ASSESSING MARKETING AGILITY IN DEVELOPING ECONOMIES: BUSINESS NETWORK IMPLICATIONS, RESEARCH ISSUES AND TANZANIAN CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Competing successfully in the global economy requires firms to develop and manage agile relationships with its network partners to quickly assess and react to changing market conditions. Doing so may be difficult when networks include firms from both developed and developing economies that may not share a common technical/social-cultural background needed to work collaboratively. To anticipate when this may be the case, the following report identifies proxy measures and a process that may be used to assess 'agility-readiness' of firms operating in a foreign market of interest using Tanzania as an overview example. Managerial implications and recommendations for further research are included to further both the practice and theory development in the area.

Keywords: *International Business Research, Marketing Agility, Global Business Management, Networked Systems, Developing Economies, Information Communication Technologies, Cultural Values, Tanzania*

1. INTRODUCTION

To be competitive in today's rapidly changing world, marketers are finding it necessary to become more agile as they quickly reconfigure strategy, structure, processes, people, and technology to respond to the growing complexity and diversity of customer demands, competition and the changing business environment (Denning, 2018). In doing so, more and more firms are finding it necessary to enter and/or develop networks to manage collaborative relationships with external partners which help assure access to the resources necessary to deliver customer value on a global basis (Piercy, 2009). To remain agile, marketers must have access to appropriate information communication technology (ICT) tools (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2009) and rework governance structures to manage the interdependencies, uncertainties and risks inherent in a globalized supply chain network (Tan, Pan and Zuo, 2019). This task may be made more complicated, however, when a firm's network extends to include developing markets especially those that lag in adopting ICT innovations seen as vital to improving agile business processes (Tan, Pan and Zuo, 2019).

Additionally, developing markets often have differing cultural values which can affect the concept and practice of agility by network partners (Hassan and Ilyas, 2016). In such cases, firms might experience a decrement in agility due to the limitations of one or more supply chain members to select and employ compatible managerial practices in this area (Christopher, 2000; Fayezi, Zutshi and O'Loughlin, 2014; Fayezi, Zutshi and O'Loughlin, 2016; Goldsby, Griffis, and Roath, 2006; Rahman, 2002). Currently, it is unknown to what degree this sub-optimization might occur when partnering with firms from emerging and developing economies as few studies on agility have been reported in the research literature to date (Osei, Amankway-Amoah, Khan, Omar and Gutu, 2019).

To help fill this gap and respond to a call for more research in this area (Piercy, 2009), the following study examines the conditions thought to promote as well as hinder the practice of marketing agility in strategic relationships between firms from developed and developing economies and suggests ways in which marketers might evaluate potential opportunities.