.

Cross-cultural Thought and E-commerce

The Internet is a means of communication capable of promoting and marketing products. From the perspective of customers, it helps buyers locate goods or services. Using a search engine, potential customers can locate a firm’s website. A straightforward example involves finding a Chinese restaurant in a strange city. This, of course, is a trivial example of a much-needed service that search engines provide. Using search engines, online shoppers can quickly and easily identify potential suppliers for almost anything. From a marketing point of view, promotes can utilize the internet to communicate to those most likely to buy a specific product and so with tailored advertisements that guide them to the organization’s website.

Within the context of building a community with a shared future, the Belt and Road and the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is designed to connect China with markets in

other countries in order to create opportunities for Chinese enterprises. Cultural factors play an essential role in cross-national communication. Even as the world is becoming increasingly globalized, many countries are increasingly nurturing their heritage. Thus, social distinctions will continue to impact national trade policies, intellectual property protection regimens, and other aspects of international trade. At a more micro level, cultural differences potentially create “invisible obstacles” capable of restricting trade (Ming, 2018).

From the consumer's point of view, one of the shortcomings of internet shopping is the lack of accuracy, privacy, and security. Consumers are likely to be dissatisfied when buying goods online, if they are of poor quality, falsely publicized, or merely a fraud. Two feasible ways to alleviate consumer concerns are (1) transparent and fair return policies and (2) for credit card companies to provide guarantees. After all, transaction security is a primary concern for shoppers. Credit card issuers in developed countries can reduce these risks by improving the security of electronic transmission and providing increased protection. Currently, such goals have not been achieved in many places.

National Advertising and E-commerce

Successes in international business (including both traditional and internet versions) need a proper understanding of their customers' culture and values. An ideal way to remain sensitive to the local heritage, beliefs, attitudes, and so forth is to identify with the intended target audience. The promotional efforts of Nike's and Giant's sports shoes, for example, appeals to China's national pride rather than using generic ads based on Western campaigns. Nike's practice has not only shown its considerable sensitivity to Chinese consumers. Nike's ability to do so was enhanced when the company hired a Chinese art director and clerical staff as well as developing its business plan by Chinese culture, rather than imposing American culture on the Chinese people (Warner, 1997). Thus, Nike chose to rely on humanistic and qualitative insights instead of formal, scientific, and quantitative research. Furthermore, it was successful in doing so.

Internet users can browse almost any website on the Internet. One of the problems in web design is the conflict between creativity and profit. Those who are creative desire to create expressive advertisements and sites with artistic values, while sales managers focus on helping the sales staff sell products. The purpose of using advertisements and websites is to make it easier for consumers to buy products; as a result, the information should be easily accessed and understandable in several languages. To achieve these goals, modifications that facilitate cross-cultural communication may be required.

Experts in promotion tend to agree that strategies that combine humanistic creativity with formal business analysis tend to be most effective. Both realms of thinking have a significant role to play. This reality should not be forgotten. The Internet has the advantage of simplifying transactions. Consumers can select suppliers and products from their computers as well as placing orders and making payments. Ease-of-use is a compelling feature of the internet. The internet is continually providing upgrades to this feature and becoming more potent as a result. On the one hand, internet shoppers can easily buy what they want while at home. On the other hand, shoppers can access the entire world using the internet. This creates a situation where people will visit corporate websites with diverse cultural backgrounds. This reality requires the marketing staff to respond in diverse ways to a variety of potential customers.

Internet customers, however, can be fickle. They are often initially impressed by the appearance of an internet website. If difficulties arise, however, many customers will never revisit the site. As a result of this risk, web designs need to empower customers by turning the website into an attractive space that serves people from a wide range of backgrounds. Despite possible additional financial requirements of doing so, such strategies tend to be cost-effective.

Of course, the internet and the Belt and Road are works in progress; at present, most of the world's people are still unable to access the Internet. There are several limitations to the cross-border e-commerce industry. Soon, there will be a substantial increase in the online business, but many retailers may still operate in two modes of a physical store and an online store. These two-sided operations complement each other. They operate on a cross-functional and cross-cultural basis.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS

Much in recent years has been written about the internet and how this emerging technology is reshaping how goods are marketing and how commerce is conducted. As a result, significant literature has emerged. Because technology exists within a social context, however, social issues need to be addressed. Qualitative and humanistic methods, such as those provided by business anthropology, have a significant role to play in these investigations. They can be especially useful in helping more scientific and quantitative researchers develop testable hypotheses. In such a spirit, this paper provides several humanistic and qualitative observations intended to encourage the development of fruitful research agendas.

In particular, the cultural context and its influence have been addressed. Successor failure of the internet and the Belt and Road is intertwined with how people think and feel; this humanistic reality should not be forgotten. In order to more effectively market its products internationally, China is investing heavily in the Belt and Road initiative that promises to streamline international e-commerce. The rapid growth of cross-border e-commerce will support the upgrading and transformation of emerging industries, deepen cooperation, facilitate exchanges between regions, as well as encouraging domestic and foreign investments and trade. To effectively achieve its goals, China needs to deal with various problems and restrictions regarding the transformation of industry, the supporting services required for cross-border e-commerce, and the innovation needed for success (Zhu, 2015).

In order to be most effective, relevant cultural aspects need to be addressed. Some of these issues are most efficiently addressed, especially at the beginning stages of the investigation, using qualitative and humanistic perspectives such as those found in the social sciences. Some established business disciplines, such as the naturalistic school of consumer behavior, are slanted towards the humanities and qualitative methods. Such research methods have a positive contribution to make when examining the Belt and Road and e-commerce.

Although the internet, in general, and the Belt and Road, in specific, are different transformations triggered by technology, they exist with the context of multiple cultures simultaneously interacting. Investigators need to address these cross-cultural exchanges in concrete ways, even if doing so requires qualitative and humanistic ways that are not quickly addressed by formal research designs. In order to lay the groundwork for more scientific and quantitative investigations, this paper has presented humanistic and social scientific perspectives of value to those interested in e-commerce and the Belt and Road. Indeed, it would be much better if this paper can have empirical analysis, which will be one of the directions for further study in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is one of the phased achievements of the 2018 China National Social Science Fund Project “Yuanshui Basin Cultural Heritage Inheritance and Innovation Development Research” (Project No.: 18bmz066). Dr. Robert Tian is the corresponding author, he can be reached by email: rgtian@yahoo.com.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, F., & Widén, G. (2018). Knowledge sharing and language diversity in organizations: influence of code switching and convergence. *European Journal of International Management*, 12(4), 351-373.
- Alon, I., Anderson, J., Munim, Z. H., & Ho, A. (2018). A review of the internationalization of Chinese enterprises. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 35(3), 573-605.
- Benedict, R. (1934, 1961). *Patterns of Culture*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Cao, Y., & Xue, J. (2006). An Overview of Research on Online Consumer Behavior. *Market Modernization*, (477), 146-147.
- Gao, L. (2018). Study on Cross-cultural Communication Conflicts under Cross-border E-commerce. *Journal of Heihe University*, (3), 192-193.
- Giovannini, M., & Rosansky, L. (1990). *Anthropology and Management Consulting: Forging a New Alliance*. The American Anthropological Association.
- Hall, E. T. (1959). *The Silent Language*. New York, NY: Doubleday
- Hamilton, D. B. (1987). Evolutionary economics ii: institutional theory and policy || institutional economics and consumption. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 21(4), 1531-1554.
- Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Harris, P. P., & Moran, R. (1987). *Managing Cultural Differences*. Houston: Gulf.
- Hu, W. (2010). *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Institute of China International Electronic Commerce Center. (2017). *Global E-Commerce Report 2017*. Retrieved October 2019, from http://www.ec.com.cn/article/zhlh/swblh/201804/27259_1.html
- Institute of China International Electronic Commerce Center. (2018). *Forrester & Facebook: White Paper on Global Cross-Border E-Commerce Marketing 2018*. Retrieved October 2019, from <http://www.100ec.cn/detail--6458724.html>
- Jia, Y. (1997). *Intercultural Communication*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Jin, Z., Mason, R., & Yim, P. P. (1998). *Bridging US-China Cross-cultural Differences using Internet and Groupware Technologies*. Paper presented at the 7th International Association for Management of Technology Annual Conference, Orland, FL.
- Kraus S., Meier F., Eggers F., Boucken R.B., & Schuessler F. (2016). Standardisation vs. adaption: a conjoint experiment on the influence of psychic, cultural and geographical distance on international marketing mix decisions. *European J. International Management*, 10(2), 127-155.
- Levitt, T. (1983, May-June). The Globalization of Markets. *Harvard Business Review*, pp. 92-102.
- Li, W., & Jiang, X. (2013). Research on Precision Marketing Strategy of Electronic Commerce. *Research on Development*, (2), 46-49.
- Li, W. (2009). Hofstede Cultural Dimensions and Intercultural Studies. *Social Sciences*, 12, 126-129.
- McCarthy, E. J. (1960). *Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach*. Homewood, Illinois: Irwin.
- Ming, H. (2018). *Reflections on Cross-cultural Business Communication from the Perspective of a Community with A Shared Future: Interview with Professor Tian Guang*. Shantou University. Retrieved October 2019, from http://www.cssn.cn/gjgxx/gj_bwsf/201811/t20181108_4772114.shtml
- Nickels, W., & Wood, M. (2000). *Marketing: Relationship, Quality, Value*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.
- Olga, K. (2016). *Research on communication mode of customer service of modern e-commerce*. MA Thesis, Qingdao University.
- Ott, D. L., & Michailova, S. (2017). Does exposure to host country language during international experiences influence the development of cultural intelligence? *European J. International Management*, 11(6), 733-753.

- Ouyang, F., & Zhou, W. (2006). An Analysis of Online Marketing Culture. *Jiangnan Tribune*, (3), 132-134.
- Paul, J. (2016). The rise of China: what, when, where, and why? *The International Trade Journal*, 30(3), 207-222.
- Paul, J., & Benito, G. R. (2017). A review of research on outward foreign direct investment from emerging countries, including China: what do we know, how do we know and where should we be heading? *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 24(1), 90-115.
- Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovations* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.
- Sinkovics, R. Yamin, M., & Hossinger, M. (2007). Cultural Adaptation in Cross Border E-Commerce: A Study of German Companies. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, (8), 221–235.
- Task group of China International Economic Exchange Center. (2017). The Belt and Road creates a new era of economic globalization and win-win development. *Globalization*, (07), 20-38.
- Tian, G., & Wang, Y. (2014). Cross-cultural Issues in Internet Marketing. *Journal of the Second Northwest University for Nationalities*, (1), 96-103.
- Warner, F. (1997). Nike tones town bad-boy image to boost sales in China's market. *The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition*.
- Wu, Y., Xiao, J., Xie, K., & Liao, X. (2017). Marketing transformation from value offering to value co-creation -- a double case study from the perspective of corporate and consumer co-evolution. *Management World*, (4), 138-157.
- Wu, J. (2000). Net Economy and Its Influence on Economic Theory. *Academic Research*, (1), 5-11.
- Wu, W., & Zheng, H. (2012). A Study on the Impact of Cultural Differences on E-Commerce Activities. *Journal of Chongqing University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences Edition)*, (6), 104-106.
- Zhou, H., & Yang, X. (2011). An Overview of Innovation Studies on Cross-cultural Online Consumers. *Economy*, (337), 120-121.
- Zhu, W. (2017). *Study on the Chinese Cross Border E-commerce under the Background of One Belt and One Road with Guangdong Province for Example*. MA Thesis, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies.