

SPECIAL SESSION

CROSS-NATIONAL TRANSFER OF MARKETING KNOWLEDGE

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The globalization of economic activity has created an increasing awareness of marketing activities across countries and cultures. This is particularly true in the developing countries where the marketing institutions and consumption patterns of the developed countries are being avidly watched and sometimes rapidly emulated or adapted. A concomitant development is a growing interest in the transfer of marketing knowledge. Concepts and techniques of marketing are often viewed as providing the keys to the rapid expansion of domestic and export markets. Marketing talent, in the form of MBAs or people with similar training, is in great demand in the developing countries.

As with any technology transfer, there is a widespread realization in the developing countries that marketing techniques have to be adapted to local conditions. The cultural roots of consumption habits, shopping behavior, and trading structures often go very deep in developing countries. New marketing practices, usually borrowed from the Western world, have to be tailored and adjusted for the indigenous cultural context.

The context for cross-national transfer of marketing knowledge that emerges is a complex and interesting one. The strong interest in and desire for Western marketing models is tempered with considerable skepticism about the cultural validity of borrowed marketing practices. There is also considerable ambivalence about which models should be emulated, especially with the ascendance of East Asian Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) which seem to offer culturally closer models to the developing nations than the West does. The NICs, however, are seen as strong exporters of goods but not of marketing knowledge. Even the highly developed European countries are not viewed as significant sources of marketing knowledge. Despite the global competitive slide of the United States, North America remains the strongest source of marketing concepts and knowhow.

This special session will brought together a distinguished panel of marketing academics to discuss issues and present experiences relevant for the cross-national transfer of marketing knowledge. The aim of the special session was to create better understanding of the methods and prospects for cross-national transfer of marketing knowledge.

The session consisted of four presentations ranging from conceptual to practical aspects of cross-national knowledge transfer. It also included the results of an empirical study of business schools from developing countries comparing their views of major Western pedagogical techniques.

Professor Gerald Zaltman of Pittsburgh University (USA), chairperson of the session, spoke from his diverse international experience with knowledge utilization in organizations. He spoke on "A Conceptual Framework for Cross-National Knowledge Transfer in Marketing". In this introductory presentation, general issues and problems of cross-national transfer of marketing knowledge between advanced and developing countries were raised. A conceptual framework based on social science research in knowledge systems was presented and illustrated with selected international examples.

The second talk was on "Marketing Knowledge Transfer Between Canada and India: The CIDA Experience" by Stanley J. Shapiro, Dean of the School of Business at Simon Fraser University, Canada. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has launched a multimillion dollar long-term program to develop and widen the base of management education in India. This presentation focused on the CIDA program, with particular emphasis on marketing education. Dr. Shapiro pointed out the benefits of selecting creative and entrepreneurial institutions in India (which are not necessarily the large and prestigious ones) as counterparts for knowledge transfer activities.

The theme of "Knowledge Transfer Through

a Voluntary Organization: The NASMEI Program in India* was jointly handled by Professor Jagdish N. Sheth of University of Southern California (USA) and Professor Dipankar Chakravarty of University of Arizona (USA).

The North American Society for Marketing Education in India (NASMEI) was formed recently to offer assistance to Indian educational institutions and companies in improving their marketing capabilities. NASMEI relies heavily, but not exclusively, on North American marketing academics of Indian origin. Dr. Sheth chairs the Advisory Board of NASMEI and Dr. Chakravarty is the incoming president of NASMEI.

The presentation by Dr. Sheth, who drew from his extensive international consulting experience, outlined the general guidelines for rapid and successful cross-national exchange of marketing and strategic knowhow. Professor Sheth's remarks provided an overall conceptual framework for understanding how a voluntary association can act as a knowledge transfer mechanism between a developed and a developing country.

Dr. Chakravarty discussed NASMEI's future plans and programs. He focused especially on a new NASMEI program to stimulate collaborative research projects between marketing scholars and professionals based in North America and in India. It is hoped that such collaborative research would lead to close interactions between marketing researchers from the two regions. These personal contacts should serve as conduits for knowledge exchange and transfer.

Dr. Kunal Basu of Indian Institute of Management at Calcutta (currently on leave from McGill University in Canada) and Dr. Amitava Chattopadhyay of McGill University presented the results of a survey of management educators in several South Asian and ASEAN countries. The aim of the survey was to assess the perceptions of and preferences for specific pedagogical tools that have been transferred from Western business schools to management institutions in Asian countries. Results of the survey indicated that the Asian management educators were generally favorable towards Western pedagogical tools but preference for specific tools varied according to whether the educators surveyed were behaviorally or quantitatively oriented. Follow up research of this type, with greater attention to cultural and politico-economic contexts of the developing countries,

would be very useful in designing effective mechanisms of transferring marketing and management knowledge across countries. The transfer process would likely become a two way exchange – as has been the case with Western and Japanese management methods – as developing countries begin to show significant results from indigenous or borrowed but highly adapted management styles and concepts.